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Shakespeare 221-01

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Antony's Lament

Lament had at least two definitions during Shakespeare's time. They both share similarities of containing grief, but Oxford Dictionary separates the two as a verb and a noun. The verb form, first documented in 1515 by the Oxford Dictionary, states that lament is an expression of “profound grief” or “mourning passionately”(Lament v., 1515). This infers that the action in the expression or feeling is a result of a death: literal or metaphorical. The noun form, first documented in 1592 by the Oxford Dictionary, states similarly that an action is done with “passionate or demonstrative expression of grief” (Lament n. 1592) . The noun definition includes an interesting commentary on the act: “also poetic¹ the action of lamenting/lamentation”(Lament n. 1592) which connects the nature of lament to be artistic. This definition signifies “lament” is equal parts expression and observation and is similar to how art is both creation and observation. The difference between the verb being profound and the noun form being poetic can be connected. Looking at the history, this word originates from tragic stories that have transcended generations.

The oldest form of lament in the Oxford English Dictionary is from 1384 definition in the adjacent form “lamentation”. This definition states “passionate or demonstrative expression of grief; mourning; in weakened sense, regret” (lamentation 1384) and appears after the word is recognized in 1382, deriving from the title *Lamentations of Jeremiah*, written in 586 bc. The book's “subject” is “the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans” and is described as “one of the poetical books of the *Old Testament*”. Created by a prophet, this documented destruction is a sorrowful reflection of Jeremiah. Lament is not only a profound expression of mourning, but it is directed at both the dead and the influencer of the death. This lament has managed to survive centuries of time because it was captured in a

¹)poetic was used interchangeably as a noun and adjective per the 1490 definition. It has no longer been considered a noun in a shared sense.

“Of, belonging to, or characteristic of poets or poetry; appropriate to a poet. Formerly also: †fictitious, imaginary (obsolete).” (poetic,1490)

form of art. Art has an ability to be evocative of deep emotions that allows each individual to connect to this story in their own personal way.

In Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Antony uses lament towards Cleopatra moments before he dies. Antony is a Roman trivium that has spent years indulging himself in Egypt with lust, gluttony, and sloth. He still finds himself connected to Rome which marked him pride, wrath, and greed. He is envious of both sides and cannot commit. This fuels his growing shame as he loses himself in the indecision. His last words towards his lover signifies his final chance to cement his place within this Shakespearean world: "The miserable change now at my end/ Lament nor sorrow at" (Ant. 4.15.60-61). This initially lends itself to the romantic qualities of Antony. His "end" functions with his physical action dying causing his romantic connection towards Cleopatra to end. This lens implies that "Lament nor sorrow at" is him asking Cleopatra not to be heartbroken at his death. The syntax surrounding lament aids this interpretation as there is ambiguity surrounding this instruction and requires a closer reading: sorrow and lament's basic definition is sadness, and it suits Antony's romantic lust that would now never wish a moment of discomfort towards Cleopatra. He is finalizing the love they shared and hopes to provide eternal comfort. He says this in extreme romanticized masculinity, that he possesses a god-like power to never allow these omnipotent feelings death brings.

Lamentations' profound story potential, one that can last hundreds of years, and creates questions as to why Antony asks Cleopatra not to lament him. Antony does not want to be eternalized and tries to stop a story that would capture them as the greatest lovers in the world. When looking at the causal scenes, Antony is deeply shameful in the manner he has lost the naval battle that derives from his inability to choose between his Roman ideologies or Egyptian ideologies. He starts a war based on not wanting to lose his power in the Roman trivium as it begins to transition into a monarchy. This ideology of Roman pride and wrath causes him to circumvent Cleopatra's power in her monarchy, but he cannot commit to fighting the battle due to his unrecognized value of love. He flees this battle to chase after Cleopatra as he cannot be without her and he feels deep shame because he cannot understand why his Roman attributes would chase, and never reach, after this embodiment of Egypt. His fundamental Roman attributes do not

allow him to fully reside in Egypt and become involved with Roman political affairs. His love for Cleopatra is a growing weakness that does not allow him to embody the great Roman general he is. Antony is under the impression that Cleopatra is dead and mirroring his student's suicide to "escape the sorrow" (Ant. 4.14.113) of killing his master. This implies that traditional gender roles have swapped between them and Cleopatra, the master and embodiment of love, and Antony's shame begins by refusing to accept this new monarch. With his inability to kill himself and unwilling aid from his attendants, his slow grueling death allows him to become aware Cleopatra is alive and makes his way to her. It's clear Antony loves Cleopatra leading into 4.14; however, this is his last chance to speak on his own behalf for his legacy. Through this deep shame he feels as a result of the weakness Egypt has done to him causes him to fully embody the wicked ideologies of Rome.

This lament Antony wants to stop would acknowledge his descent from this beyond-human comparison into an idiot in love with an exoticized woman. His character is dramatically changed by looking at his final words as one's aligned with his connection towards Rome. Antony uses extensive language that captures him as the powerful Roman figure he identifies himself with: "Roman by a Roman/ Valiantly Vanquished" (Ant. 4.15.66-67). Further, he encourages Cleopatra to remember his "former fortunes" (Ant. 4.15.62) and brings an idea that Antony only wants to be remembered for his Roman attributes rather than any sort that recognizes his stint in Egypt. Antony's shame developed from envy of his former self as a Roman. He marks himself a fool for indulging in love of Cleopatra that has slowly poisoned him; and this last wish he has for Cleopatra encourages her to exoticize him and marks traditional Roman misogyny. If Cleopatra were to never lament it would allow for his previous stories of greatness to prevail and not his shameful fall. This functions as a way that could be his 'return to home' all heroes make.

The exploration of the word "lament" brought forth these extreme emotional depths of the scene that still could be interpreted without the heightened focus of this word. I learned how this word is deeply connected to art: poetically capturing it eternalizes it and observing the art evokes deep emotions. In the characteristics of this profoundly sorrowful poetic speech, this is Antony's lament. In my own

observation, the palpable humanizing emotion from Antony deems the extreme ideologies of either Rome and Egypt unworthy to be eternalized. Antony's lament: a man, full of shame, who could not fully live or embody either Egypt or Rome. He could not let go of his Roman ideologies that kept his perspective of Egypt as a place of exotic indulgences like parties or lustful encounters. From Wrath he starts a war over Lepidus' imprisonment with pride in his battle strategy and he lustfully chases after his exotified woman Cleopatra to never catch her. This shame Antony feels as a result not being able to embody these ideologies fuels the emotional instability that leads to his suicide. In the art of dying, Antony separates himself from these ideologies that have hindered him and humanizes himself. Removing these qualities allows him to overcome his original shame and now fully see's the world for how it is. He recognizes his Roman qualities have not left him and is still the great Roman Triumvir, and accepts his true love, not exotification, of Cleopatra that allows him to be physically with her. He shares this acceptance to comfort Cleopatra, that he was incapable of change; his death was necessary for him to get this ability to see his values clearly. "Lament nor sorrow": Don't eternalize me in the ideologies that fueled my demise, but use this moment to accept our unregretful love.

Citations

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