

The problem with
claudio: a
unsympathetic
character in much
ado about nothing



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Shakespeare's light-hearted 'Much Ado About Nothing' explores both the triumph and tragedy which presents itself in the love of Hero and Claudio, using the latter as an easily deceived character whose errors almost culminate in a tragic ending to the play. Claudio's character is presented initially in a virtuous light, though his many flaws and wrongdoings surface throughout the play, thus leaving an audience with little sympathy for Claudio at the end of the play.

A primary way in which Shakespeare explores Claudio's foibles and renders the lack of sympathy for him is by Claudio's use of words or phrases which insult or shame another character. The most prominent of these examples is 'But you are more intemperate in your blood / Than Venus, or those pamper'd animals / Which rage in savage sensuality,' which is said to Hero in Act 4, Scene 1. Both the hyperbolic reference to 'Venus', and the harsh alliteration of 'savage sensuality' portray his true anger, and the inanity of the insults. Because the audience members are aware of the truth, Shakespeare deliberately uses the dramatic irony to over-exaggerate Claudio's insults, therefore rendering sympathy for the unknowing Hero, yet not the brashness of Claudio and his denunciations. In the same scene, Claudio goes on to describe oxymoronically Hero's 'pure impiety, and impious purity,' which utilises antithesis of two contrasting words - 'pure' and 'impious'- to perfectly encapsulate his anger of her apparent actions, yet the dramatic irony of the scene depicts Claudio as seeming 'impious' himself, due to his brash accusations. His irrationality can also be seen in 'But fare thee well, most foul, must fair! Farewell,' which uses an oxymoron in his description of Hero as both 'fair' and 'foul', and in conjunction with the

paronomasia used in the reiteration of 'fair,' and 'fare,' it brings Claudio's foolishness and ignorance to light with his jumbled and confused sentence. So too is Claudio's acrimony seen in his outburst to Leonato, 'Away! I will not have to do with you,' which uses an imperative and a caesura to portray and emphasise Claudio's condescension to Leonato, made yet more disrespectful from the perspective of an audience, coming from the man who killed Leonato's daughter with his accusations. Claudio's image to an audience is yet more tarnished when he deliberately jokes in a hostile manner about Benedick's love for Beatrice, saying, 'Here dwells Benedick the married man,' mocking Benedick about marriage, which undoubtedly portrays a lack of sensitivity on Claudio's part, with the irony of his failed wedding looming over this jest.

A similarly rude and undesirable attribute which Claudio can be seen to be is his proneness to narcissistic and hypocritical behaviour. This manifests itself in Act 3, Scene 2, when Don John deceives Claudio about Hero's infidelity. When Don John has merely told Claudio of this, the latter is quick to change his allegiance, stating 'If I see anything tonight why I should not marry her tomorrow in the congregation,' which shows his natural disposition to be changeable, and his love for Hero can clearly not be too strong if he immediately distrusts her. He subsequently says, 'Where I should wed, there I should shame her,' which portrays his selfishness, using twice the word 'I' rather than 'we', conveying his self-centred character, yet this also shows further shows his willingness to embarrass and shame people if need be, which undeniably portrays him to an audience as dishonest and false.

Claudio's tendency for selfish behaviour can so too be seen when he says, '

Yet sinned I not, / but in mistaking,' to Leonato, which portrays his lack of remorse or responsibility for his actions, and his 'mistaking' is emphasised by appearing on a new line in the spoken verse. His failure to even apologise truly conveys his selfish and somewhat immature nature, as he simply passes the blame on without accepting any responsibility himself. So too is this common nature of his seen when he proclaims at his first wedding to Hero, 'For thee I'll lock up the gates of love,' which portrays his state of being broken-hearted at the wedding: an innocent theme, yet he is quick to break his word by saying 'I do embrace your offer,' in reply to Leonato's proposition for him to marry Hero's cousin, hence disproving any true love, because he would not insult Hero's image if he did love her truly. He instead is trying to make peace with Leonato for his own sake, rather than making peace with himself for what he has done. To him, it is a duty to Leonato, rather than to Hero, proven by his words to Leonato, 'For this I owe you.' The word choice of 'owe' by Shakespeare conveys a deliberate meaning of superficial material matter over emotion and love, which imparts the dishonest nature of Claudio to the audience. Furthermore, the same issue of a lack of responsibility or remorse is seen in his epitaph, describing Hero's death as 'done to death by slanderous tongues,' which perfectly epitomises Claudio's selfishness, using generalities to describe Hero's death, and accepting no personal responsibility even though he was the primary offender.

Amongst Claudio's flaws and hypocrisy, there are, especially at the beginning of the play, instances where he is illustrated as innocent and naïve, and his wrongdoings are nothing more than youthful and blameless

mishaps and mistakes. This innocence can be seen when he says, ' In mine eye, she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on,' which through its prose, and plain language evokes a sensitive picture of Claudio to be painted to the audience, contrasted to the grandiloquence and hyperbolic words of Benedick which came before, ' Do you...tell us Cupid is a good hare-finder and Vulcan a rare carpenter?' This same effect is present in Benedick's words of, ' Alas, poor hurt fowl!' which portray Claudio in a sensitive light, achieved by both the monosyllables of the sentence, and the metaphor of an animal used to describe Claudio, which depicts a weak and vulnerable picture of him. Furthermore, Claudio's naivety is seen in the easiness in which his mind or opinion is changed. This can be seen in, 'Tis certain so; the prince woos for himself,' which illustrates a certain element of utter disappointment and defeat in his choice of words - ' for himself.' ' Certain' portrays a definite naivety and immaturity, since Claudio has merely Don John's words to persuade him that Don Pedro has wooed Hero for himself. Claudio subsequently says, ' Friendship is constant in all other things / save in the office and affairs of love,' which conveys a broken and betrayed sense of Claudio, utilising the enjambment and ' save' at the beginning of the line, to truly emphasise the act of being betrayed, and with the dramatic irony of the scene, a true element of pathos is painted for the naïve Claudio.

The sense of irony is rife through the play, and it is especially used in Claudio's character, to portray his lack of knowledge of the truth. This is seen in Claudio's ' farewell,' to Hero, which is used both in Act 2, Scene 1, and Act 4, Scene 1. On both these occasions, Claudio has been deceived by Don John: the first time being that the latter had tricked Claudio into thinking that

Don Pedro had taken Hero for himself, and on the second occasion, believing that Hero had been unfaithful, Claudio disgraced her at their wedding. The repeated 'farewell,' perfectly epitomises Claudio's changeability and ignorance, and in conjunction with the dramatic irony of the scene, would evoke a strange sense of sympathy from the audience due to the extent of his misconception, and almost a child-like pity on the twice-deceived Claudio. Similarly, when Claudio says to Hero, 'To make you answer truly to your name,' it is an irony made bitter by Claudio's usage of 'truly,' which again would evoke pity upon the deceived Claudio, who has been unfairly tricked, and proceeds to draw out the process of degrading Hero on falsely acquired evidence.

Claudio's character undergoes a subtle change in the duration of the play, starting as a naïve and innocent man who is the youngest of the group, and is often left behind by Benedick's sharp wit. His naivety leads him to be deceived twice by Don John, and both this ignorance and the way in which he is completely deceived and misled draws sympathy from the audience; yet in both his harsh words, and his hypocritical behaviour, this view shifts through the duration of the play, leaving Claudio with next to no sympathy at the end of the play, leaving darker tones in the light-hearted Shakespearean comedy.