Hero, Resurrected and Reimagined:

Silence, Slander, and Performative Chastity on the Renaissance Stage

A Thesis by Maille-Rose Smith

Thesis Advisor: Professor Clare Kinney

Presented to the Department of English

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors

The University of Virginia

Charlottesville, Virginia

April 9, 2021

Abstract

Renaissance conduct books emphasize the importance of chastity as a virtue of femininity but at times offer mixed signals about the proper "performance" of chastity. This fact is of particular interest in plays of the period, in which the plot motif of the slandered or violated heroine frequently appears across several dramatic genres. By staging varying outcomes for heroines that perform chastity, these works offer their own perspectives on the social prescriptions of the conduct books. My project explores these issues most specifically through the misuse and "resurrection" of Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing*, but also through the discussion of threatened or abused chastity, as represented in some plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries.

The fungible nature of the conduct book scripts and the dramatic scripts reflects masculine anxieties surrounding women's changeability and their ability to deceive. Once a heroine has lost her reputation, she must often die to be "resurrected" as pure in the eyes of influential male characters. This thesis observes how a heroine must navigate the two scripts to perform chastity for both the powerful men onstage and for the audience, without being labeled a deceiver. I posit that in the case of *Much Ado About Nothing*, the fragility of this dual performance necessitates Hero's death, so that she may enact yet another ideal feminine role: the conduct book role of "moral teacher." In the epilogue, I offer brief case studies of Hero on the stage and onscreen; actors' embodiments and re-embodiments of Hero as a unique character complicate her textual blankness. This thesis demonstrates how the embodiment of Hero onstage as a multifaceted, expressive individual, as opposed to a chaste lady stereotype, may challenge her "dramatic object" status.

Dramatis Personae / Acknowledgements

Shakespeare without a live audience is quite lonely. Digital theatre tests our technological boundaries in glorious ways, but nothing, in my mind, can replace that breathtaking sensation of staring at a stage, head tilted unnaturally up or down, surrounded by jostling elbows. Being surrounded by people, mutually transfixed by a moment onstage that is completely unique and unrepeatable and understood – it's simply magical.

Live theatre may not be back in all its glory yet, but I have been fortunate in the magic department. Praise be to these wonders of humanity, who inspire more amazement than statue conversions, Echo hauntings, and resplendent resurrections. They have offered endless support and cauldrons of kindness.

I profess all my gratitude for …

Jay Baker, Claire Koeppen, and Salem Zelalem*: The most brilliant readers and feedback-givers imaginable, whose thoughtful comments, tea-sipping commiserations, and sparkling insights made the online DMP collaborative and joyful.*

My wonderful parents*, for their love, enthusiasm, support, and willingness to proofread heaps upon heaps of pages.*

Professor Mary Kuhn, *for her Zoom-teaching prowess, ever-flowing patience and advice, and for working to make the DMP group a warm, supportive community. Her compassion knows no bounds.*

Professor Elizabeth Fowler*, whose joy-filled "ENGL 3810" class put me firmly on the road to majoring in English and whose teaching makes me want to fill up a notebook a day scribbling down every terrifyingly eloquent, off-the-cuff sentence. Her victorious morning "hwæt!" has converted multitudes*.

Professor Clare Kinney: *The beaming beacon in the night sky of thesis-writing. For encouraging and guiding me through research and editing for The Mousetrap (an eternity ago). For making every class of Transforming Desire a cause for grand celebration. For telling me that the DMP was an option! For offering direction, guidance, grounding, and eternal support, and for making me feel excited to read and watch more Shakespeare and write about it! For her patience, generosity, and enthusiasm. Like Paulina, her magic knows no bounds.*

Without them, my project would have indeed been *About Nothing*, because it simply would not exist.

Contents

Introduction

Was there ever any so abused, so slaundered, so railed upon, or so wickedly handled vndeservedly, as are we women?

– Jane Anger, *Her Protection for Women. To defend them against the Scandalous Reportes of a late Surfeting Lover* (1589)

In the Renaissance literary imagination, protecting one's honor is paramount to remaining a respectable member of society. Powerful men engage in battle, woo ladies, meet with diplomats, and fight in duels for the sake of their reputations. Valor, courage, and gentility serve as measures of their honor. For Renaissance women, though, honor is defined largely by chastity, and a woman cannot simply fight a duel with someone who accuses her of unfaithfulness; she must defend her chastity with an eye towards social expectations and ideals. She cannot sound too eloquent, as this may be a mark of deceit, nor can she be completely silent, which may be read as guilt. She must strike a perfect balance of self-expression and guilelessness, performing chastity so naturalistically that she appears to not be performing at all. However, masterful acting may be read as an even more dangerous mark of deceit. Slandered Renaissance heroines often must die, or feign death, and be resurrected to purify their sullied reputations.

By placing Renaissance dramas in conversation with conduct books of the period, my goal is to examine the distinction between ideals of femininity on the page and on the stage: how do slandered female characters perform chastity, and how do their performances collide with and subvert conduct book instructions on feminine behavior? If, as Renaissance scholar Peter Stallybrass observes, "the politics of conduct is a politics of appearance,"[1] then how may a woman make herself legible to an audience primed for a performance of femininity? By considering the manners in which stage performances of chastity complicate conduct book

1. Peter Stallybrass, "Reading the Body: The Revenger's Tragedy and the Jacobean Theater of Consumption," *Renaissance Drama*, vol. 18 (1 Jan. 1987), 122.

notions of chaste behavior and specifically, speech, we may construe the staged "perfect woman" as not a single, perfectly anatomized entity, as conduct books suggest, but rather as an amorphous, circumstance-specific actress: one whose performance, however virtuosic (or even, perhaps, by the very virtue of its virtuosity), is open to multiple male interpretations and speculations.

For more than four centuries, the witty, sparklingly subversive Beatrice of *Much Ado About Nothing* (1600) has charmed audiences. Her "merry war" of words with Benedick marks her as entertaining, intellectually lively, and unafraid to speak her mind (1.1.58).[2] She is a spitfire and adored for it.[3] Claire McEachern notes that she "is generally the most beloved of Shakespearean heroines, for her vitality, generosity of spirit and wit, and the graceful but firm insistence with which she claims intellectual equality with men."[4] Critics have studied and written about her extensively. Actors pine for that plum role. She is whip-smart, hilarious, and clearly the star of the show.

This thesis, however, is not about Beatrice. Instead, it shines the spotlight on the comparatively pallid Hero, who seems, outwardly, much less interesting or worthy of critical commentary than her sparkling counterpart. She speaks far less and may be pitifully relegated to the background, treated as a transactional object to be used, slandered, and forgotten, to the point that some 19th century critics raged against the injustice of the "angel of the house" being denied her moment. Henrietta Palmer, author of *The Stratford Gallery; or the Shakespeare Sisterhood*

---

2. William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, edited by Claire McEachern (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). Subsequent references to *Much Ado* will be indicated parenthetically.

3. Although some nineteenth-century critics were less than taken with her. Thomas Campbell called her an "odious woman," preferring Hero's relative silence (McEachern, 128).

4. Claire McEachern, from the preface to William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 37.

(1859) attacked Beatrice for stealing the limelight: "loud and persistent vanity has succeeded in usurping the honorable place belonging to modest, graceful excellence."[5] Hero is, in short, the picture of docile purity — both by nineteenth-century and Renaissance-era standards. Meanwhile, Beatrice breaks conduct book rules right and left. Why, then, is Beatrice the hero and Hero the slandered "'nothing' that generates so much ado"?[6] With this seeming social and dramatic contradiction in mind, I have chosen Hero as a representative of the chaste lady archetype, and *Much Ado* serves as the framework upon which I explore variations on the slandering of women, a theme rife in Renaissance dramas.

Some feminist critics, including Marilyn French, have attempted to characterize Hero as psychologically richer than the script suggests. "As a noncharacter," asserts French, "the obedient and silent Hero amplifies the inlaw feminine principle at its most acceptable: but like Bianca in *The Taming of the Shrew*, she wears the disguise society demands of her, but harbors other thoughts under her impeccable exterior."[7] Yet Carol Cook convincingly argues that such a reading adopts "a notion of Hero's 'seeming' that concurs with the one Claudio takes up in his most misogynistic moment."[8] To "read" Hero as an autonomous deceiver may be to engage in an unfounded conception of her personality and interior life.

My aim, in focusing on Hero, is not to imbue her with such unsubstantiated interiority. Rather, this thesis examines why the woman who best fulfills conduct books' prescriptions of femininity is slandered, and to place that moment of social disorder in conversation with the

---

5. Palmer quoted in Thompson and Roberts, *Women Reading Shakespeare* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997): 111-12.

6. Carol Cook, "'The Sign and Semblance of Her Honor': Reading Gender Difference in *Much Ado about Nothing*," *Shakespeare and Gender: A History*, edited by Deborah E. Barker and Ivo Kamps (Verso, 1995), 85.

7. Marilyn French, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (New York: Summit Books, 1981), 133.

8. Cook, 85.

experiences of similarly abused Renaissance heroines, particularly those in Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607), Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (1623), Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1613), and John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1623). By situating key dramatic moments before, during, and after the slander in relation to Renaissance conduct books and plays, this thesis ultimately explores how a woman, as a social performer, can respond to and extricate herself from slander and abuse. If she must die and be "resurrected" to save her reputation from ruin, what does this say about society's equation of life to chastity and the necessity of scripted honesty?

To begin, I will examine the masculine anxieties in *Much Ado* that make the slandering of Hero possible, analyzing Claudio's perception of Hero from the moment he sees her to when he slanders her at the first wedding scene. This slandering raises questions regarding the ability of even the most chaste woman to protect her reputation, which Chapter Two addresses as I move into a discussion of Hero's behavior and "seeming." In conversation with conduct book ideals, men's interpretations of Hero expose fissures between ideal feminine virtues as represented literarily and onstage. In the third chapter, I will situate the slander of Hero alongside the slanders of her contemporary heroines to contextualize Hero as an archetype of the chaste lady and further parse the dichotomy between conduct book ideals and staged performances. This discussion will lead into Chapter Four's exploration of the necessity of death to contain female characters and reincorporate them into society through resurrection. In Chapter Five, I will re-examine Hero's misfortune and offer an alternative reading of her slandering not as a failure in the social script but rather as a potential opportunity for her to fulfill the metatheatrical role of moral teacher. Finally, I will offer brief case studies of Hero on the stage and onscreen; actors' embodiments and re-embodiments of Hero as a unique character complicate her textual

"blankness."[9] Hero's "dramatic object" status is challenged by the multifaceted humans, not objects, that play her onstage.

Analyzing Hero as a textual blank space upon which men may inscribe their insecurities, as an actor on a daunting social stage, and as a moral teacher, we may parse (and perhaps even relish in) the incongruities between, and potential convergences of, conduct book dicta and dramatic scripts. The Renaissance Dream Woman refuses to be pinned down.

Chapter 1: Doubting Hero

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Hero seems like that dream woman, embodying patriarchal values of obedience, modesty, and quiet virtue. And yet Hero, not the socially transgressive Beatrice, is misused and slandered, raising the question: How does silence inspire, rather than quell, male insecurities about cuckolding in English Renaissance society, and how are these insecurities enacted? The process of slandering, undoing, redeeming, and resurrecting virtuous women exposes a slippery, unfixed male perspective on female self-expression — a perspective ironically similar to the very traits associated with the supposedly deceitful women. In this chapter, I examine masculine insecurities and social perceptions that propel Claudio to immediately distrust Hero, dissecting why the ostensibly perfect woman is the object of slander.

Young and demure, Hero is often perceived as a blank canvas rather than a full human being, a mirror for men to see whatever they please. Representing meek femininity open to male interpretation, she is a statue into which men carve their fantasies and insecurities. This personal ambiguity works initially in her favor, as she attracts the affections of the young Count Claudio. However, Claudio proves insecure and distrustful. His "immature romantic interest," Alison

9. Cook notes that, for male characters as well as for literary critics, "Hero's nothing invites noting, her blankness produces marking" (85).

Findlay notes, "is obvious in his need for peer approval."[10] Upon seeing Hero, he praises her beauty and then immediately seeks a second opinion, asking Benedick to judge her purity: "Is she not a modest young woman?" (1.1.157). From the first scene of the play, Claudio calls into question Hero's honor and his ability to accurately "read" her.

Benedick responds to Claudio's question with two of his own: "Do you question me as an honest man should do, for my simple true judgment? Or would you have me speak after my custom, as being a professed tyrant to their sex?" (1.1.158-161). Not only does this presage Claudio's later false judgment of Hero as dishonest, in which he — not Benedick — becomes a "tyrant" to the female sex, but it also establishes a comparison between Claudio's and Benedick's perception and treatment of women (1.1.160). Benedick claims to take great joy in mocking the female sex,[11] but it is Claudio who seriously slanders a woman. Claudio's malignment of Hero exposes her vulnerability despite, or perhaps because of, her docility and silent chastity, calling into question the merits of the quiet obedience so lauded in Renaissance conduct books. She fulfills the wifely ideal, according to Robert Cleaver and John Dod's *A Godly Form of Household Government* (1614), "to be silent, obedient, peaceable, patient, [and] studious to appease [the man's] choler if he be angry."[12] Instead of earning a spotless reputation, she is left slandered and husbandless at the altar. Claudio's unjust treatment of Hero complicates

10. Allison Findlay, *The Shakespeare Handbooks: Much Ado About Nothing* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 13.

11. In action, though, he does not mock the entirety of the female sex. Rather, he jokes about cuckoldry and vows to never get married until he finds the perfect woman (2.3.27-33). With Beatrice, he does not initiate the battle of wits; he responds to her jabs. He neither slanders women with generalizations nor does he initiate conflict with them.

