

“Mariana” – Alfred Lord Tennyson

FORM:

- Third person narrative, narrator is disconnected from Mariana, emphasising her isolation.
- Descriptive poem with no progression.
- 7 twelve-line stanzas, each describing her state of mind with increasing sadness.

STRUCTURE:

- Rhyme scheme traps a rhyming couplet within two quatrains and another couplet, emphasising her entrapment.
- Stasis of the rhyme scheme emphasises the constant of Mariana.
- Iambic tetrameter, trimeter in more emphatic lines.
- Refrain is bewitching, incantatory.
- Extra weak beat of “the night is dreary” draws it out, emphasises depression.
- Final refrain is monosyllabic, makes it seem final, decisive, it’s more anguished.

LANGUAGE:

- Pathetic Fallacy – surroundings show her mind, “The brok’n sheds looked sad and strange”, psychological landscape shows M’s mental decay as what is around her decays. “Glanced athwart the glooming flats” shows her psychology again with monotonous, flat land. Use of superlatives, “blackest moss”, “thickest dark” shows lack of colour, monochrome and depressing.
- Personification – “Cold winds woke the grey-eyed morn”, monochrome, bleak, shows how broken and tired she is. “A sluice with blacken’d waters slept”, personified to show her feelings, dark and depressed. Irony as water can sleep but M can’t. Also water is stagnant, reflects stasis of the poem and M’s lack of progression.
- Time (theme) – time moves on in the poem, which contrasts to M remaining constant. 1st, 4th and 6th stanzas are all daytime; she always sees the same, cyclical. “The ancient thatch” gives a timeless feel. “The slow ticking clock”, “slow” uses assonance, time drags on. Stanza 6, repetition of ‘old’ suggests she is stuck in the past anaphora. The fact that M is still feeling the same is shown by the repetition of the refrain, it is rhythmic which shows M’s routine. More assonance when she describes life as “awearied” and “dreary”.
- Passiveness (theme) – “The oxen’s low // came to her”, enjambment, the sounds come to her, no action from her, emphasises her isolation. “Unlifted was the clinking latch” nothing is happening, no movement from her. First half of stanza 5, action contrasts with her passiveness. “She only said”, she does nothing but wait and speak. Epigraph, no verb, emphasises waiting.
- Entrapment (theme) – “The blue fly sung in the pane” enclosure image. Rhyme scheme. Epigraph, she is surrounded by the moat. “Wild winds bound within their cell”, imprisonment.
- Poplar tree (symbol) – represents Angelo, tree is only break in landscape, “no other tree did mark//the level waste”. Phallic symbol, “Upon her bed”=sexual frustration, “Across her brow”=always in her mind. Could represent broken promise according to Greek mythology.
- Onomatopoeia – “shriek’d”, “creak’d”, gothic, melodramatic words, harsh, haunting. Heightened awareness as she hopes to hear Angelo.

CRITICS:

- Harold Bloom: “The woman is too happy in her unhappiness to want anything more”
- Timothy Peltason: The poem is “both time-soaked and immobile”

LINKS:

- Tithonus – Stasis and unending time
- The Lady of Shalott – Isolation and despair
- Godiva – Contrasts of passive and active