

Handout Act 4

Scene 1: During the wedding of Hero and himself, Claudio accuses her of being unfaithful, Don Pedro and Don John confirm that. Shortly after, Hero faints. Her father, Leonato, believes in the accusations because Hero does not deny them and did not share a bed with Beatrice. Beatrice and Benedick do not believe in them, as well as the friar, who is finally able to calm Leonato down, until he trusts in his daughter. Benedick assumes an intrigue, the friar comes up with a plan in which Hero assumingly died while fainting earlier. Finally, Benedick and Beatrice confess their love and Benedick promises to duel Claudio if he has attacked Heros honour for no reason.

(1) What does Leonato first think when Claudio claims that Hero has lost her virginity?

At first Leonato is very shocked and does not really believe the accusation. He requires proofs, but when the witness Don John apparently gives these the father is disappointed of his daughter's behavior. He claims that Hero is not his daughter anymore if she has really lost her virginity and in the end he leaves her to let her die.

(2) The opposition between appearance and reality features very prominently in this scene. Find out which aspects are mentioned and by whom.

Some characters show conformity between their appearance and behaviour, especially Beatrice, the Friar, Hero and Benedick. In contrast to that, Don Pedro and Don John are not conform concerning their behaviour in the scene.

(Claudio causes a scene on account of things he BELIEVES to know and constantly draws attention to his belief that nothing is at it seems; the errors in judgement that are made due to outward appearance (cf. Hero's blushing) are underlined by the fact that the friar interprets this same blushing as a sign of Hero's innocence; with the implicit claim that reality is right in front of everyone ("Is this the prince?" etc.) and easily perceptible, he only exposes his own error even more.)

(3) How does this scene affect the love plot between Beatrice and Benedick?

They admit their love for each other, the fact that Benedick promises to duel Claudio is a deep proof of love because he duels a friend for Beatrice. Moreover the relationship is strengthened because of the alliance against Claudio. (He tries to console her; she is so distressed that she hasn't got enough strength to conceal her love for him; he takes her seriously; Benedick as the true romantic hero.)

(4) Shakespeare makes use of prose and verse.

There is a distinction between verse and prose in Shakespeare's plays. Verse is often used in tragedies because it is more formal and dramatic and it puts emphasis on the speech. In contrast to verse, prose is usually used in comedies because it is the language of everyday speech without a crafted formal pattern. Scene 1 is the only scene throughout the play where verse outweighs prose.

- P. 77, ll. 27-38 (Verse) Claudio accuses Hero of being unfaithful ("rotten orange") underlines dramatic situation and climax of the play

- P.79 Don Pedro, Don John, Claudio (Verse) still accusing Hero of being unchaste, Claudio lost trust in women; Beatrice, Hero, Leonato (Prose) shocked about accusation contrast in language
- P. 83, ll. 177-184 (Verse) Hero talks in verse for the first time defending herself of the accusations
- Everyone starts to talk in verse at the end of the scene (until Benedick and Beatrice are talking to each other); underlines dramatic climax of the play
- Pp. 87f Benedick and Beatrice express their feelings for each other in prose In this scene verse has a more solemn, tragic and dramatic effect to stress the climax of the play. Moreover, it reflects the superficial relationship of Hero and Claudio (in the acts before, Claudio usually uses verse to express his feelings for Hero) whereas Benedick and Beatrice usually talk in prose. This is more natural and thus also reflects their real emotions for each other (cf. p. 87f)

Scene 2: In the second scene of Act IV Dogberry, Verges, Sexton, Borachio, Conrade and the Watchmen appear. The scene serves to let about on the innocence of Hero and the guilt of Borachio Conrade and Don John. The scene takes place in a prison where Borachio and Conrade are interrogated by Dogberry. He accuses them of being criminals but they refuse the accusations. Dogberry fails to question Borachio and Conrade, overall because he believes them, but Sexton advises him to first speak with the watchmen. He also explains the conspiracy that took place and informs the attendant people about Hero's death and Don John's escape. At the end Sexton wants Dogberry to take the criminals to Leonato's house in order to reveal on the truth.

- (1) Why is it a little unusual that Dogberry would address Conrade with 'sirrah' and how does the latter react to that?

Referring to someone as a 'sirrah' is a way of addressing someone while showing contempt and disrespect for him. Dogberry ridicules Conrade's social status and presumes he is not a gentleman or sir, which is quite rude. Especially in his position, it would be Dogberry's job to stay neutral and objective towards the defendant and not to openly show disrespect for him. He seems to be incompetent. Conrade stays polite though, does not talk back but only replies that he is a gentleman indeed. (actually 'sirrah' was a customary way to address servants; although Conrade might be a villain, he is still of higher social status than Dogberry; Conrade is aware of this difference in rank and hence the impropriety of Dogberry's address, which is why he answers: "I am a gentleman." By addressing Dogberry as "Sir" he tries to underline the point he makes, which, however, is completely lost in Dogberry.)

- (2) What is Dogberry's role in the proceedings in court and how does he perceive himself?