12. Robert Cleaver and John Dod, *A Godly Form of Household Government*, quoted in *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, edited by Kate Aughterson (Routledge, 1995), 82.

men's ideals of femininity, illustrating a dichotomy between the theoretical and actual "perfect woman" in the play and, more broadly, in English Renaissance society.

Inexperienced in love and relying on his friends' affirmations, Claudio (as man and count) nevertheless holds significant social power over Hero, which allows him to turn even her father against her. Claudio's self-aware innocence induces paranoia: he is more than willing to believe there is cuckoldry at work.[13] He initially objectifies her as a beautiful "jewel," only to vilify her as a "rotten orange" after Don John's impersonation scheme has made its impression (1.1.171, 4.1.30). Hero's demureness and Claudio's insecurities surrounding women's true natures coalesce into a toxic compound of distrust and slander.

Ironically, in a society in which popular opinion labeled women as the inconstant sex,[14] Claudio's own identity as a lover is unfixed. When confronted with the scheming Don John's suggestion that Don Pedro is wooing Hero not for Claudio, but for himself, Claudio is all too willing to give up the entire venture:

> Let every eye negotiate for itself,
> And trust no agent; for Beauty is a witch
> Against whose charms faith melteth into blood.
> Thus is an accident of hourly proof
> Which I mistrusted not. Farewell, therefore, Hero! (2.1.163-167)

Claudio chastises himself for trusting his friend too much, foreshadowing his later disillusionment with, and accusation of, Hero. He struggles with character judgments, easily perceiving the villainous Don John as truthful, and the faithful Don Pedro and Hero as deceitful.

---

13. See Cook's "'The Sign and Semblance of Her Honor'" for a deeper discussion of cuckoldry anxieties in *Much Ado*.

14. For a particularly vitriolic indictment of women's serpent-like artifice and bewitching qualities, see Euphues's *querelle* in John Lyly's *The Anatomy of Wit* (1578): "I had thought women had been as we men, that is true, faithful, zealous, constant, but I perceive they be rather woe unto men, by their falsehood, jealousy, inconstancy" (35r). This criticism of the female sex informs Claudio's views on women and wooing. He believes that revealing his feelings would leave him vulnerable to female inconstancy so he should smother his passions.

Claudio mystifies Don Pedro's agency in this speech, faulting Hero's beauty and the "affairs of love," not Don Pedro's own character or lack thereof, for the betrayal (2.1.161). Claudio characterizes Hero as a sorceress whose looks have bewitched Don Pedro and stirred his "blood," and thus he cannot help being a disloyal friend (2.1.165). Cook notes that "Hero is subsumed into an archetype of destructive female power … who deprives men of their wills and dissolves the solidarity of masculine bond."[15] When two male friends pine after the same woman, their homosocial relationship loses meaning. They transform from multifaceted, honorable individuals within a community into warring pawns bound only to love. Friends, Claudio believes, can be loyal "in all other things," but the "charms" of beauty transform even the most constant friend into a backstabber (2.1.160, 165).

Instead of blaming Hero outright for Don Pedro's betrayal, Claudio wields a slippery, transitive logic: Beauty, a personified "witch," is the real culprit in seducing Don Pedro, destroying his willpower and his loyalty to Claudio. Beauty causes men to behave lustfully, converting "faith into the more carnal blood (or passion)."[16] If Beauty is to blame for disintegrating men's homosocial loyalties, and Hero possesses Beauty and presents as beautiful, then Hero has the potential to destroy the foundations of patriarchal society. The Beauty of even (or perhaps especially) the quietest woman turns men into animals, tempting their basest instincts.

Claudio is hardly the first man to distrust and indict Beauty's powers. Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, first performed in 1606 (approximately seven years after the first performance of *Much Ado*), features a male character who claims that his agency is

15. Cook, 86.

16. McEachern, 226.

similarly stolen by the alluring and immaterial Beauty. She has taken hold of him and twisted his mind and actions into unnatural (or perhaps natural to the point of animalistic) shapes. Junior, the Duke's privileged son, is on trial for the rape of Lord Antonio's wife — a "general honest lady."[17] We never meet this woman alive, but we hear from men aplenty of her virtues.[18] When Junior is asked what moved him to commit the rape, he jauntily responds, "Why, flesh and blood, my Lord: / What should move men unto a woman else?"[19] Yes, rape is "the very core of lust, / Double adultery," but when a woman is beautiful, he claims, base instincts triumph over social rules.[20] Junior casts himself as a lustful victim of Beauty's power, claiming:

> ... it would please me well
> Were it to do again. Sure, she's a goddess,
> For I'd no power to see her and to live;
> It falls out true in this for I must die.
> Her beauty was ordained to be my scaffold.[21]

Junior ruthlessly riffs on the "death" double entendre: when he saw Antonio's wife, he knew he was destined to "die," meaning to experience orgasm.[22] Being put to death for rape, then, is a just punishment: a death for a death, or so he jokes.[23] Junior describes the effect of the wife's beauty on him similarly to how Claudio describes the effect of Hero's beauty on Don

---

17. [Thomas Middleton?], *The Revenger's Tragedy*, edited by Brian Gibbons (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 1.2.46.

18. The judges declare that "that lady's name has spread such a fair wing / Over all Italy, that if our tongues / Were sparing toward the fact, judgment itself / Would be condemn'd" (1.2.56-9). These men must proclaim the wife's virtuous nature, or their entire judgment system collapses. Their strong insistence of the wife's purity is similar to the friar's defense of Hero, in which he reads her blushes not as guilt but rather as a mark of purity.

19. [Middleton?], 1.2.47-8.

20. [Middleton?], 1.2.43-4.

21. [Middleton?], 1.2.60-4.

22. [Middleton?], 1.2.63

23. In truth, though, he expects his brothers to "have a trick" to help him escape from prison (1.2.86).

Pedro. Junior claims that the moment he saw the lady, he lost all "power" to live.[24] Death, in both senses of the word, was inevitable; her beauty, consensually or not, would kill him. To justify his behavior, Junior glibly invokes the cultural cliché of a woman's beauty making men behave erratically. Claudio seems to view this cliché as fact. Joking or not joking, men cast women as (unwitting) temptresses based solely on their looks. A woman has little say in how beautiful she is, but once in the public eye, her beauty becomes both a tantalizing feast for men to devour and a weapon to attack their willpower.

Ironically, Claudio's distrust of Hero affirms the unsustainability of a system in which the idealization of feminine silence and obedience strips women of outward autonomy, forcing them to underhandedly manipulate social situations while maintaining a guise of docility. Patriarchal society expertly trains women in the art of deception. Claudio sees women as counterfeits without understanding their double bind: to seem pure, they must engage in that very "seeming" so frowned upon by conduct books.[25] Claudio mistakes women playing their assigned social roles for deceivers. We as an audience must ask: Where is the line between deceiving others and fulfilling a social role?

For the young and impressionable Claudio, stating his love for a woman feels perilous, as it places him in a vulnerable social position, open to ridicule. Don Pedro, however, comforts Claudio into disclosing the ambiguous: "That I love her, I feel" (1.1.214). Onstage, this line could be read as a great sigh of relief, an expulsion of anxieties and a revelation of tightly guarded feelings. It could also, however, be read as a lukewarm, sheepish, and qualified

---

24. [Middleton?], 1.2.62.

25. Even characters that deride the female sex as inconstant acknowledge the difficulties faced by women in the public sphere: in *The Anatomy of Wit*, Euphues instructs men to protect themselves from falling in love by finding fault in a woman no matter her virtues: "If she be plesaunt, then is she a wanton, if sullenne, a clowne, if honeste, then is she coye [reclusive], if impudent, a harlotte" (43V). In other words, portray her virtues as sins.

admission of injudiciousness. Claudio does not *know* that he loves her. He just *feels* it. Sensing Claudio's continuous resistance to a full confession of love, Don Pedro substantiates Claudio's feelings with the line: "That she is worthy, I know" (1.1.215). Even as the men idealized Hero with "fair" and "sweet" epithets, she is treated as a prize to be won. They will huddle up as a team to help Claudio "have her" (1.1.291).

When "fair Hero is won," she is also contained and dehumanized as an object of status and desire, signifying perfect female virtue (2.1.274). Prolific author Barnabe Rich enumerates the ideal woman's traits in his conduct book *My Lady's Looking Glass* (1616): "temperance in her mind, silence in her tongue, and bashfulness in her countenance."[26] The modest Hero embodies these traits; she is young, unassuming, and, as McEachern observes, "more often spoken about than a speaker herself."[27] Hero does have moments of lively conversation with Ursula and in the company of Beatrice and Margaret, but she is reticent in mixed-gender company; when men are onstage, she speaks almost only to answer questions that she has been explicitly asked. When Hero is wooed by Don Pedro on Claudio's behalf, we never hear her direct response. Although it is implied that she has consented to Don Pedro's suit, it is telling that the play does not script her answer, drawing attention to women's silence and invisibility in the courtship process.

The coupling is bound up in masculine communication and connections, with the two lovers curiously absent from the dialogue. Don Pedro bears the news, proudly announcing that he has "won" Hero (2.1.274). Leonato tells Claudio to "take of me my daughter, and with her my fortunes" (2.1.277-78). Claudio and Hero do not speak to one another — or at least they do not

---

26. Barnabe Rich, *My Lady's Looking Glass*, quoted in *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, 96.

27. McEachern, 43.

have lines dictating this speech. Don Pedro speaks for Claudio. Leonato speaks for Hero. Beatrice acts as an interpreter for the quiet lovers, but she holds little sway over the union itself. In this supposedly joyous but oddly unromantic moment, men transfer ownership of a woman, with hardly a peep from Hero herself.

Perceiving the awkwardness of both parties' lack of speech, Beatrice works to legitimate the union as a joyful one through her own use of language. She prescribes and describes Hero's actions, instructing Hero to indicate her consent to the betrothal by either speaking or, if she cannot speak, then she should "stop his mouth with a kiss and let him not speak neither" (2.1.285-86). Beatrice preaches equality in verbal expression between the lovers: if one of them is silent, then the other should follow suit. She then attempts to recuperate Hero's near-silence by narrating an intimate moment onstage, reporting that "my cousin tells [Claudio] in his ear that he is in her heart" (2.1.289-90). Claudio substantiates Beatrice's report with his single line: "And so she doth, cousin" (2.1.291). Textually (though this may differ in performance), he does not respond to Hero's whispered love confession. He instead shifts his attention to Beatrice and the noblemen to tell them what Hero has just said. In this supposedly joyous moment, Claudio expresses himself not in eloquent declarations of love but rather in clipped statements of fact. His and Hero's communication styles temporarily resemble one another: Hero does not speak except to whisper in Claudio's ear, and Claudio only speaks when he has been directly addressed.[28]

In the scene of slander, their communication styles completely diverge. If "silence is the perfectest herald of joy" for Claudio, then public vitriol is his choice courier for anger (2.1.281). He rails against Hero as the image of false modesty:

28. Alternatively, his awkwardness could be attributed to his onstage audience: in the presence of mixed-gender company, he feels uncomfortable and grows quiet, just as Hero does.

> Give not this rotten orange to your friend;
> She's but the sign and semblance of her honour.
> Behold how like a maid she blushes here!
> O, what authority and show of truth
> Can cunning sin cover itself withal!
> Comes not that blood as modest evidence
> To witness simple virtue? Would you not swear,
> All you that see her, that she were a maid,
> By these exterior shows? But she is none;
> She knows the heat of a luxurious bed.
> Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty. (4.1.30-40)

He wields verbal power to recuperate the honor he believes he lost when he was tricked by, and nearly married, a supposed strumpet. He appeals to his fellow men's perceptions of Hero, asking if they too would not be fooled by her "exterior shows" (4.1.37). Is Hero not, Claudio asks, an excellent actor? She looks the picture of innocence, right down to her physical transformations. Her blushes may seem like those of an innocent maid, but beware: her "outward graces" disguise a "foul" heart (4.1.101, 103). Claudio calls on the men to reinterpret her every word and deed through a clouded, sin-streaked lens. Ironically, Claudio unwittingly becomes a liar by calling Hero one, as his portrayal of Hero as a dangerous deceiver is in itself false. Cook suggests that reading others in *Much Ado* "is always an act of aggression; to be read is to be emasculated, to be a woman."[29] In attempting to read Hero as transgressive and preserve his "soul" from being cuckolded, Claudio himself is read by Don John (4.1.42). Indeed, Claudio could have avoided being read by trusting Hero over his unsubstantiated insecurities, other men's comments, and an ambiguous scene set on a rainy night[30] that was brought to his attention by a

29. Cook, 76.

30. Borachio tells Conrade that "partly by [Don John's] oaths, which first possessed them, partly by the dark night, which did deceive them, but chiefly by my villainy, which did confirm any slander that Don John had made, away went Claudio enraged" (3.3.149-152). The viewing conditions are not ideal: it is dark and "drizzles rain" (3.3.101).

confirmed liar who already tried to destroy his relationship with Hero once.[31] By believing that Hero has transgressed, Claudio becomes an actor in Don John's slander-filled directorial debut.

The scheming Don John maneuvers both Claudio and Hero like set pieces on a stage. Claudio, watching the late-night window scene in which "Hero" appears to talk with a man, concludes that she is unfaithful.[32] The fact that Hero did not speak to anyone that night renders her alibi-less: she has nothing to prove her innocence. Her purity destroys her semblance of purity, and Claudio and his compatriots believe their eyes more than Hero's own speech, just as Don John predicts. When Claudio asks Hero to tell him what man she talked with "out at your window betwixt twelve and one," he stakes her maidenhood on her answer, ordering, "if you are a maid, answer to this" (4.1.84, 85). When she responds truthfully that she "talked with no man at that hour, my lord," Don Pedro pounces, proclaiming, "Why, then you are no maiden" (4.1.86, 87). The moment that Hero tells the truth, she becomes unheard.

