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SCENE 3

- At Hero's tomb Claudio and Don Pedro mourn her publicly.
- They leave to prepare for the wedding.

CONTEXT

In *Romeo and Juliet* the lovers' supposed deaths have tragic consequences whereas here the comedy is maintained.

Before dawn the next morning at Hero's empty tomb Claudio and Don Pedro make a public show of grief. Claudio recites an epitaph and a song of apology is sung. As dawn breaks, Claudio and Don Pedro leave to change their clothes for the wedding.

COMMENTARY

This is a brief scene of pomp, ceremony and dignified atonement. The song explores the destructive male inconstancy of 'Sigh no more' (II.3). When Don Pedro notes the first glimmer of daylight he speaks **metaphorically** of the 'wolves' of jealousy and villainy which have 'preyed' (line 25) in the night of human irrationality or sin; the gentle day of love and reason returns. **Blank verse**, classical allusion and formal syntax lend the utterance dignity and establish a new order: 'the gentle day, / Before the wheels of Phoebus, round about / Dapples the drowsy east with spots of grey' (lines 25–7). **Alliteration**, assonance of short vowel sounds and rhythm create appropriate lightness of tone.

GLOSSARY

5	guerdon recompense
12	goddess of the night Cynthia, goddess of the moon and patroness of virgins
13	thy virgin knight Hero as knight errant, warring huntress
26	Phoebus Apollo, sun god, who drives his chariot across the sky
29	several separate
30	weeds clothes
32	Hymen god of marriage

SCENE 4

- At the wedding Antonio's daughter turns out to be none other than Hero.
- Benedick and Beatrice are betrothed.
- Don John is captured.

Waiting in his house for the ceremony to begin, Leonato grants Benedick's request to marry Beatrice. Don Pedro arrives with Claudio, who weds Hero, masked as Antonio's daughter. Hero unveils to his joyful surprise. After some sparring, Beatrice agrees to marry Benedick. A messenger bears the news of Don John's capture. Benedick urges Don Pedro to marry and orders the musicians to strike up for a dance.

COMMENTARY

As he asks for Beatrice's hand, Benedick exuberantly mocks himself as a lover. For a misogynist to marry is 'To bind me or undo me' (line 20). Not until the end of the scene is there a hint that he knows he was tricked into loving Beatrice.

His earthy, realistic love contrasts with Claudio's. He puns on the phallic connotations of will, hoping that Leonato's 'good will' may 'stand with ours' (lines 28–9). Marriage is an acknowledgement that 'the world must be peopled' (II.3.197); only an equal in wit and energy would tie Benedick down happily.

Beatrice and Benedick have the last say. After the solemnity of the wedding of Claudio and Hero, with its hint of miracle, it is a coming down to earth. Had either had an excess of pride or vanity, the disclosure that neither loves the other any 'more than reason' (line 74) would have been destructive. Their 'no more [love] than reason' could be played as a challenge, with tongue in cheek or as another joke gone wrong. When Claudio and Hero supply written proof of their feelings, there is relief that their marriage will be consummated.

CONTEXT

Even in Gielgud's fantastic 1949 production, the seriousness or Claudio's rejection of Hero and reconciliation with her were brought out through a realistic church setting.

CRITICAL APPROACHES

CONTEXT

Shakespeare adapted the Hero–Claudio plot but invented the Beatrice and Benedick plot.

CHARACTERISATION

The antagonism and attraction of the sexual battle between Beatrice and Benedick produces sharp repartee, droll, whimsical images and wonderfully versatile, thought-provoking wit. Claudio's language lacks wit and his behaviour is conventional; Hero is obedient and hardly speaks at all. The Beatrice–Benedick, Hero–Claudio plots resonate and interlink to create a vision of reconciliation and harmony through sexual love. It is sometimes argued that the Hero–Claudio plot would collapse on its own. However, their love story is the spine of the play, their eventual marriage its consummation. Beatrice's and Benedick's story arises from, depends upon and complements it. It was adapted from popular romances, whereas the subplot is the original product of Shakespeare's own imagination. Its quality of spontaneous improvisation creates spaciousness, freedom and exuberance. When independent characters scornful of romantic love succumb to feeble deceptions, the power of love as a universal solvent is exalted.

BENEDICK

Benedick's name means he who is to be blessed, Beatrice's, she who blesses, which indicates that they were destined for each other. His prototypes are two stock characters of comedy: the scorner of love and the witty courtier. He has an **ironic** sense of himself; an actor plays Benedick who is conscious of playing himself. Don Pedro warns, proverbially, 'In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke', meaning that he must succumb to matrimony, to which Benedick retorts: "The savage bull may; but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull's horns and set them in my forehead, and let me be vilely painted, and in such great letters as they write, "Here is good horse to hire", let them signify under my sign, "Here you may see Benedick, the married man"' (I.2.193–9). The quick retort to a stale proverb is one of his hallmarks, another his ability to conjure up cartoon images with words. The too audacious expression of pride, presaging his fall, and his anxiety about being made a cuckold

Critical approaches

are funny. Equally so is his childish self-dramatisation – his name mentioned twice in the third person – as a notorious scorner of woman and recognisable social type.

Asked by Claudio for his opinion of Hero, he had replied, 'Do you question me as an honest man ... or would you have me speak after my custom, as being a professed tyrant to their sex?' (I.1.122–4). This is often cited as proof that misogyny is a pose adopted to protect him from women and amuse his friends; since it is a pose, his falling for Beatrice, it is argued, is no surprise. Yet a pose may be sincerely adopted and fully embraced, scorn of women no less genuine for its self-consciousness, the fear no less real for its self-dramatising playfulness.

Although his patronising of Claudio and the sophistication of his wit have prompted directors to cast Benedick as mature, verging on middle age, his fondness for painting fantastic, outlandish, whimsical cartoons and almost gloating over his comic self-image may reflect the immaturity of one little older than Claudio and just as susceptible to marriage.

This ironic attitude towards himself is apparent in major **soliloquies** where he weighs up the discrepancy between how the world sees him and he sees himself – after Beatrice dissects his masked character at the ball, in the garden before and after the eavesdropping and after Beatrice has entered to bid him come to dinner. Speaking to himself, he speaks of himself in a manner not far different from the Benedick who speaks to others. His openness about himself is engaging; his self-dramatisation arises from an insecurity about who he is, which makes him accessible.

Benedick exercises a fool's licence from the moment he interrupts a courtly exchange with his mischievous question about Hero's paternity, 'Were you in doubt, sir, that you asked her?' (I.1.79). His particular talent is not merely for wittily voicing disdain of romantic love; he is quick to deflate pomposity and undermine whoever takes his own shaky social *persona* too seriously. Though a professed woman-hater, he boasts that he is 'loved of all ladies' (I.1.92–3), only Beatrice excepted. He is a notorious womaniser, who dreads



For useful discussion of character and themes, see <http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/> and explore the Much Ado link.