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Scene Analysis 2

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Master of Persuasion: An Analysis of Act II Scene ii from Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*

Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* follows an entourage of “banished cavaliers”—colonel Belvile, Ned Blunt, Captain Willmore (the rover), and their friend Fredrick—while they peruse Naples during Carnival. The entourage is increasingly enthralled with the atmosphere of masquerade and the freedoms awarded by dawning vizard masks. The plot kicks off when their group intersects with that of Hellena and Florinda who are Spanish ladies and sisters to Don Pedro—a Spanish nobleman. The men instantly attempt to seduce the cache of ladies to no avail, leaving their lustful appetites whetted but far from satisfied. Willmore decides to look for prostitutes to satisfy himself and this leads him to Angellica, the courtesan where he successfully convinces her to lay with him by seduction alone. Belvile finds favor with Florinda and takes the place of Antonio to gain her hand and approval from Pedro. Ned Blunt falls into a trap laid out by a whore and her pimp and finds himself remiss of his belongings and maddened to the point of violence. He nearly carries out violent abuse against Florinda in his rage until she is saved by Fredrick and he calms down. Willmore continuously pursues every woman he encounters and finds himself enamoured by Hellena. Angellica overhears his sultry seductions employed on Hellena and becomes enraged. She confronts Willmore with a pistol intending to kill him for his inconsistency but she is talked down by Pedro, Antonio and Willmore. Hellena returns and Willmore having seemingly met his mischievous match in her, takes her hand in marriage and the play concludes.

Act II scene ii of *The Rover* presents Willmore’s seduction of Angellica, the courtesan. This begins in the previous scene with Willmore seizing a picture of Angellica that is seen as an act of rudeness by Antonio and Angellica’s bravo. The resulting conflict belittles Antonio and grants Willmore an avenue for having speaks with Angellica. She summons Willmore because she is curious as to why he took her portrait, this gesture implies that she is somewhat flattered by the action. Willmore then takes it upon himself to seduce the courtesan without paying her sum of one hundred thousand crowns and providing her with “love” instead. After some back and forth discussion, Angellica eventually gives in to Willmore’s proposition to her companion, Moretta’s amazement.

The chosen scene contributes to the development of Willmore and Angellica. Act II scene ii oversees the sub-plot of Willmore’s seduction of Angellica. Act II scene ii’s sub-plot is intertwined with the main plot and becomes critical in the play’s falling action. The scene follows Willmore and Angellica engaging in a discourse prompted by his seizure of her portrait as act II scene i comes to a close. The discourse begins with Angellica’s declaration, “[i]nsolent sir, how durst you pull down my picture” (II:ii line 1). Willmore’s rebuttal effectively sets the tone of their discourse:

Rather, how durst you set it up, to tempt poor amorous mortals with so much excellence, which I find you have but to well consulted by the unmerciful price you set upon’t? Is all this heaven oof beauty shown to move despair in those that cannot buy? And can you think th’effects of that despair should be less extravagant than I have shown? (II:ii lines 2-8)

The precedence of this remark is established in the previous act when Willmore announces his goal, “[i]t may be she may give a favor; at least I shall have the pleasure of saluting her when I enter and when I depart” (II:i lines 318-320). Angellica then reinforces her good nature and rebukes Belvile’s suspicion that she would rather stab Willmore, “[f]ear not, sir, all I have to wound is with my eyes” (II:i line 323).

Effectively, the plot of act II has thrust Willmore into the graces of Angellica. Although Willmore finds her to be “a lovely charming beauty”, he still cannot justify paying for her services (II:i line 312). This is why he decides to pursue a “favor” from her and receive her servitude free of charge (II:i line 318). Moreover, Willmore’s character has developed thus far to be a rakish character who developed the idea to peruse Naples for prostitutes which is best conveyed by Belvile’s remarks just before act II scene ii commences: “The rogue’s stark mad for a wench” (line 329).

Angellica’s esteem of Willmore is contradictory to his true character. Her impression of him is catalyzed by his theft of her portrait and his flattering words that justified the theft:

I saw your charming picture and was wounded; quite through my soul each pointed beauty ran, and wanting a thousand crowns to procure my remedy, I laid this little picture to my bosom (II:i lines 271-275)

Even though Willmore explicitly states that he has no intentions of paying for Angellica’s services (II:ii lines 54-56) he has already conquered her heart, as she says aside: “Sure, this from any other man would anger me nor shall he know the conquest he has made” (II:ii lines 57-58). Although, had Angellica been aware of Willmore’s nature that brought him to her residence, she may have had a different esteem.

Act II scene ii ends with Angellica succumbing to Willmore’s rhetoric where she states: “Thou hast a pow’r to strong to be resisted” (line 167). This is integral for the falling action of the play which divulges as Willmore’s true nature as a rake is revealed to Angellica in act IV and her later attempt to murder him by pistol in act V. Angellica’s sacrifices to Willmore, her pride, what she thought was love, and her bill become realized as such when she overhears Willmore’s flirty conversation with Hellena in act IV. The reasoning for her rage is made evident in the aforementioned details of act II scene ii where Willmore succeeds in persuading her out of financial prostitution by prostituting his own love.

Works Cited

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