In this situation, one might be tempted to say that Hero loses her maiden honor by speaking and thus, this dramatic situation substantiates the silent feminine ideal of the time. One might argue that if only she had kept quiet, Claudio might have considered her chaste and Don Pedro might not have slandered her. However, Claudio's "if you are a maid, answer to this" line complicates this argument (4.1.85). Claudio has set an honesty trap. "Honest," as used at the time, is defined as "virtuous as regards sexual morality, chaste; virginal" (for our purposes, let us call this definition one), "of a person: that acts fairly and with integrity; that is not disposed to lie, cheat, or steal; truthful; trustworthy; sincere" (definition two), and finally, as "worthy of

31. At the masquerade, Don John tells Claudio that Don Pedro "is enamoured on Hero" and that he "heard him swear his affection" to her (2.1.149,153). Don John's statement is promptly disproven.

32. This pivotal "window scene" is unscripted; the audience does not see it unless a director chooses to add it into the script.

honour, honourable, commendable" (definition three).[33] Claudio has crafted a self-expression trap in which Hero can *attempt* to be seen as either the first or second definition, but she will never achieve the third. If Hero does not speak, she will immediately be ruled guilty of infidelity and labeled as no longer a maid, thus losing the first definition as perceived by Claudio. To be ruled honest in the truthful sense (definition two), Hero must speak, telling Claudio about the man who was outside of her window late at night. This is itself a lie, as the audience knows she spoke with no such man, but her dishonesty would be ruled truthfulness by Claudio, who believes he witnessed her talk with a man. However, by admitting that she had a late-night male visitor, she would be slandering herself and dissatisfying Claudio in regard to her chastity (definition one). Claudio places Hero in a quandary: if she is honest, then she is not honest.

Like Hero's words, her physical responses are disturbingly polysemous: blushing could be a sign of her innocence or guilt. In his treatise on the education of children, *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium* (1530), Catholic humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam declares that a blush may signify "a natural and wholesome modesty … Although even that modesty should be so moderated that it is not construed as insolence, and does not connote … shame."[34] Hero's blush could indicate modesty at the very notion of impurity, or it could indicate shame inspired by her impurity. To further complicate the interpretation of Hero's physiognomy, she may not be blushing at all and Claudio may simply be imagining it: Findlay notes that "most actors cannot blush on demand, making the blush the creation of Shakespeare's text and Claudio's imagination (which the audience may or may not share)."[35] Watching *Much Ado* onstage, the audience may reject Claudio's interpretation of Hero's physical reactions. More fundamentally, they may reject

33. *Oxford English Dictionary,* s.v. "honest, adj. and adv."
34. Erasmus, *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium* (1530), 23.275.
35. Findlay, 51.

his conception of a lady as an object to be "read." Knowing that Hero is innocent, the audience must examine the prudence of a society that prioritizes men's suppositions over women's lived realities.

Chapter 2: Silence and "Seeming"

The friar's alternative reading of Hero's blush complicates this message. He interprets her blush as an unmistakable badge of innocence, claiming that he has marked "A thousand blushing apparitions / To start into her face, a thousand innocent shames / In angel whiteness beat away those blushes" (4.1.159-61). Although the friar sees guiltlessness in her face, staking his own reputation — his "age," "reverence, calling," and "divinity" — on her modesty, he too is a man attempting to interpret Hero's appearance (4.1.167, 168). He reads Hero just as the other men do, albeit with a more generous eye. No matter how benevolent he may seem in comparison to the others, he is participating in the same cycle of patriarchal sanctioning of a woman's character. He does, however, ask Hero to speak when the rest of the men have already made up their minds about her "damnation" (4.1.172). When sanctioned to speak, Hero asks to be considered innocent until proven guilty. She stakes her life on this, telling Leonato to "prove" that she conversed with a man at night (4.1.181). If he can do so, then he can "refuse" her, "hate" her, and "torture" her to death (4.1.184).

In this pivotal scene, Hero carefully rations her words to maximal dramatic effect. Full silence will be read as an admission of guilt, but eloquence may be read as deceit. Hero knows that she could be perceived as a "whore of her tongue" simply by adequately defending herself.[36] Indeed, Italian politician Francesco Barbaro warns in his treatise *On Wifely Duties* that "the

36. Ralph Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People during the English Reformation, 1520-1570* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 80.

speech of women [should] never be made public; for the speech of a noble woman can be no less dangerous than the nakedness of her limbs."[37] Conduct books conflate corporeal promiscuity with overuse of language. "Silence, the closed mouth, is made a sign of chastity," notes Stallybrass, and Hero perfects this silence, only speaking when absolutely necessary.[38] Further, when she speaks, it is not to beg for her life, but rather to set up a hypothetical that riffs on virginity tests of the time: *if* her father can prove her unchaste, *then* he can kill her.[39] To beg for her life might be interpreted as a mark of sin; a woman may not want to die, and hence be parted from her body, because she enjoys corporeal acts like sex. Or perhaps because she has been unchaste, she fears punishment in the afterlife. For a woman on trial, self-contradictory patriarchal interpretations of female silence and speech are difficult —if not impossible — to navigate. It seems that when a woman speaks up to defend herself, she is automatically assumed a deceiver and a whore, unless she does something remarkably adroit with language (ironic, considering how eloquence is supposedly another mark of a woman's deceitfulness). If a woman is so linguistically clever as to surpass men's ability to read her cleverness, then they may believe her.

The Winter's Tale offers a prime example of a heroine ready to die to defend her honor. Hermione attempts to circumvent defamation by presenting death as an option.[40] When

---

37. Francesco Barbaro, On *Wifely Duties,* trans, B. G. Kohl, in *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society,* ed. B. G. Kohl, R. E. Witt, with E. B. Welles (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 205.

38. Peter Stallybrass, "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed." *Othello: Critical Essays*, edited by Susan Snyder (Routledge, 2015), 255.

39. See Diaphanta's virginity test scene in Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's *The Changeling*. See also Laurie Maguire's 'Virginity Tests' in *The Oxford Companion to the Body,* discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

40. In his introduction to *The Leopold Shakespeare* (1877), Frederick Furnivall, philologist and one of the founders of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, discusses how Hero may be read as "the prototype of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*" (Furnivall, lv).

Hermione asks Leontes to tell her "what blessings I have here alive, / That I should fear to die," she acknowledges the gravity of the "unchaste" charge: as an outcast, belittled and branded as a strumpet, her life would not be worth living (*WT* 3.2.105-6).[41] She masterfully indicts Leontes by listing the losses and injuries she has suffered at his hands, claiming that the losses she has incurred at his hands have made life itself unattractive: she has lost not only his "favour," but also her reputation ("On every post," she is "proclaimed a strumpet") and access to her children (*WT* 3.2.92, 99, 100). She affirms her chastity by expressing no fear of death: if she wants to die, she believes she will be treated kindly in the afterlife, so she must be chaste. Thus, she shouldn't die. Hero's statement is less sensational: she puts her life on the line but feels she should die only *if* she knows "more of any man alive / Than that which maiden modesty doth warrant" (4.1.178-9). She then places the burden of proof on her father: if he can "prove … that any man with me conversed / at hours unmeet," then he can torture her "to death" (4.1.181-184). Hero positions her life a collateral to her chastity; if she is proven unchaste, she will relinquish it. Her self-defense may be less bold than that of Hermione, but both women equate the loss of perceived chastity to death, and both manipulate speech to protect themselves from being judged as "whores of the tongue." In declaring that a loss of chastity should indeed be punished by death, Hero simultaneously lends credence to her innocence and upholds the very system that placed her in this precarious position.

Hero and Hermione are hardly alone in equating their virtuous reputations to their lives and expressing the belief that once a woman loses her chaste reputation, death is preferable to life. Renaissance writers, Ruth Kelso observes, frequently expressed the belief that a woman

41. William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, edited by Stephen Orgel (Oxford University Press, 1996). Subsequent references to *The Winter's Tale* will be indicated parenthetically by (*WT*).

with chastity "has all," and a woman without chastity "has nothing."[42] Kelso notes that "enough could not be said of [chastity] as the foundation of womanly worth."[43] We again turn to *The Revenger's Tragedy*, in which the equation of a lady's life to her chastity, or rather her chaste reputation, engenders not physical resurrection but rather resurrection in the memories of men, who praise the lady for her virtuous suicide. Antonio's wife commits suicide to avoid the shame of the rape and to prove her chastity beyond a doubt; in a cruel twist of irony, Junior's "death" (orgasm) precipitates her death by suicide. Antonio finds her and reveals the spectacle of her corpse to his fellow noblemen, declaring that "violent rape / Has played a glorious act."[44] In response to this gory scene, his companions extol her virtuous nature, and Antonio calls her a "precedent for wives," applauding both her honorable nature before death and the suicide itself.[45] His companion, Hippolito, further lauds her suicide, claiming that it elevates her reputation and class: she "has made her name an empress by that act."[46] We never learn her name.

Like Claudio, Antonio conflates his beloved's honor with her life, declaring that "Her honour first drank poison, and her life, / Being fellows in one house, did pledge her honour."[47] Displaying her limp body for his fellow noblemen, he notes that her hand points to the Latin motto in a prayer-book: "*Melius virtute mori, quam per dedecus vivere*," translated as, "Better to die virtuous than to live dishonored."[48] By lauding her perfect chastity, Antonio diminishes and

---

42. Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), 24.

43. Kelso, 24.

44. [Middleton?], 1.4.3.

45. [Middleton?], 1.4.6.

46. [Middleton?], 1.4.50.

47. [Middleton?], 1.4.18.

48. [Middleton?], 1.4.17.

oversimplifies his wife's identity. His memory of her is remarkably one-dimensional, based on a single trait. As readers, we are left wondering: "But who was she?" All we know is that she, like Hero and Hermione, would prefer death to dishonor. Based on Antonio's and his compatriots' alarmingly gleeful response to her suicide, is it really any surprise that a woman would desire death in this situation? The alternative is to live the rest of her days denigrated and rejected by her husband, family, and society, all who would have preferred that she die. The very fact that she is alive breeds distrust of her morals.

Claudio's indictment of Hero "seeming" rather than *being* chaste encapsulates male insecurity in relation to female identity and sexuality:

> 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. (4.1.55-60)

Claudio's tirade not only expresses his horror at being deceived by a seemingly virtuous woman but also signifies broader Renaissance male insecurity regarding women's ostensibly raging sexual appetites. Even when a woman appears virtuous, men hold the "uncomfortable suspicion that underneath, the angel *is* a whore," and that women are "simultaneously 'seeming' to be virgins and 'being' actual whores."[49] A woman may *appear* to be the chaste goddess Diana, while actually *being* the seductress Venus, filled with desire and untethered to monogamy. Women are characterized as slippery, lustful creatures that will cuckold men whenever given the chance. The dichotomy of Hero's "seeming" and "being" is indicative of a larger societal belief in the inherent untrustworthiness of, and sexual desires held by, women. Further, by the very

49. Valerie Traub, "Jewels, Statues, and Corpses: Containment of Female Erotic Power in Shakespeare's Plays." *Shakespeare and Gender: A History*," edited by Deborah E. Barker and Ivo Kamps (Verso, 1995), 123-126.

virtue of a woman's fragile reputation (a patriarchally designed fragility), men's fears of women's supposed changeability escalate: if a woman's reputation is easily destroyed by slander, and a woman's identity is her reputation, then is not her very core changeable? Thus, men's propensity to distrust and slander the purest-seeming women grows, and the cycle of circular reasoning continues.

Hero's gentle, silent femininity acts as both her shining glory and her downfall. Her theoretical faultlessness exposes the gap between what the men of *Much Ado* say they want in a woman and how they actually perceive and treat such a "perfect" woman. In his sermon *A Preparative to Marriage* (1591), Puritan preacher Henry Smith declares that the ideal wife should "hold her peace to keep the peace … silence oftentimes doth keep the peace, when words would break it."[50] Yet when Hero follows these guidelines, speaking when spoken to and only answering in short, mainly monosyllabic lines, she finds herself horribly ill-used. Don John slanders her as "disloyal," Claudio misinterprets her blushes as "guiltiness," and her own father wishes death upon her (3.2.93, 4.1.40). Richard Brathwait, author of the popular conduct book *The English Gentlewoman* (1631), would like us to believe that "silence in woman is a moving rhetoric, winning most, when in words it wooeth least."[51] If this is the case, then why does Hero suffer defamation and ruin while Beatrice remains relatively unscathed?

The adulation of Beatrice's eloquence and wit has been brilliantly and extensively analyzed by critics, so I will not belabor the point.[52] Instead, I will focus on the men's

---

50. Henry Smith, *A Preparative to Marriage*, quoted in *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, 83.

51. Richard Brathwait, *The English Gentlewoman*, quoted in *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, 84. Published in 1631, the title page of this conduct book states, "Modestia non forma," translated to modesty rather than beauty.