Dogberry is the chief of the Watch. This "citizen-police" takes care of the neighbourhood and is composed of ordinary citizens who have to serve on the Watch for a certain time. Dogberry's task is to observe the often unenthusiastic watchmen, but (probably) he is not adequately trained. This becomes apparent when he fails to examine the deceiver. His function in the play is to uncover the conspiracy but he is also good for comedy. Many malapropisms, extreme showing-off and arrogant behaviour make him appear ridiculous which does not match with his self-perception. He thinks of himself that he is much more important, skilled and correct than he actually is. (More than revealing zhe

villainy, he actually creates confusion and is completely lost in the moment of feeling important.)

Review Questions

R(2) Act 4 consists only of 2 scenes, which are very different from each other – why do you think that especially these two scenes constitute this act?

In the first scene Claudio claims that Hero has lost her virtue and refuses to marry her. In the second scene Sexton finds out what has really happened and the reader gets to know about the conspiracy of Don John.

So the contrast of these two scenes underlines the conspiracy of Don John and the aftermath of his actions. Moreover the second scene can be seen as a solution to the first. (Act IV traditionally represents a turning point of events; in scene 1 the plot takes a profound turn and the happy ending is not as immediately conceivable as before; however, MAD is still supposed to be a comedy; since the previous scene has caused distress among the characters and the audience, a light interval is needed; secondly, the scene points to the overall development of the play => obviously it will continue as a comedy, not a tragedy. Since two of the villains are questioned now, an important step is being taken towards the resolution of the conflict.)

R(3) Think about how differently Hero's behaviour is perceived in scene 1. Who thinks what and for what reasons?

Hero's behaviour in scene 1 is perceived and interpreted very differently for reasons of different relationships to Hero, but also because of different views on women and their reputation, marriage and love. These views are also according to age and social status. Claudio of course interprets Hero's silence as a sign of no confidence and weakness, and sees himself confirmed in his accusations. Don Pedro, as a close friend of Claudio, who is cultured and comes from a high social class, would agree with him. Leonato at first perceives Hero's silence the same way Claudio and Don Pedro do, as his family honour is attacked and his daughter does not even try to defend it. Beatrice and Benedick though see her silence as a sign of confidence and think if she does not have to defend herself, she must be guiltless. Also, as both are not enthusiastic to marry, they do not seem to care that much about marriage customs. The friar builds his opinion on Hero's face colour and general reaction, and concludes that she is guiltless. (blushing = one of the key elements in the play => displays how deceptive appearances can be on the one hand, but also how much true insight a person can have.)

R(4) What is Friar Francis's function in the play and why is this function not served by a member of the stage society?

Friar Francis serves to solve the conflict of the play, namely the conspiracy against the marriage of Hero and Claudio. This function is achieved by Friar Francis and not by a main character of the play because he is not involved in the conflict and has no attachment figure that is involved. (The only other character who has got this much insight is Beatrice, but since she is a woman she cannot serve this function.)

R(5) In scene 1, there are many references to eyesight- what are their functions and how does this correspond with the rest of the play?

Many references to eyesight can be found in Act IV.1. The eyes stand for the perception of outer appearances of persons/things. In the context of scene 1 this cognition is contrasted to (supposed) inner qualities. Claudio says he was deceived by his eyesight because what he saw of Hero did not match with her "impurity". He adds her beauty distracted him from her true character. In the Friar's opinion Hero's eyes gave proof for her innocence and Claudio's minds eyes will see his "new wife" (Hero again) in a much better light. At first the eyes are depicted as a means to see only the surface but not the true nature of a person. Then they reveal the truth but are still distracting some people from the truth.

R(6) In this act, severe differences between men and women are displayed- which are they and why is this so important for the plot?

In this act, severe differences between men and women are displayed. The Elizabethan society was a patriarchally structured society. Women were supposed to be obedient to their husband and father and were meant to be chaste and virtuous. Throughout the whole comedy Hero does not speak much, even in Act 4 when she is accused of being unfaithful she does not really defend herself. She even faints due to the shame which is brought on her and her family. Beatrice is different; she is convinced of Hero's innocence and defends her (cf. p. 81, l.145) which is an untypical behaviour for a woman. At the end of scene 1 she convinces Benedick of duelling Claudio, which means that Benedick would put the relationship to a woman above his friendship to Claudio, thus Beatrice dominates Benedick in this scene, which is very uncommon for men. All in all, Hero fits into the Elizabethan role of the woman, which is important for the plot because she does not defend herself to convince Claudio of her innocence. Thus, Claudio and his fellows can bring shame on Hero and her family. Beatrice, however, behaves in a more self-determined way and therefore she wants to prove Hero's innocence, which changes the plot. (The men display their power in church; focus is on Hero as the property of her father (objectification); underlined by Claudio rejecting her as if she were spoiled goods; cliché of the adulteress seems confirmed / is alluded to at last; men = fully convinced of their prejudices; women = united in their powerlessness; Hero seems to have lost the only object in her power, namely her virginity.)