

Analyse act four, scene one of much ado about nothing essay sample

[Literature](#), [Play](#)



The play “ Much Ado About Nothing” incorporates love, villainy, friendship, parent-child relationships, society and customs and relationships between men and women. Men dominated Elizabethan society and this play explores a wide range of men’s attitudes to the place of women in society.

At the beginning of Act four, Scene one, we immediately become aware that Leonato is displaying slight anxiety over the wedding ceremony and it seems he wants to fast track the procedure to get it out of the way. At this point in the play, the audience know more than Leonato. Previously, Dogberry, the constable of Messina, had tried to inform Leonato of how Hero would be humiliated publicly at the wedding. However, Leonato is so preoccupied, he never receives this information and so is completely unaware of what is going to take place.

As the scene begins, Friar Francis asks Claudio “ You come hither, my lord, to marry this Lady?” Claudio’s response is a simple no. Leonato becomes unsettled by the Friar’s disconcerting manner. He says hastily “ To be married to her: friar, you come to marry her.” This is an example of Leonato’s anxious behaviour. Earlier on in the play, he expresses that leaving the wedding for a week in the best idea, Act two, Scene one. Now at the wedding, it seems he is contradicting his previous thoughts and wants to hurry it on.

As the scene continues, Claudio’s behaviour starts to become rather surprising and confusing. The other characters are taken aback by his manner but from the audience’s perspective, it is to be expected. Although it is soon made clear to the other characters that Claudio is upset and angry,

he fails to pinpoint the reasons for his outrageous accusations. He speaks sarcastically, steps forward to everyone's shock and confusion and pushes Hero away, disgracing her and her family.

" There, Leonato, take her back again,

Give not this rotten orange to your friend,

She's but the sign and semblance of her honour"

The phrase " rotten orange" that Claudio uses to describe Hero conveys that on the outside Hero is innocent but there is corruption on the inside. The image of Hero being similar to a rotten orange is constant throughout this scene. There are also several references to how things appear differently to what they really are. In Elizabethan times, the outfits worn by both sexes distorted the natural human shape. Phrases such as " exterior shows" and " semblance of her honour" demonstrate how Hero seems clean and pure on the outside but is actually guilty on the inside. One of the themes in this play is the nature of truth and reality versus appearance and in this scene it is emphasised most.

Hero is unable to rebut to Claudio's accusations and this makes her seem even more guilty. Claudio calls Hero and " approvingly wanton". However, he has no proof. He begins to talk about the unquestionable truth and is almost bullying Hero, demanding answers from her. He believes that seeing Hero is good enough proof, however, his eyes have been deceived. He mimics the first time he thinks he has lost Hero, Act two, Scene one. In this scene he

says "farewell therefore, Hero" and in act four, scene one he says, similarly "But fare thee well, most foul, most fair, farewell". Claudio was hurt by what happened at the masked ball when he thought Don Pedro was wooing Hero for himself. He should have learnt from that but instead, he makes the same mistake again. To the audience, Claudio seems imperceptive. Leonato is confused at what is going on. He says to Claudio:

"Dear my lord, if you in your own proof,

Have vanquished the resistance of her youth,

And made defeat of her virginity-

Claudio responds to this in a very pompous manner. He is extremely self-satisfied that he is not the one who has done wrong. After boasting about his innocence, Hero speaks for the first time in the act. However, she does not choose her words carefully and ends up making Claudio even more angry. She says "And seemed I ever otherwise to you?" Claudio has been using the imagery that on the outside things appear differently and has mentioned the word "seem" repeatedly. Hero has not made the connection. Claudio says:

"Out on thee seeming, I will write against it!

You seem to me as Dian in her orb,

As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown:

But you are more intemperate in your blood,

Than Venus, or those pampered animals,

That rage in savage sensuality.”

This verse is iambic pentameter and Claudio uses the rhythm to express his rage and it is propelled by his anger. Here Claudio introduces blood to give the impression of sexuality and guilt.

Leonato addresses Don Pedro, but he also refuses to defend Hero's honour, telling Leonato that he watched with his own eyes as Hero embraced another man the night before. He uses hyperbolic language when describing what he saw and even goes to the extreme of calling Hero a “ common stale”.

Claudio too, exaggerates and accuses Hero of ruining everything. He says:

“ Oh Hero! What a hero hadst thou been...

But fare thee well, most foul, most fair, farewell

Thou pure impiety and impious purity,

For thee I'll lock up all the gates of love,

And on my eyelids shall conjecture hang,

To turn all beauty into thoughts of harm,

And never shall it more be gracious.”

It is surprising that Claudio shames Hero appallingly; instead of cancelling the wedding like any noble gentleman would, he chooses to publicly shame

and humiliate her. Just before the exit of Don Pedro, Don John and Claudio, Leonato says “Hath no man’s dagger here a point for me?” This is part of the social norms, it is Leonato’s way of avoiding humiliation. Leonato chooses Hero’s death in order to protect his reputation and avoid embarrassment. It is the personal shame that matters to him the most. If Hero had not been his child, it would not have mattered to him. When lashing out at Hero, Leonato continuously uses the word “mine”. It is all completely personal now and Leonato no longer cares for Hero, instead he cares solely for himself.