52. McEachern succinctly notes that despite "assumed links between loose words and loose women … the eloquent Beatrice's virtue is never in doubt" (39).

paradoxical treatment of Beatrice in relation to Hero, which illuminates contradictions between conduct book ideals and the treatment of women onstage. Beatrice's ostensibly masculine traits, for which she is both mildly chastised and greatly lauded, protect her from Hero's fate. Indeed, Beatrice's quick wit, engagement in conversation with men, and continuous self-expression make her more decipherable in men's eyes, and therefore less dangerous. Though Leonato criticizes Beatrice's sharpness,[53] his and his compatriots' tone towards her is largely one of affectionate teasing. Cook explains that "the vocal Beatrice refuses the subjection of femininity, of castration, by placing herself among the men and wielding phallic wit as aggressively as they."[54] Beatrice manages to fit in with the boys while retaining her signature charm, eloquence, and social adroitness.[55]

Meanwhile, the meek and docile Hero provokes enormous male anxiety, as her silence both signifies what the men could become if they are cuckolded and allows room for speculation surrounding her chastity: she acts as an indecipherable and thus dangerous object. Her silence "figures the threat of difference for Messinan men."[56] They dread being emasculated through cuckoldry: "In becoming a cuckold, a man relinquishes his role as the teller of jokes, the manipulator, reader, and subject of language, and falls instead to the woman's position as the object of jokes, the silent, legible sign."[57] A cuckolded man is no longer a man; he is silenced and mocked like a woman. By this logic, a woman's virtuous silence becomes a red flag for

53. Leonato warns Beatrice that "thou wilt never get thee a husband, if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue," and Antonio declares her "too curst" — meaning "cantankerous" and shrewish — to marry (2.1.16-18).

54. Cook, 82.

55. Cook, 82.

56. Cook 82.

57. Cook 82.

deception and a reminder that trusting a woman may have devastating consequences: a man's children may not be his own. A woman's apparent obedience, then, is not a comfort but rather a liability: she could secretly be thinking impure thoughts and plotting adultery. The silent woman is "doubly threatening, both in her imagined capacity to betray men and as an image of what men fear to become … her very vulnerability is threatening."[58] Hero's obedient silence is paradoxically more transgressive and anxiety-provoking than Beatrice's outward rebellion against feminine docility.

Here, the chasm between the ideal woman on paper and onstage reveals itself. Conduct books such as Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives's *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* (translated into English in 1529) preach the virtues of women's silence: "women should be kept close, nor be known by many, for it is a token of no great chastity or good name, to be known of many, or be sung about in the city in songs, or to be marked or named by any notable mark,"[59] a strong departure from plays, which preach the virtues of women precisely through those public means.[60] Hero is condemned in *Much Ado* through the qualities that would make her virtuous by conduct book standards: onstage, her silence is read as guilt, whereas in conduct books, silence

58. Cook, 80.

59. By reading — or noting — Hero falsely, Claudio creates "much ado," slandering her in a highly public setting. Vives, however, might blame Hero for allowing herself to be "noted." He declares that it is a woman's responsibility to not be "known abroad" (72).

60. Juan Luis Vives, "How the maid shall behave herself forth abroad." *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*, quoted in *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, 71-73.

in a woman is generally a winning trait[61] — a way to protect, rather than jeopardize, her reputation.[62]

Male characters' positive attitudes towards Beatrice further expose rifts between conduct book and dramatic representations of ideal femininity. Departing from conduct book standards, Beatrice is indeed "known by many," a supposedly dangerous, undesirable trait, yet in *Much Ado*, the wit she wields in the public sphere wins her admiration:[63] far from imperiling her honor, her sparkling self-expression earns her a proposal from the noble Don Pedro (one that she rejects with tact aplenty) and affection from Leonato. In Benedick and Beatrice's war of words, Leonato jokes that, if married, "they would talk themselves mad," espousing an equality in their loquacity: he does not place the blame for excessive speech on Beatrice (2.1.326). Instead of doubting her wifely abilities, calling her a shrew and espousing the notion that a wife must "observe the servant's lesson, *not answering again*,"[64] Leonato sees them as equally culpable in their war of words; it is not solely Beatrice's responsibility to put it to a halt (if it needs to be put to a halt at all; the men appear to find Beatrice and Benedick's witty courtship quite amusing). Both Leonato and Don Pedro characterize Beatrice and Benedick's verbal jousting as harmless,

61. Though John Milton does warn of the ambiguity of women's silence in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643): "who knows not that the bashful muteness of a virgin may oftimes hide all the unliveliness and natural sloth which is really unfit for conversation?" (708).

62. In *The English Gentlewoman*, Brathwait tells women that "modesty gives the best grace to your behaviour, so moderation of speech to your discourse" and that it becomes a woman to "tip her tongue with silence." He claims that "it suits not her honour for a young woman to be prolocutor."

63. Because Beatrice is not an heiress, she may not need to adhere to the same strict, courtly rules that Hero must honor. As Leonato's niece, she has less honor to lose; she can subvert gender more flexibly without potentially destroying a family legacy and bloodline.

64. Smith, "A Preparative to Marriage," 83.

comedic repartee, not a symptom of "the evil and unquiet life that some women have."[65] Beatrice clearly would not be a silent wife, and, according to the men, this is not a flaw in her femininity.

Beatrice flouts the "silence in her tongue" ideal and would perhaps fall into Rich's "harlot" category: "impudent, immodest, shameless, insolent, audacious … a reveller."[66] Yet she captures the affection not only of Benedick but also of Don Pedro, whom she describes as "too costly to wear every day" (1.1.58, 2.1.302-303). In this context, "costly" may be translated as "well-born."[67] Indeed, the prince's social status exceeds both that of Hero and Beatrice, yet he is willing to undermine aristocratic tradition and marry beneath his royal status, if the "pleasant-spirited" Beatrice will accept him (2.1.315). It seems that the loud lady — the type of woman that conduct books rail against — is rewarded and lauded onstage. She is given the power to possess, or reject, Don Pedro;[68] she sanctions her own desires through speech acts. To further complicate the divide between conduct books and theatre, the publicly displayed wit that conduct books would deem sinful and promiscuous is the very tool Beatrice uses to reject the prince without bruising his ego. Onstage, conduct book ideals crumble.

It is important to note, however, that most conduct books do not espouse complete female silence. Rather, they advocate for meekness. A complete lack of speech could signify not sweet docility but mute resistance and passive aggression (undesirable attitudes that would figure more trouble for men). Christina Luckyj notes that "feminine silence … is not recommended by the

---

65. A life which must be mended by the woman keeping silent "when her husband beginneth to chide," according to Robert Cleaver and John Dod's *A Godly Form of Household Government* (81).

66. Rich, *My Lady's Looking Glass*, 96.

67. McEachern, 236.

68. Don Pedro offers himself to Beatrice, "Will you have me, lady?" (2.1.300).

conduct books without careful and significant qualifications."[69] In *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622), Blackfriars Church minister William Gouge declares that prating, "loquacitie," and "over-much tatling" are unideal traits in a woman, but so is silence, which can "implie stoutnesse of stomacke, and stubbornnesse of heart."[70] By conduct book standards, the "loose-tongued shrew" and the silent woman are, Luckyj notes, "equally horrifying."[71] Conduct books may tell women to be quiet, to avoid in the public sphere, and to not bother their husbands unnecessarily, but they do not advocate for a total lack of expression. Women should choose their words wisely, but they need not (and should not) be statues.

Some conduct books even laud talkative ladies. In popular Italian author Baldassare Castiglione's *The Courtier* (1561), Lord Giuliano di Lorenzo de' Medici appreciates wit in women and promotes semi-equality in the ideal traits of women and men.[72] He declares that "many virtues of the mind I reckon to be as necessary for a woman as for a man," and that a woman should be "witty, foreseeing, not haughty, not envious, not ill tongued, not light."[73] Giuliano's appreciation of women counters the bitterness of the less mature Gaspare Pallavicino, who initially disagrees but eventually concedes that he has been wrong to disparage women. While Beatrice's snarky criticism of Benedick might not be categorized as "sweetness in

69. Christina Luckyj, "'A Moving Rhetoricke': Women's Silences and Renaissance Texts." *Renaissance Drama*, vol. 24 (1993), 35.

70. William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, (London, 1622), 282.

71. Luckyj, 35.

72. Baldassare Castiglione, *The Courtier*, quoted in *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, 232.

73. Castiglione, 232.

language that may delight," her wit and beauty (acknowledged even by Benedick)[74] make her an unconventional candidate for ideal womanhood.

Though exceptions certainly exist, the general consensus of English Renaissance-era conduct books is that women should be verbally conservative and subservient to their male counterparts. Dramatic performance challenges these ideals, exposing the rift between conduct book and theatrical (and perhaps real-life) values. Are men really attracted to the meek woman who sits in a corner and avoids the public gaze? Beatrice goes against conduct book advice, and she is adored, not only by the men in the play, but also by the audience; *Much Ado* forces the early modern audience to question the validity and value system of the conduct books they purchase.

The stage forces characters to talk: how will an audience care about a character if she enters only to rush to the back corner of the stage and hide her face? If female characters[75] enter "with scarcely an eye open to see her way," not desiring to see or be seen, incurious about the world, taking care not to laugh too much, and avoiding interaction with men,[76] who will see the play? Who will empathize with a personality-less zombie that supposedly embodies the perfect woman on paper? In attempting to describe the ideal Renaissance woman's level of speech, we must accept a middle ground between conduct book and play: the beloved, ideal woman onstage may be an exaggerated, larger-than-life character that would seem abrasive and unattractive in

74. An unimpressed Benedick tells Claudio that Beatrice, "as she were not possessed with a fury, exceeds [Hero] as much in beauty as the first of May doth the last of December" (1.1.180-182).

75. All played by men and boys, further complicating the gender dynamic.

76. Vives offers a great deal of advice for a woman going "abroad": she should "hide her face and with scarcely an eye open to see her way withal. Neither let her desire to see, nor to be seen, not cast her eyes unstable hither and thither, nor be busy to know who dwelleth in this place." These instructions are driven by (and perpetuate) the belief that it is all too easy for a woman to be slandered, and she must take precautions to prevent the ruination of her reputation.

real Renaissance life. Similarly, the quiet, meek woman idealized by conduct books might in reality fade into the background and be forgotten by suitors in favor of more effervescent, loquacious peers. Characters onstage are often hyperbolic versions of real life. Hero as an imaginary character, created by a playwright, functions as a foray through which we may investigate the mistrust of a stage heroine's performance of nearly perfect purity. [77]

Chapter 3: Hero, Mariam, and Hermione

"Reading the room" is paramount for a woman accused of infidelity; she must perform perfectly — not only naturalistically but also in keeping with what her particular audience wants and expects. Hero's treatment in *Much Ado*, set in dialogue with that of Mariam in Elizabeth Cary's closet drama, *The Tragedy of Mariam,* and that of Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, exposes and critiques a society in which a woman must choose her dramatic moments perfectly — and sometimes, no matter how skillful her performance, all roads lead to guilt.

In *The Tragedy of Mariam*, the verbally powerful Mariam willfully places herself in danger of defamation, allowing herself to be suspected of infidelity and slandered by her enemy. Mariam believes that her virtue, honesty, and beauty will protect her from punishment; therefore, she does not take the opportunity to advocate strongly for her innocence. To her horror, her husband, Herod, sentences her to death, proving that innocence and beauty are not enough: a woman must "free her life" from "suspicion" (*TM* 3.3.3).[78] It is her responsibility to retain a spotless reputation. Like Hero, Mariam walks a tightrope of self-expression, attempting to be a

77. Although Hero does have moments of mischief and speech (in same-gender company), her near-silence in the presence of men make her an ideal conduct book candidate for femininity.

78. Elizabeth Cary, *The Tragedy of Mariam*, edited by Stephanie J. Wright (Keele University Press, 1996). Subsequent references will be indicated parenthetically by (*TM*).

paragon of virtue and womanhood:[79] a "guiltless queen," "chaste," and "pure of heart" (*TM* 3.3.63, 87, 90).[80] Yet Mariam comes up short: in prison, she realizes that her fault was both in trusting that her beauty would protect her from Herod's wrath and in failing to grasp the necessity of both humility and chastity. She was only chaste, not humble. She bemoans her fall from Herod's grace: "Had I but with humility been graced, / As well as fair I might have proved me wise, / But I did think because I knew me chaste, / One virtue for a woman might suffice" (*TM* 4.8.35-8).[81] I argue that it is not humility that she lacks, but rather timing and instinct as an actor in a society that says it wants women to express themselves one way, when it often wants another form of expression altogether. The one moment that Mariam chooses to be relatively silent is a moment in which she should eloquently and falsely repent, feigning love for Herod and firmly falling into the "deceptive woman" stereotype.[82]

Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* articulates this struggle "to speak or not to speak" in her trial scene, repudiating society for its treatment of slandered women: once accused, it is extremely difficulty for the woman to be found not guilty, no matter how she articulates, or silences, herself. Hermione is imprisoned and forced into court on her husband Leontes's accusations of "high treason in committing adultery with Polixenes" (*WT* 3.2.13-4). Leontes has based his suspicions on her ability to persuade Polixenes to stay longer at the palace (a persuasion made at Leontes's own behest). Exhausted from having just given birth, now placed

79. Though set in pre-Christian Judea, the play was written in 1613; thus, we may assume that Christianity and conduct books guide Cary's characterization of Mariam as a near-perfect woman.

80. According to Sohemus. Herod further lauds her "rare perfection," declaring her beauty and wisdom superior to all other women around the world (*TM* 4.4.46).

81. Though Mariam criticizes her lack of forgiveness of Herod, she still firmly believes she will be seen as virtuous in the afterlife. Powerful men's judgement does not equal God's judgment: "In heav'n shall Mariam sit in Sara's lap" (*TM* 4.8.50).

82. It is possible that if she eloquently repented, she would be judged as doubly false, as a liar and a harlot.

on a public stage for all to condemn her,[83] Hermione speaks — to explain why she will not speak:

> Since what I am to say must be but that
> Which contradicts my accusation, and
> The testimony on my part no other
> But what comes from myself, it shall scarce boot me
> To say 'not guilty'; mine integrity
> Being counted falsehood, shall, as I express it,
> Be so received. (*WT* 3.2.21-7)

Hermione recognizes that no matter how eloquent she is, her words will only be used against her by the court, or more particularly, Leontes.[84] Cristina León Alfar notes that "Hermione operates under the paradox that her self-defense will only verify her guilt. She struggles against the view that public speech for women is evidence of sexual promiscuity."[85] Indeed, the moment that Hermione obeyed Leontes, successfully and eloquently convincing Polixenes to remain at the palace, she sealed her doom. After this, nothing she says or does not say can save her from her husband's baseless suspicions: she is a "hobby-horse," a "thing," and a "bed-swerver" (*WT* 1.2.273, 2.1.82, 2.1.93). "Her speech on [Leontes's] behalf, by its very forcefulness, wit, and above all its success," notes David Schalkwyk, "pronounces her a whore."[86]

With such accusations leveled against her, Hermione employs a tactic of "speaking about not speaking." She speaks a great deal (which would normally be judged as a sign of guilt) —

---

83. Other men come to Hermione's defense, to little avail. Antigonus promises to "geld" his daughters if Hermione is indeed "honour-flawed" (2.1.147, 143). Leontes dismisses Antigonus's impassioned pleas.

84. Schalkwyk notes in "'A Lady's 'Verily' Is as Potent as a Lord's': Women, Word and Witchcraft in *The Winter's Tale*," that "if [Hermione] remains silent she admits the charge, but if she speaks against it she proclaims her guilt" (248). Neither silence nor speech can save her from being read as grotesquely unfaithful.

85. Alfar, 177.

86. David Schalkwyk, "'A Lady's 'Verily' Is as Potent as a Lord's': Women, Word and Witchcraft in 'The Winter's Tale'," *English Literary Renaissance* vol. 22, no. 2 (1992), 248.

but with a metaphysical twist. Declaring that she is not ruled by earthly laws, she turns to the gods, invoking "powers divine" to "make / False accusation blush and tyranny / Tremble at patience" (*WT* 3.2.27, 29-31). She justifies her eloquence by claiming that she is not interested in how this court judges her; she only cares about the court of the gods; she can be chaste and still speak, *because she is not abiding by social standards to begin with* (yet even as she supposedly rejects earthly social standards, she cleverly draws attention to her feminine virtue of "patience") (*WT* 3.2.31). Hermione recognizes the conduct books, the moralizing plays, and the manner in which men treat supposedly-unfaithful women, and she says: "I won't play by those rules. I play by the gods' rules. If you want to kill me for something I haven't done, go ahead. Ultimately, the judgment of my purity is not in your hands."[87] In doing so, she exculpates herself even as she performs the eloquence that would normally be seen as deceitful and worthy of punishment. She proceeds to dominate the scene with powerful monologues, ending her appeal with another call to the gods: "Your honours all, / I do refer me to the oracle. / Apollo be my judge!" (*WT* 3.2.112-14).

Leontes's inability to be swayed by Hermione's rhetoric (and the oracle's actual pronouncement) reaffirms the notion that once a woman has been slandered, it is nearly impossible for her to win back her reputation. Her speech can be read not as a mark of virtue but as an indictment on her character: Barnabe Rich warns that the harlot "is bold, she is impudent, she is shameless," while a good woman is silent.[88] Further, Vives's aforementioned *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* cautions women from entering public places, as "nothing is

87. *The Winter's Tale* is set in Sicilia at an undisclosed time. By the magic and references to the gods, we may infer that it takes place in a pre-Christian world. However, Hermione's trial speech clearly points to conduct books and plays of Shakespeare's time that warn of deceitful women who are too quick to speak.

88. Rich, 96.

more tender than is the fame and estimation of women, nor nothing more in danger of wrong."[89] Performance of chastity and of honesty is a tightrope act, and it is perilously possible for a slandered woman never to reclaim her honor

With this balancing act in mind, Mariam takes a different tactic: instead of long, eloquent monologues with the disclaimer that the gods, not the earthly court, will judge her innocence, Mariam speaks in brief, stilted sentences rife with monosyllables, expressing both her honest anger at Herod and subsequent shock when he accuses her of infidelity and attempted murder. Upon Herod's accusations, Mariam immediately questions her own consciousness, asking, "Is this a dream?" (*TM* 4.4.27).[90] Mariam places herself in a deferential position, seeking a soothing answer from Herod. Asking him about her version of reality flatteringly implies that he knows more than she does and has the power to comfort her, playing into the husband-as-protector ideal.

Hermione, too, looks for initial comfort from her accusatory husband, asking him if he is charging her with treachery and adultery in "sport" (*WT* 2.1.58). But unlike Mariam, Hermione attributes altered consciousness not to herself but to Leontes, declaring on the stand that "my life stands in the level of your dreams" (*WT* 3.2.78). Hermione knows she is sane and fully conscious, and that Leontes is paranoid and has horribly misinterpreted her obedience. Thus, she pleads not for her life, but rather for her reputation and honor, and by extension the honor of her descendants. She declares that she prizes life "not a straw, but for mine honour, / Which I would

89. Vives expounds on women's struggles to seem truly virtuous: "if thou talk little in company folks think thou canst but little good: if thou speak much, they reckon thee light: if thou speak uncunningly, they count thee dull-witted; if thou speak cunningly thou shalt be called a shrew" (71).

90. This line could also be read as cold, clipped, incredulous, and rhetorical: "Where in the world did you get that ridiculous idea?" However, based on her previous interaction with Herod — cold, but not impudent — and Herod's response to her question about dreaming ("thine eye / Is pure as heaven, but impure thy mind"), it would appear that Mariam is not speaking angrily; she is reeling from shock (*TM* 4.4.35-6).

free — if I shall be condemned / Upon surmises, all proofs sleeping else / But what your jealousies awake, I tell you / 'Tis rigour and not law" (*WT* 3.2.108-112). Through her self-professed disregard for life and her focus on reputation, she convincingly casts herself as a vision of chastity even as she flouts conduct book decorum; she is not silent, and she is all the more virtuous for it.[91]

In a world in which men speculate on and test women's chastity via various humiliating channels, a woman's willingness to lay down her life for her honor may be a remedy to a powerful man's accusations. This willingness must not be feigned; a loud woman must genuinely be ready to die and be physically and verbally entombed. She cannot defend her honor in death, and yet, paradoxically death is the only method by which she may fully resuscitate that honor. Despite Hermione's protestations and the reality of her innocence, she dies,[92] or so Leontes (at least partially) believes. He tells Paulina: "I saw her / As I thought, dead, and have in vain said many / A prayer upon her grave" (*WT* 5.3.139-41). In the midst of his joy, he voices vague suspicions: how Paulina "found" his wife "is to be questioned" (*WT* 5.3.138, 139). Polixenes, too, wonders how Hermione has preserved herself.[93] Unlike the men, Paulina explicitly acknowledges Hermione's death, commanding Leontes not to "shun her / Until you see her die again; for then / You kill her double" (*WT* 5.3.105-7). Though Hermione's death is open to

---

91. No matter how convinced the court may be of Hermione's innocence, only Leontes's opinion matters. He is the judge, jury, and executioner. Alfar notes that "the trial has a predetermined outcome," so Mariam's voice does not truly matter (179).

92. Or so the audience is to believe, based on Paulina's report and Leontes's own demand to "bring me / To the death bodies of my wife and son. One grave shall be for both" (*WT* 3.2.232-4). Stephen Orgel argues that "Leontes could easily have said nothing, or could have said that he could not bear to be confronted with the evidence of his crimes. Leontes is our guarantee that the two deaths are real" (36). If we are to take Hermione, Paulina, and Leontes at their words, then Hermione really has died and been resurrected.

93. Polixenes asks that Hermione speak and "make't manifest where she has lived / Or how stolen from the dead" (*WT* 5.3.114-5).

interpretation, it is clear that she has been punished (contained either in death or in hiding) for a sin that she did not commit; she was only adulterous in the mind of one powerful man, not in the court's (or the audience's) reality. The earthly justice system has failed. Death, or feigned death, is her only chance to resurrect her earthly honor. If her reputation has been damaged beyond repair, then her only hope lies in the afterlife. *The Winter's Tale* exposes men's "guilty until proven innocent" mindset regarding women's chastity. Once slandered, a woman holds little hope for justice or reputational resuscitation while she lives. She must die and pray that the gods, and the audience, abide by an "innocent until proven guilty" justice system.

With the dangers of speaking in mind, Mariam, like Hero, chooses near-silence when accused of infidelity. This is a sharp departure from Mariam's long, poetic monologues in which she bares her emotional strife; her confident defense of her and her children's status as Herod's legitimate family; and her searing counterattacks on her enemy Salome. When Herod returns from Rome, she is cold and honest: she has "forsworn his bed," having learned of his murder of her brother and grandfather and his command to execute her if he died abroad (*TM* 3.3.16). Nothing will change her mind: his "offers to [her] heart no ease can grant, / Except they could [her] brother's life restore" (*TM* 4.3.25-6). She cannot forgive him after he has so deeply betrayed her trust. She speaks plainly, valuing honesty and feeling that she must be true to herself, even if that means disobeying her husband (if she were not honest with Herod, she would be a deceiver). Thus, she simultaneously obeys and breaks social conventions. Honesty is indeed a lauded feminine trait. In *The Book of Matrimony* (1564), Canterbury Cathedral preacher Thomas Becon declares that "as the woman's duty is to be in subjection to her husband: so likewise is she bound by the commandment of God to be chaste, pure and honest in deed, in word, in gesture … that no point of lightness appear in her, but all modesty, sobriety, gravity,

chastity, honesty, womanliness."[94] He stresses the importance of both obedience and chastity. Mariam seems to have missed the message about obedience and *performed* purity: Becon claims that "nothing doth so dishonest an honest woman as lightness, wantonness and dishonesty."[95] Even the most honest woman can appear dishonest if she fails to act the part of chastity. In disobeying her husband, Mariam loses the ideals of both obedience and perceived chastity.

Living in ancient Palestine, Mariam has no knowledge of English Renaissance conduct books. However, the Renaissance reader would perceive Mariam as flouting conduct books' advice. Her lack of forgiveness for Herod contradicts advice to "reverence" one's husband and "submit [oneself] and be obedient unto him."[96] Paired with her refusal to act a part, Mariam places herself in quite a precarious position: she is primed to be read as unchaste by Herod. What Mariam sees as her womanly perfection — honesty, chastity, and a profound refusal to deceive others — is read by others as "unbridled speech" (in Sohemus's less violent terms), and as impurity, cozening, deceit, and vanity, as Herod sees it (*TM* 3.3.65).[97] Mariam is "by herself undone" (*TM* 3.3.30). She is bluntly honest when, to survive, she should either flatter Herod and feign delight at his return or banish her emotions (and in doing so, be untrue to herself) and hastily forgive him. Herod would have perceived both her "eye" and "mind" as "pure as heaven" — instead of only her eye — if she had indeed been *impure* of mind, feigning joy or forgiveness (*TM* 4.4.35, 36). By remaining pure in both eye and mind, she unwittingly dooms herself to be judged as "impure."

---

94. Thomas Becon, *The Book of Matrimony*, quoted in ***Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook***, 112.

95. Becon, 112.

96. Cleaver and Dod, 80.

97. As does Salome, who jumps at the chance to destroy Herod's trust in Mariam: "Now tongue of mine with scandal load her name" (*TM* 3.2.65). The vengeful Salome seems to genuinely suspect Mariam, accusing her of wanting "another king," and noting that "her eyes do sparkle joy for Herod's death" (*TM* 1.3.3-4).

While Hero's gentle insistence of her innocence fails to produce the desired effect on Claudio and Hermione's eloquent appeal fails to sway Leontes, Mariam's fate is sealed when she refuses to simply state: "I am innocent." When Herod asks her why she was unfaithful to him with Sohemus, she replies not that she was never unfaithful, but that "they can tell / That say I loved him, Mariam says not so" (*TM* 4.4.35-6). This line could be interpreted as slightly snarky: she is not denying her involvement with Sohemus, but rather placing the onus of proof on her accusers. While she may soften her verbal blow with the ambiguous "they," it is clear that she is telling Herod that he is responsible for finding the proof of her infidelity. In this moment, she recognizes that she has the power to fully exculpate herself if she simply feigned love for Herod: she "could inchaine him with a smile: / And lead him captive with a gentle word," and easily nullify Salome and Herod's mother's criticism and slander (*TM* 3.3.45-6). However, she feels that being false to her true feelings would render her spirit "impure" (*TM* 3.3.60). In this way, she honors her own desires and values over those of her husband. Herod interprets her honesty as impurity.

While Mariam fastidiously follows conduct book rules that preach honesty,[98] "Herod reads her misogynistically," Luckyj notes, "as theatrically divided between inside and outside."[99] Herod sees her as even more of an actress *because* she takes action to avoid such a characterization. "Her silent body, like her 'unbridled speech', is read as a text reliable only in signifying her unreliability. Her silence … opens her to two closed, dichotomous interpretations, erasing her subjective choice: for Herod she is guilty; for the reader (as for Constabarus) she is

98. Brathwait's *The English Gentlewoman* instructs women to "be indeed what you desire to be thought" (106).

99. Christina Luckyj, *'A Moving Rhetoricke': Gender and Silence in Early Modern England*, 153.

innocent."[100] Despite the apparent objectivity of Mariam's innocence, the reader still must, like Herod, literally "read" her innocence, filling in the gaps of her silence. In doing so, the reader must acknowledge the social shortcomings of silence as a virtue. As Hero's blush is interpreted by Claudio as guilt and by the friar (and the audience) as modesty, so is Mariam's silence doubly read, to her reputational detriment. As scripts, conduct books again betray our heroines.