The wedding ceremony is one of the main scenes in the play, which demonstrates that Messina, at that time, was a very patriarchal society. The characters in the play belong to a stylised, highly conventional world in which the mundane needs of everyday life fade into the background. No one has to earn a living, the wars are over and all may devote themselves to revelry. In such a world as this, demure daughters find their husbands in accordance with their rank and fortune and their marriage was arranged by their parents. In his play, Hero belongs to this world.

A woman was legal property and was rarely expected to think for herself. And in Shakespeare’s time, a woman’s honour was based upon her virginity and chaste behaviour. For a woman to lose her honour by having sexual relations before marriage meant that she would lose all social standing, a disaster from which she could never recover. Moreover, this loss of honour would poison the woman’s whole family. Consequently, when Leonato rashly believes Claudio’s shaming of Hero at the wedding ceremony, he tries to

alienate her entirely. Furthermore, he speaks of her loss of honour as an indelible stain from which he cannot distance himself, no matter how hard he tries. He uses words such as “ smirch \ddot{i} ½d” and “ mired” to describe how Hero has become dirty and uses the metaphor of her having fallen “ into a pit of ink”.

In contrast to this, in today’s modern society, virginity is a personal choice and in western societies it does not affect one’s ability to get married. Arranged marriages no longer exist in western societies and now people marry for love. In Elizabethan times marriage was primarily a commercial undertaking.

Hero is not a strong individual and there are many references to how she is “ smothered” and always protected. The theme of female passivity and vulnerability is used a lot in this scene. Shakespeare has also tried to emphasise the helplessness of women at the time by the grammar he uses. In an active verb construction such as “ God defend me”, Hero is the object of the sentence. This emphasises the fact that throughout life, Hero will always be the property of a man. In the phrase “ how am I beset”, Hero is the subject of the sentence. However, this is a passive verb construction and this demonstrates how the society she lives in is very male-dominated. She is powerless and is always on the receiving end and is constantly being controlled by others. Of all the men and women present at the wedding, only Friar Francis actually “ notes” Hero. He says:

“ By noting of the lady.

I have marked

A thousand blushing apparitions...

Trust not my reading, nor my observations...

If this sweet lady lie not guiltless here,

Under some biting error."

The Friar is correct as we all know, and his choice of words, "by noting of the lady" is significant. It is the first time that anyone points out to the characters what we all know to be true; the others have failed to note what is happening around them. Friar Francis is protecting Hero; he is the voice of reason at this point in the play. The imagery that he uses is completely different from how Leonato has described Hero. Friar Francis uses phrases such as "angel whiteness" and "sweet lady". Hero has, by this time, regained consciousness but still has not said anything. Finally, Friar Francis addresses her for the first time. Throughout the scene Hero has been asked questions through her father, again, this shows how the society was extremely male dominated. Finally it becomes clear to Leonato that it was Don John who wronged Hero and that she is indeed innocent. For women in that era, the loss of honour was a form of annihilation. The only way Hero can clear her name is for her to pretend to die. When discussing how they will go about this, Friar Francis says "You may conceal her" not "she can hide". Here again it shows how Hero is being told what to do.

She has not given her consent to go ahead with the proceedings but she cannot do anything else. Benedick, who has said surprisingly little in the entire scene, pledges his loyalty to the plan. He wants to do what is necessary. Friar Francis finally says to Hero "have patience and endure". All Hero can do is nothing, she is helpless. Benedick and Beatrice are left alone in the church and here the dialogue changes from verse to prose, showing a change has occurred. Most of the play is written in prose, and the easy flow of the dialogue establishes a conversational realism. The fluidity of the prose and verse in the play is further enhanced by the way in which the characters frequently switch from one form to another. Each transition has its own particular dramatic effect. For example, Claudio, the romantic, will lead Don Pedro into verse, whilst the dim-witted Dogberry remains in prose as everyone around him speaks verse. Beatrice and Benedick speak to each other with the grace, freedom and ease of social equals. They are recognised by the others as supreme in the "merry war" of wit, as the cleverest talkers in a society, which values their dexterity.

At this point in the play they go back to the word play, which is now most familiar to the audience. Beatrice is hurt and angry for her cousin, Hero, while Benedick simply wants to help. They fumble with their words until Benedick at last reveals his love for Beatrice. She returns the affection by saying: "I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest" These love declarations are revealed at a very inappropriate time. Beatrice anticipates what she is going to say. She is leading Benedick on and he is unaware of what she is about to request. Benedick says "Come, bid me do

anything for thee." Beatrice replies with " Kill Claudio" These words are monosyllabic and the harsh alliteration is powerful and creates a big impact on the audience. She asks this as a way for Benedick to prove his love for her. Her demand essentially forces Benedick to choose between the brotherly love of men and the loyalty of a man to a woman. Beatrice's request is completely irrational and Benedick refuses. As a result, Beatrice erupts into a tirade of words and bitterness for her wronged cousin until Benedick says that he will challenge Claudio. Surprisingly, it seems Beatrice plays the more dominant role in this scene and talks with a man's licence.

Although Much Ado About Nothing is set in Messina, Shakespeare is really exploring sixteenth century England and men's attitudes at this time. Hero is a stereotype in this play and Beatrice, who speaks her mind is seen as unusual. Throughout the play Shakespeare emphasises the superiority of men and the fact that a woman's future relied purely on her social status. He also conveys how virginity is imperative when it comes to marriage. Today, although virginity is less important when it comes to marriage and people marry for love, men and women are still not seen as equal. Even today men hold most senior positions and in eastern societies, many women still live in a highly male-dominated world.