Believing that her innocence is her "fair defence" and that the "heavens" are on her side, Mariam refuses to change tactics and feign love for Herod (*TM* 3.3.55, 4.4.5). With her honest, final lines to Herod — in which she disobeys his demand to "smile" and forgive him — Mariam seals her fate (*TM* 4.3.56). In this moment, she fails as an actor, misunderstanding the weight of the moment and the consequences of her honesty. Her survival instincts do not alert her to Herod's extreme power insecurity in that moment, and how this insecurity will leave him especially vulnerable to Salome's influence, which will serve to finalize Mariam's execution. Herod feels he has lost the loyalty of his wife, or that perhaps he never had it: she is a deceiver, who has "show'd the best, and yet did prove the worst" (*TM* 4.7.120). As Leontes accuses Hermione of treachery and Claudio accuses Hero of immodesty, Herod accuses Mariam of usurpation (*TM* 4.4.76). [101] His royal identity rests on her, so when she dares defy him, he lashes out and seeks to neutralize the threat by executing her. In prison, she laments her misjudgment: she thought that "Herod's love could not from [her] be drawn," no matter how she acted towards him (*TM* 4.8.32). She trusted that honesty, coupled with beauty, would save her life. The chorus chastises her, claiming that "the fairest action of our human life, / Is scorning to revenge an

---

100. Luckyj, 153.

101. Herod feels that Mariam's supposed infidelity is worse than if she attempted to have him assassinated for her son to take the throne. He feels that "hadst thou complotted Herod's massacre, / That so thy sonne a Monarch might be stilde, / Not halfe so grievous such an action were, / As once to thinke, that Mariam is defiled" (*TM* 4.4.53-6). Herod conflates himself with the state, and thus sees Mariam's infidelity as an act of usurpation. He goes on to "staine" Mariam with "usurpers name" (*TM* 4.4.76).

injury" (*TM* 4.8.1-2). If Mariam had forgiven Herod for murdering her family members and for ordering her conditional execution, then she could have lived a "long famous life" (*TM* 4.8.36). Yet forgiving him would have required a profound shift in her principles — a swift alteration of her selfhood. She must be changeable to be perceived as constant. Mariam's true flaw is not in failing to forgive Herod, but rather in failing to deceive him. She neglects to attune herself as an actor to a society in which feigning goes with the territory of femininity. With confirmation bias already leaning against her, the punishment for a botched scene is fatal.

Like plays, conduct books script behavior and speech, casting characters and staging appropriate dialogue and actions. For conduct books, the stage of society is simply larger and the performers are less line-perfect. The critics, too, play roles even as they feign removal from the stage. Men criticize women's performances as they attempt to perform ideal conduct book roles themselves: the courtier, the lover, the honorable soldier. In *Much Ado*, a play within a play emerges: actors play characters who are trying their best to play conduct book ideals, and often failing. For male characters, the stakes are simply lower: if they fail to perform their role well, they may be criticized and vilified by their fellow men. If female characters fail to perform their conduct book roles well, they may die. Women are instructed to perform chastity, but when they perform well, they become doubly frightening: *they are excellent actors, so they could easily be excellent deceivers*. A woman is punished for not acting well enough and for acting too well. If conduct books are scripts, then the director is very picky indeed.

Chapter 4: Hero's Containment and Resurrection

The friar attempts to recuperate Hero's virginal identity by transforming her into a memory; she must "die to live" (4.1.253). If her falsely-claimed "death" (experience of orgasm)

with another man has caused her reputational death, then she must falsely "die" (lose her life) to resuscitate her reputation and reenter society. If Hero disappears, then the powerful men can claim that she died "upon the instant that she was accused," and thus both summon public sentiment and hopefully make Claudio regret his accusation (4.1.215). The friar designs Hero's feigned death as a recuperation effort to change Claudio's "slander to remorse," hoping that his sweet memories will supersede his bitterness (4.1.211). The friar assures Leonato that, upon learning of Hero's death:

> … every organ of her life
> Shall come apparelled in more precious habit,
> More moving, delicate, and full of life,
> Into the eye and prospect of his soul
> Than when she lived indeed. Then shall he mourn —
> If ever love had interest in his liver —
> And wish he had not so accused her. (4.1.226-232)

Since Claudio has perceived Hero as an object of desire and of subsequent disgust, the friar suggests removing the corporeal element of Hero entirely, transforming her into ethereal silence. Claudio can then recall "every organ of her life," without his prior fears of cuckoldry and of the autonomy-stripping powers of beauty. He will be free to reimagine her as more "full of life" than he ever perceived her "when she lived" (4.1.226, 228, 230). In the eyes of men, Hero is more alive when she is dead than when she is alive, because her life is solely defined by Claudio's perception of her purity. Her life, like Hermione's, "stands in the level" of a powerful and once-trusted man's "dreams" (*WT* 3.2.78).

Departing from Hermione's negative portrayal of Leontes's delusions, the friar believes that these dreams can be used to Hero's advantage. If "flesh and blood" are the main components of women's allure and sinfulness, then Hero's death may allow Claudio to idealize her without

the fear that other men may also see her, desire her, and become romantically or sexually involved with her — either by force or by Hero's consent (4.1.226).

Claudio, however, refuses to renounce his accusations. When Leonato tells Claudio that Hero "lies buried with her ancestors," dead by Claudio's "slander" and "villainy," Claudio is unrepentant, simply repeating, "My villainy?" (5.1.69,68, 71, 72) and rebuffing Leonato's challenge to a duel. Claudio proves an inconstant lover but a constant doubter and slanderer. Once he has made up his mind about Hero, his faithlessness will not be shaken by the news of her death: he nearly lost his reputation to loving an impure woman, so that woman deserves to die with her reputation in tatters. A reputational death for a real (and reputational) death. Claudio maintains that Hero is at fault and even makes fun of the grief-stricken Leonato, callously joking that he is an "old" man "without teeth" (5.1.116). Despite Leonato's, Antonio's, and Benedick's best efforts, Claudio will neither repent, nor love Hero again, nor even take seriously Benedick's challenge to a duel. Instead of trusting Hero until her inconstancy is irrefutable, Claudio distrusts her as soon as there is the slightest whiff of a scandal, however untrustworthy the source and however shaky the evidence. He promptly treats her death, and all those who advocate for her, as mockable comic relief.

It comes as no great surprise, then, that the friar's ploy to reincarnate Hero in Claudio's mind as the image of purity fails. However, the ruse of Hero's death is not only for Claudio's benefit. Rather, the friar argues that the announcement of her death will still be successful if the general Messinan public are affected: "if all aim but this be labelled false, / The supposition of the lady's death / Will quench the wonder of her infamy" (4.1.237-9). Even if the plan does not wholly succeed, her supposed death will at least hush the gossip about her shameful infidelity

(4.1.237-239). Hero's personal, performed silence will breed social silence; once she is dead, the public will remember her as pure.

The friar serves as a level-headed advocate for Hero,[102] contradicting the emotional and vitriol-prone Leonato who initially disowns Hero and tells her to die (and even asserts that he would "strike at [her] life" if she were not already inclined to die of shame), though he later recants his searing indictment (4.1.127). [103] In Leonato's mind, Hero's purity — or more accurately, her pure reputation — is her identity. Having lost it, she no longer deserves to live; she will only sully the family name with her "foul-tainted flesh" (4.1.143). Her only honorable recourse — her only possibility for redemption and resurrection — lies in death, either a natural, shame-induced death, or suicide.

In Shakespeare's 1594 poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, suicide indeed seems the only possible redemption for a woman who has lost her honor or, as the Roman noblewoman Lucrece describes it, "violated troth" (no matter how nonconsensual the interaction was) (*RL* line 1059).[104] In Lucrece's mind, only by separating her violently raped body from her pure soul can she reclaim her identity as an honorable woman and a "loyal wife." Although the men protest that her "mind untainted" clears "her body's stain," Lucrece is adamant that she will make no "excuse" for her "forced offence" (*RL* lines 1710, 1715, 1071). Lucrece chooses death over dishonor. Though this poem may be more aligned with Roman ideals of stoicism than with early

---

102. The friar calmly suggests that, if the plan entirely fails, Hero may simply enter "some reclusive and religious life / Out of all eyes, tongues, minds, and injuries" (4.1.241-3).

103. Leonato verbally attacks Hero as the powerful men accuse her of speaking with the man. However, as the scene progresses, Leonato is cautiously swayed by the friar's argument and he agrees to the feigned death scheme. By the end of this scene, he is not completely convinced but admits that: "Being that I flow in grief, / The smallest twine may lead me" (4.1.249-50). Later, he definitively sides with Hero: "My soul doth tell me Hero is belied, / And that shall Claudio know" (5.1.42-3).

104. William Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece*, edited by J.W. Lever (Penguin Books, 1981), line 1059. Subsequent references will be indicated parenthetically by (*RL*).

modern conduct book dicta, Shakespeare's formal resurrection of Lucrece in the Renaissance literary imagination places her well within the sphere of ideal femininity that Hero inhabits, albeit one with potentially more extreme consequences for a loss of chastity or chaste reputation. Unlike Lucrece, Hero has not been physically violated, yet the window scene (or more appropriately, the men's reactions to it) has stained her reputation so drastically that her father wishes she were "a beggar's issue" (4.1.132). Both Lucrece and Hero's reputations are ruined by actions to which they never consented; they pay the social price for men's transgressions. Conduct books affirm that once a woman's reputation is tainted, it is nearly impossible to recover her public honor while still alive: Vives notes that "if a slander once take hold in a maid's name by folks' opinion it is in a manner everlasting."[105] Having "lost a dearer thing than life," Lucrece vows that "my blood shall wash the slander of mine ill; / My life's foul deed my life's fair end shall free it" (*RL* lines 687, 1207-1208). If her life is only worth her chastity, the loss thereof renders her life void. By losing her life, she can reclaim her chastity and wash her reputation clean. Lucrece physically silences herself to reclaim her societal voice. Her chaste reputation may live on, long after her death.

After Claudio's vicious accusation, Leonato, Hero, and the friar all appear to second Lucrece's belief that loss of purity is equivalent to loss of life. The friar proposes an alternative to these drastic proposals: by feigning death, Hero can become a new Hero. Under the friar's guidance, she executes a complicated (but dramatically precedented) social maneuver: to survive, she allows her identity to be exclusively tied to her pure reputation, just as the men of *Much Ado* consider it to be. As long as Hero is considered impure, she is dead. The chaste, modest Hero and the slandered, impure Hero are two different masks, and under the friar's

105. Vives, 71.

tutelage, Hero slips into each of them with ease. “Hero remains dead in her resurrection,” Cook argues, “as she is reappropriated to the mode of perception that killed her.”[106] She splits herself temporally and morally to avoid certain death, indulging “Claudio’s dualistic notion” of her purity and her mortality.[107] By allowing the men to equate her chaste reputation to her life, by encouraging them to compartmentalize the pure and impure Hero and the dead and alive Hero, she ironically saves the life that would otherwise have been stolen from her. She silences herself temporarily to avoid being permanently slandered.

This is not to suggest that Hero possesses an overwhelming amount of agency, but rather to note her obedience to powerful men as they (with a curiously silent Beatrice) attempt to resuscitate her honor.[108] Duplicity is an ironic survival tactic for a woman who wishes to prove her honesty. It is even more ironic that her father, the very man who declared that she could not possibly deny Don Pedro and Claudio’s story, encourages her to engage in this duplicity. Leonato easily changes his mind — a supposedly feminine flaw — from wishing death upon Hero for her deception to encouraging her to deceive Claudio by feigning death. Men decry women as changeable and deceptive, and yet engage in and indeed encourage those very traits when convenient. Further, men’s employment of supposedly negative female traits elicits desired results in *Much Ado*, suggesting that, when sanctioned by men, deception may be viewed not as sinful but rather as pragmatic. Thus, men seem to understand that, for women, deception is a survival tactic. Perhaps it is disobedience, then, not inconstancy, deception, or speech, that most frightens the men of *Much Ado*.

---

106. Cook, 99.

107. Cook, 99.

108. Men are not the only ones to defend Hero’s honor. Beatrice, too, persuades Benedick to “kill Claudio” for his “public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancour” towards Hero (4.1.288, 303-5). Fortunately, Borachio confesses before their duel can come to fruition.

The men direct Hero's performance of chastity and death as Beatrice impotently observes; when she speaks in this scene (before all the men have exited except for Benedick), it is only to ask the men for aid and to answer their questions. Beatrice seems to respect the power of masculine directorship in saving a woman's honor. Once alone with Benedick, she twists the concept to save Hero through her own design: she bemoans her womanhood, cleverly espousing the masculine "protector of honor" ideal, convincing Benedick to break his brotherly ties. Faced with an exclusive, patriarchal network of communications, Beatrice, like Hero, must resort to underhand forms of self-expression to resurrect Hero's honor.

The reputation of the supposedly perfect Hero is so unstable and open to accusations that she must duplicate herself to avoid destruction. Though the friar's plan does not work on all fronts, her feigned death buys her time for Borachio to affirm her innocence. Only when confronted with Borachio's confession does Claudio partially repent, telling Leonato that:

> I know not how to pray your patience.
> Yet I must speak. Choose your revenge yourself.
> Impose me to what penance your invention
> Can lay upon my sin. Yet sinned I not
> But in mistaking. (5.1.261-4)

Claudio's "mistaking" is a double entendre: he was mistaken in that he took the wrong woman for Hero, and he was also "mis-taken," in that he took the situation badly; he responded poorly, choosing not to speak privately to Hero but rather to viciously defame her at the altar. Women are not the only characters in *Much Ado* whose speech is vulnerable to criticism. Claudio is horrified by Borachio's revelation, and Hero's verbal power is potentially recuperated. In the future, Claudio might believe his fiancée when she speaks, because her words have proven true.

At this point, we must draw a divide between the Claudio written in the script and the Claudio portrayed onstage. Findlay argues that Claudio's and Don Pedro's initial reactions offer

"only a very flimsy skeleton for an actor to build a convincing sense of remorse."[109] I argue that, while an actor may certainly portray a sympathetic Claudio, the script itself does not offer enormous support for such a portrayal. A sympathetic Claudio lives in the actor's and director's choices,[110] and while these choices do not contradict the script, they are also not textually implied. On the page, Claudio's comprehension of his wrongdoing appears limited and superficial. For a supposedly repentant character, his lines sound suspiciously unapologetic. The line ending "yet sinned I not" fosters an attitude of disbelief and self-exculpation, and only in the next line might he salvage some sense of apology (5.1.263).[111] It is "not clear," Findlay notes, "how deeply [Claudio and Don Pedro] understand or feel any guilt beneath their flamboyant willingness to do any 'penance' (5.1.268)."[112] Textually, "Claudio's offer to make restitution to Leonato," notes Philip Collington, "sounds more like defiance than remorse."[113] In the BBC TV *Much Ado About Nothing* (1984), Robert Reynolds's Claudio is "a beautiful, self-assured and rather vain young man [whose] rejection of Hero in the chapel [is] motivated by hurt pride rather than love."[114] Though an actor can certainly craft a sympathetic and repentant Claudio beyond the text through physicality, facial expressions, and blocking, Reynolds's Claudio most closely

---

109. Findlay, 64.

110. A sympathetic Claudio may stem from an actor's natural desire to make his character redeemable, or from a director's urge to make Claudio and Hero a couple that audiences can applaud.

111. The enjambment of "sinned I not / But in mistaking" does allow an actor who wishes to portray a genuinely repentant Claudio the opportunity to simply not pause between the lines (5.1.263-4).

112. Findlay, 64.

113. Philip D. Collington, "'Stuffed with all honourable virtues': *Much Ado About Nothing and The Book of the Courtier*," 305.

114. Findlay, 136. Further, "His joking with Don Pedro in Act V scene I indicated no sense of remorse, even when he learned of Hero's death. The mourning scene was another elaborate show" (136).

encapsulates the character as written. Claudio's character arc on the page leaves growth, repentance, and humility to be desired.

Fran Kranz in Joss Whedon's *Much Ado*[115] and Robert Sean Leonard in Kenneth Branagh's *Much Ado*[116] embody apologetic versions of Claudio with great success. Textually, though, "Claudio's offer to make restitution to Leonato," notes Philip Collington, "sounds more like defiance than remorse."[117] With his ambiguous diction, Claudio may be earnestly calling upon Leonato's imagination to think up some horrible punishment for his mistreatment of Hero, but he could also be subtly mocking Leonato's highly emotional reaction. Claudio's prior reactions (and lack thereof) to news of Hero characterize him as outwardly respectful, but generally unrepentant. Before Borachio's confession, Claudio refuses to listen to any man who defends Hero's honor. He seeks to extricate himself from the tense situation and forget Hero. The script offers no response from Claudio to Leonato's direct accusation: "Thou hast killed my child" (5.1.78). Only the revelation of Hero's chastity moves Claudio. In this scene, though Claudio remains outwardly respectful and tearfully thanks Leonato when he suggests a replacement bride,[118] Claudio may, based on his emotional record, view Leonato's anger as an overreaction and his own disparagement of Hero as justified. Even in his repentance speech, he

---

115. Kranz's Claudio accepts the offer of Hero's cousin with a joyless, iron resolve. He swallows hard, grits his teeth, and meets Leonato's eyes. He is willing to do anything to amend for his "mistaking," but he clearly finds it emotionally difficult to forget his beloved and marry her cousin. Even at the wedding, prior to the unveiling, Claudio is solemn to the point of sourness. It is only after Hero reveals her face that he expresses joy.

116. Branagh's film "deliberately softens its portrayal of Claudio," playing up "the youthful romanticism between him and Hero" (Findlay 140). Upon hearing Borachio's confession, Claudio (Robert Sean Leonard) contorts his face in pain and begins to cry as he laments, "Sweet Hero!"

117. Philip D. Collington, ""Stuffed with all honourable virtues": *Much Ado About Nothing and The Book of the Courtier*," 305.

118. Claudio declares that Leonato's "over-kindness" has brought him to "tears" (5.1.283),

declares that he is only guilty in "mistaking" (5.1.264). For the textual Claudio, Hero's death seems nothing more than a minor misunderstanding.

Claudio remains silent for most of the scene as Leonato recuperates verbal power. When Leonato sardonically thanks Claudio and Don Pedro for Hero's death, Claudio responds awkwardly that he knows "not how to pray" Leonato's patience, yet he "must speak" (5.1.260, 261-2). Claudio's lines read as hesitant and balky as he attempts to apologize while retaining some blamelessness. This silence-speech dynamic hearkens back to the coupling scene, reaffirming the notion that Claudio is at his most verbally skilled and passionate when he is publicly slandering his beloved.

Rather than fully repenting, Claudio reverts to his role of Claudio the Quiet Lover. This transformation lends credence to the argument that between the sexes, men are the slippery deceivers. The possibly-pseudonymous Jane Anger, author of the 1589 *Jane Anger Her Protection of Women*, argues that women's "behaviours alter daily because men's virtues decay hourly."[119] She declares that men "dissemble" and use "their tongues ill," and in this manner the most "wel formed" women are "fouly deformed" by men.[120] Claudio indeed uses Hero wrongly; by the end of the first wedding scene, he has "deformed" her reputation so completely that she is, in the eyes of Messinan society, not only promiscuous but dead.[121] After Borachio's confession, Claudio quickly rights himself, switching from vengeful harlot-exposer to mournful lover. Yet his unsavory alter ego has already revealed itself. Hero's silence, then, makes her not only "doubly threatening, both in her imagined capacity to betray and cuckold men and as an image of

119. Jane Anger, *Her Protection for Women* (London, 1589), B3v.

120. Anger, B3r.

121. Anger, B3.

what men fear to become," but triply threatening, as her silence exposes men's character flaws.[122] A silent woman is a pristine mirror into which men stare, see themselves, and initially fall in love with their reflections. But as they look more closely, they notice splotches and imperfections. They then must choose one of two unpleasant options: acknowledge that the splotches are on their faces or claim that the mirror is dirty. Claudio looks at Hero and he sees a changeable counterfeit; he fails to recognize that this counterfeit is not Hero, but himself.

Claudio takes Hero's quietness — he believes she is dead and thus completely silent — as permission to semi-exculpate himself. Hero's silence seems to work against her throughout the play: it allows for her downfall, both in her lack of an alibi for the night of the window scene and in Claudio's brutal destruction of her character at the wedding, in which she does not defend herself with the verbal vigor that other heroines employ.[123] Now, even upon her supposed death, her silence does not achieve the desired results: Claudio fails to fully see the error of his ways.

Obeying Leonato's instructions, Claudio and Don Pedro attempt to publicly, posthumously remove Hero's shame by hanging her epitaph and singing it "to her bones": the epitaph declares that Hero was "done to death by slanderous tongues" and expresses hope that "the life that died with shame, / Lives in death with glorious fame" (5.1.274, 5.3.3, 7-8). In song, Hero is labeled a "virgin knight," evoking images of Diana, goddess of the hunt, Britomart in *The Faerie Queene* (1590), and presaging the chaste lady in Milton's *Comus* (1634) (5.3.13).[124]

---

122. Cook, 80.

123. See Vittoria's trial speech in Webster's *The White Devil* (1612) for a potent example of verbal self-defense.

124. McEachern, 345-346. In *Comus*, a similar moral intervention saves the lady's honor. Instead of the friar coming to the lady's defense, a virgin nymph, Sabrina, saves the lady and undoes Comus's containment spell. It is Sabrina's office to "help ensnared Chastity" (Milton, 28). At the end of the masque, a spirit enters with a moral lesson: "Love Virtue —she alone is free: / She can teach you how to climb / Higher than the sphery chime; / Or, if Virtue feeble were, / Heaven itself would stoop to her" (30). When Virtue fails a chaste woman, Heaven will save her. Although Hero must take earthly measures to reclaim her reputational chastity, she too is guided by a godly

Knighthood calls to mind a great amount of movement; it is hardly a stationary job. The dead Hero is bequeathed a certain amount of agency denied to her in life; she is immortalized as a strong, willful-yet-pure queen. Death and a tomb contain her, so the men feel safe to retroactively characterize her as active.

During the epitaph ceremony, Hero is supposedly passive and prone, lying in a tomb while the men who wronged her circle it, singing "songs of woe" (5.3.14). She is only "bones" now, so her pure reputation, her "glorious fame," can be immortalized without the dangers of a living, sensuous, volatile female body — a body that could make a man a cuckold at any point (5.3.22, 8). Now that she is dead, Claudio can mourn her. If women are seen as inherently dichotomous virgins *and* whores — slippery and prone to adultery by nature — then death is the only process that can permanently immobilize their sexuality: by dying, women can be immortal virgins.[125]

Containment of women in death points to a particular societal connection between porousness and unchastity. Popular thought maintained that a woman's chastity could be determined by how sealed off her orifices were. Laurie Maguire notes that a common early modern method of testing virginity was to give a woman a diuretic to see if she could keep herself from urinating: "The chaste woman was sealed, impermeable; the unchaste woman was porous, incontinent."[126] Men perceived an open, speaking mouth as indicative of an unfaithful body and mind. Such a connection is on full display in *The Winter's Tale*. Bonnie Lander

---

force: the friar. It seems that a woman's voice and virtue must be upheld by a divine or moral power and for her to be rendered pure again.

125. Traub notes that, in Hamlet's eyes, "only in death can Ophelia-as-whore regain the other half of her dichotomized being: chaste virgin" (124). For Claudio, Hero follows a similar path.

126. Laurie Maguire, 'Virginity Tests', in *The Oxford Companion to the Body*, edited by Colin Blakemore and Sheila Jennett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 713–4.

Johnson notes that Leontes is particularly preoccupied with Hermione's supposed porousness; he believes that she has been "sluiced" by his dear, trusted friend — an insecurity that stems from her verbal prowess (*WT* 1.2.235).[127] Paranoid and obsessed with his legacy, he believes that her openness is simultaneously a gate through which a disease may enter *and* a disease unto itself. He feels, Johnson notes, that "all men … have 'gates' that are opened against their will. Hermione's body is itself something of a gate — where a barricado ought to be — and 'the enemy' moves in and out."[128] Hermione and the palace are porous and thus perfect vehicles for disease, both venereal and moral.

Hermione's transformation from human to statue removes porousness from the feminine equation, purifying her as her orifices transform to stone. Leontes is then safe to reimagine her as faithful, mourning and regretting his slander. She can neither speak eloquently nor have sex with Polixenes — two actions that Leontes sees as intertwined. Similarly, Hero's feigned death seals up her orifices from supposed inconstancy: she cannot speak to strange men at her window if she cannot speak at all. Hero's tomb further contains her, as her body is hidden from public view. In death, Hero fulfills the conduct book dictum for women to leave their private spaces as little as possible. If she cannot move, speak, or be seen, then she cannot possibly turn herself "from God unto men," as Vives warns, and consequently forsake Christ to become "an adulterer."[129] In death, she can be "kept close."[130] A dead woman checks a disturbing number of boxes for the conduct books' ideal woman.

---

127. Bonnie Lander Johnson, *Chastity in Early Stuart Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 14.

128. Johnson, 14.

129. Vives, 72.

130. Vives, 72.

Funeral crypts, tombs, and coffins resolidify the slandered woman in death. Likewise, women's transformations into statues (such as Hermione, literally) and gems (such as Desdemona,[131] metaphorically) take on a special significance in understanding the disempowerment and reintegration of slandered women into society. Not only do death and objectification of women assuage men's anxieties as the women are no longer able to cheat on them, but they also reclassify slandered women as chaste — a task that even the most socially adept female characters fail to achieve through words alone. It seems that a slandered woman cannot be properly deemed chaste again until she is unanimated and cold, her flesh replaced with marble or gemstones or confined in a tomb. Though her body and mind are already physically and morally "sealed," she must transform into a sealed *object* for the man to realize his mistakes and repent. Ironically, transformations and changeability, the very qualities so often used to denigrate the female population, prove to men that a woman has been chaste the entire time. Changeability — from warm, breathing human to inanimate object — reveals constancy. A woman's transformation further reveals that only her reputation, not her physical self, was porous, and this misjudgment of reputation cost her her life. Again, a woman's life and her reputation appear eerily interchangeable in the eyes of men.

After death, a woman is physically contained in a tomb and reputationally contained in social memory and in the words of men. Without her voice and actions contradicting their fantasies, men may claim possession of her, as exemplified by *Hamlet*. With Ophelia dead, Laertes and Hamlet "fight over the right to appropriate Ophelia's chastity" without the problematic aspect of Ophelia present: her life.[132] Her chastity, notes Valerie Traub, "embodies a

131. Othello laments his frenzied jealousy, bemoaning that he "threw a pearl away" in murdering Desdemona (5.2.363).

132. Traub, 125.

masculine fantasy of 'female essence' wonderfully devoid of that which makes women so problematic: change, movement inconstancy, unpredictability — in short, life."[133] The Duchess of Malfi, in advocating for her remarriage, challenges these ideals of female containment, asking, "Why should only I, / Of all the other princes of the world, / Be cased up like a holy relic? I have youth, / And a little beauty" (*DM* 3.2.136-9)[134] She questions social rules: why must a widow who is still young and vivacious spend the rest of her days in mourning? Why should a woman's identity be defined solely by that of her husband (and thus when he dies, she must act like a dead woman)?

We may read the Duchess as a case study of a dramatic heroine who actively rebels against the silent femininity ideal. She is certainly louder than Hero, and more assertive in her agency than even Beatrice. The Duchess is the first to confess her love, by hierarchical necessity. She is of a higher social rank than Antonio, so she must express her romantic desire before he can confess his own. Likewise, she orchestrates their wedding.[135] In a departure from *Much Ado*, *she* is the one who stops *his* mouth with a kiss.[136] As a final punishment for her audacity and supposed impurity, her brother orders that she be murdered. She calmly assures her executioners that death is the "best gift" her brothers can give her; she will gladly exit the stage of life to be out of her executioners', her brothers', and society's "whispering" about her reputation (*DM*

---

133. Traub, 125.

134. John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi*, edited by Brian Gibbons (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). Subsequent references to *The Duchess of Malfi* will be indicated parenthetically by (*DM*).

135. She laments her high social status: "The misery of us that are born great! / We are forced to woo because none dare woo us" (1.1.433-34).

136. Hearkening to Leonato's "Peace! I will stop your mouth" in *Much Ado* (5.4.97). Contradicting the SP Quarto, 18th century editor Lewis Theobald reassigned this line to Benedick, and many stage productions have followed his version. However, McEachern notes that the original assignment of the line "provides for a more egalitarian accommodation between the lovers" than if Benedick singlehandedly declares that he will silence Beatrice. Often, this silencing comes in the form of a kiss, though marriage itself could be viewed as a means of silencing a woman.

4.2.215, 213). She wishes to join her chosen family in Heaven and leave her brothers' slander and vitriol on earth. She then apologizes for her speech: "I would fain put off my last woman's fault: / I'd not be tedious to you" (*DM* 4.2.216-7). She repurposes the stereotype of the too-talkative woman for her own powerful ends, taking control of her death narrative: she asks that her body be bestowed upon her women and then calmly orders the executioner to tell her brothers, once her body has been prepared for burial, that "they then may feed in quiet," a powerful indictment of their remorseless cruelty (*DM* 4.2.227).

Like Hermione, the Duchess sanctions her speech by vowing that she prefers death to a miserable life. She meets death nobly, or at least professes to do so, putting on a brave face and cordially greeting her own mortality. She can be as eloquent as she wants, if she acknowledges the dispensability of her life. Unlike Hero and Hemione, however, the Duchess is not interested in resuscitating her honor through death: she wishes to die simply because she feels she has nothing valuable left in life. She believes her husband and eldest son have died, and her younger children are imprisoned.[137] While Leonato sees Hero's reputation as a reflection of himself, the Duchess, like Hermione, views her reputation not for her brothers' or parents' benefit, but rather for that of her progeny. Since the Duchess believes she has no legacy, there is no reason to be remembered as pure.

Literally, the Duchess allows herself to be contained in death: her body is entombed. However, she takes agency both in ordering that her body be bestowed upon her women (rather than given to her brothers) *and* in reclaiming her voice posthumously as Echo. She haunts her husband, Antonio, and attempts to warn him of the murder plot against him. As Echo, she is, for the most part, linguistically confined to a man's vocabulary and thought pattern, but she is able

137. Her brothers have also divested her of her property and surrounded her with "mad-folk" (*DM* 4.1.127).

to repeat certain phrases with a difference, adding her own inflections and meaning.[138] Nonetheless, neither her repetition of a man's voice nor her subtle attempts at communicative autonomy sway Antonio. He refuses to listen to her, declaring, "Echo, I will not talk with thee, / For thou art a dead thing" (*DM* 5.3.38-9). She repeats, "Thou art a dead thing" as a message to stop him from visiting her murderous brother (*DM* 5.3.40). Instead of listening, Antonio laments on his visual loss: "Shall I never see her more?" (*DM* 5.3.43). Early modern drama scholar Brian Chalk argues that the play presents the Duchess "in the form of an echo that serves to deny rather than confirm her transcendence … When [Antonio] questions whether they shall meet again, the echo gloomily predicts that he 'shall never see her more' (5.4.43)."[139] The Duchess certainly repurposes Antonio's language to answer his question, and indeed, this utterance could be a prediction that Antonio will never see her again because Heaven does not exist. Alternatively, it could also be read as a lamentation of Antonio's dismissiveness: because he refused to pay her heed, he will soon no longer be alive to look upon her ghostly visage.

Seemingly in the Duchess's final act of despair, Antonio glimpses a "face folded in sorrow," possibly the Duchess's own visage (*DM* 5.3.44). She reveals herself to him for the last time, before he flies to his death. If we read this statement as an active demand to "never see her more," rather than a simple prediction that he will not see her again, the Duchess may be interpreted as an especially forceful and linguistically adept instructor: Antonio *must* forget her to preserve his life (*DM* 5.3.43). Despite Echo's warnings, Antonio fails to pay her heed. Although the Duchess skirts a more traditional containment narrative, her disempowerment in

---

138. For example, when Antonio notes that the echo is "very like my wife's voice," she repeats, "Ay, wife's voice" (5.3.26, 27).

139. Brian Chalk, "Webster's 'Worthyest Monument': The Problem of Posterity in *The Duchess of Malfi*." *Studies in Philology* 108, no. 3 (2011): 399.

death indicts an unjust patriarchal justice system that silences all the wrong people and fixates on appearances to the exclusion of genuine measures of honor. Should a woman's self-expression and autonomy, the play asks, really be punished by death?

In a metatheatrical sense, the Duchess's role as protagonist calls into question conduct books' idolization of silent submissiveness. The Duchess is loud. She certainly rebels against conduct book ideals of submissiveness and silence. Yet she is the titular character; she is our hero. A meek, obedient woman in the Duchess's situation probably would not suffer like the Duchess does, but she also would not be remembered with the intensity and beyond-the-grave impact that the Duchess wields. The Duchess's mere presence onstage, in tandem with her character arc, challenges conduct book teachings: she gets to be loud on earth *and* lauded in death.

The lack of prolonged mourning for a contained Hero may be attributed to Hero's silence and Claudio's inconstancy, but also to the comedic genre of *Much Ado*. In comparison to the tragic *Othello,* which serves as a similar containment narrative, the extent to which Claudio forgets Hero may be read as quite shameful. "Like Othello," notes Traub, "Claudio first idealizes the object of his affection … and Claudio's readiness to suspect Hero's infidelity matches Othello's susceptibility to Iago's allegations."[140] Insecure and quick to distrust his beloved, Claudio joins Othello in the ritual of containment. Unlike Othello, though, Claudio quickly forgets Hero. Othello take time to memorialize Desdemona in death, speaking extensively about her and taking uninstructed, passionate action in mourning, while Claudio simply obeys Leonato's wishes. Othello begs to be whipped by the devils, blown in the wind, roasted in sulfur,

140. Traub, 132.

and washed in "liquid fire," before wounding Iago and slaying himself (5.2.294). Meanwhile, Claudio moves swiftly into wedding preparation mode.

Because *Much Ado* is a comedy, and because we as an audience know that Borachio and Conrade have been apprehended before Claudio even slanders Hero at the altar, we can feel confident that the plot will correct itself. Claudio's cruelty and suspiciously superficial remorse may be unsettling, but Claudio can *afford* to forget Hero, because she will be "resurrected" and reclaim his attention quite easily; we see a happy ending in sight. In *Othello*, forgetting Desdemona is not an option, nor is substituting her cousin as a replacement wife; such easy solutions would violently oppose the tragedy genre. Moving on from the tragic beloved would seem heartless to the point of sociopathy, from an audience perspective. After Desdemona's death, the plot barrels forward as the truth outs, blood spills, and time hastens to a frenzy, but all Othello does and says is in memory of the destroyed, irreplaceable Desdemona.

Though Othello mourns, he also takes comfort in her lifeless form. Traub notes that "like Hamlet, who idealizes *and* sexualizes Ophelia's corpse, Othello may safely sexualize Desdemona only posthumously, after she is permanently immobilized and sacramentally elevated."[141] Once Desdemona is dead, Othello compares her to jewels, "hard, cold, static, silent, yet also adored and desired" — he may "maintain both his distance from and his idealization" of Desdemona as an untouchable, eternally chaste goddess.[142] It seems that mourning is preferable to potentially being cuckolded, and the reader must wonder: would Othello have ever trusted Desdemona completely? Would he not have found another occasion to doubt Desdemona's honesty? He makes no secret of his dichotomous opinion of Desdemona: "I think my wife be

141. Traub, 131.

142. Traub, 131.

honest and think she is not."[143] Once the suspicion is lodged in his mind, he cannot see Desdemona without experiencing double vision: a pure and perfect woman, and a potential "whore" underneath.[144] Even a woman who performs purity to perfection is perceived as potentially deceptive *because* she outwardly fulfills the conduct book ideal: can a woman — the weaker sex, inherently changeable — possibly be that perfect? She must be hiding something shameful. Just as a man may use a woman's flaws to call her fidelity into question, so can he wield her perfection against her. To be purified beyond reproach, she must die.

Though Othello arguably never would have perceived Desdemona as chaste had she not died (and had the fearlessly outspoken Emilia not insisted on her purity), he certainly pays the emotional price for her death. Meanwhile, Claudio simply claims that he sees Hero's image "in the rare semblance that [he] loved it first," (verbally containing Hero in an image and reducing her to an "it"), and then he forgets the woman who died by his words (5.1.242). He breaks the code of the Renaissance lover by failing to properly idolize and mourn Hero. Claudio may seem perfect, but he lacks the character of a courtier, and indeed, that of a soldier: Collington notes that Claudio "displays more of the superficially refined qualities" than Benedick does, and he certainly "cuts an attractive figure and knows all the latest fencing techniques, but he lacks the essential qualities of an honorable soldier": nobility, valor, and honesty.[145] In characterizing Claudio, "Shakespeare exposes the dangers inherent in attaching disproportionately high values to superficial details" while forgoing the most vital conduct book criteria for courtly

143. William Shakespeare, *Othello*, edited by E. A. J. Honigmann (London: Arden Shakespeare 3, 2004): 3.3.394.

144. *Othello*, 3.3.369.

145. Collington, 303.

perfection.[146] Claudio's shallow, flashy showing on the battlefield may translate to his inconstancy in love.

Claudio's hasty shift in focus from Hero's epitaph ceremony to the second wedding casts doubt on his honesty: "In light of this quick second wedding," Collington argues, "Claudio's speech at the first visit to her burial monument … seems merely an empty gesture."[147] In Claudio's defense, he does not have much choice in the matter; Leonato has ordered him to mourn Hero properly, publicize her innocence, and promptly give Hero's cousin "the right [he] should have given her cousin" (5.1.281).[148] Then, Leonato's "revenge" will die (5.1.282). If Claudio wishes to placate the powerful father of the woman whose reputation he unjustly destroyed, he must obey, and he has already vowed to accept whatever "penance" Leonato ordains (5.1.263). He does, however, seem suspiciously eager to exculpate himself and forget Hero: directly after performing the epitaph ceremony, he declares, "Hymen now with luckier issue speed's / Than this for whom we rendered up this woe" (5.3.32-3). He shifts the blame, insinuating that Hymen simply cursed the marriage and it was out of his control to rectify the situation, when in reality he *created* the situation when he chose to publicly "shame" Hero (3.3.113).

Claudio does not speak Hero's name throughout the epitaph ceremony.[149] He calls her epitaph "the monument of Leonato," establishing Leonato's ownership of her in death, and

---

146. Collington, 303.

147. Collington, 305. Further, Claudio's "willingness to wed Hero's supposed cousin, sight unseen, contradicts his earlier vow to 'lock up all the gates of love' and never marry another (4.1.104)." (303).

148. It may be argued that Claudio is merely a gullible youth guided by Don Pedro, an unwise superior officer. Collington notes that Don Pedro repeatedly supports "the mistaken decisions taken by his impressionable charge" (305). However, Hero is Claudio's, not Don Pedro's, lover. Claudio should be the man who knows her most intimately, besides her father. Yet both her father and Claudio are quick to read her as unchaste.

149. See McEachern's discussion of the SP quarto. McEachern, 344.

describes her as “this for whom we rendered up this woe” (5.3.1, 5.3.32-3). He further compartmentalizes his mourning of Hero by restricting his solemnity to the epitaph ceremony: after the ritual specified, Don Pedro declares that they are off to “put on other weeds / And then to Leonato’s we will go” (5.3.30-1). Claudio has dutifully mourned, and now he can reap the reward: he will have a new bride, “the copy” of Hero (5.1.279). The dead Hero may be idealized as a virgin martyr, but the men perceive her as painfully replaceable. This raises questions regarding the real value of silent women in society: for all the lauding they receive in conduct books, are silent women really remembered after their deaths, or are they forgotten and rapidly replaced? If Beatrice were to die, she would not easily be forgotten. Benedick would struggle to find a woman as witty and expressive as she, so he would be forced to mourn. Meanwhile, Claudio is all too happy to wed a convenient replacement for a woman whose silence makes her lamentably forgettable: a stereotypical chaste, slandered lady.

Although the textual Hero does have moments of volubility in the company of other women, the reader generally does not know what goes on in her mind. Perhaps she is a brilliant wordsmith and a clever, curious intellectual. Perhaps she speaks eight languages and writes comedies. However, such a rich characterizing of Hero would be rooted either in readerly projection or in an actor’s creative choices. I argue, then, that it is Hero’s very unremarkableness, her cardboard-cutout-ness, that ironically serves as a warning against female silence: if you are quiet and follow the social rules, you can be slandered, proclaimed dead, and forgotten. Break the conduct book rules, speak up, and be clever; you may be criticized by some, but you may also dodge dangerous male insecurities. If chaste, rule-abiding women are killed and contained because men perceive them as suspiciously perfect unknowns, then perhaps a woman may avoid slander by making herself known.

A contained Hero can be both idolized and forgotten; with her body safely cold and desexualized, Claudio is free to fantasize about what could have been, without facing the insecurity-laden reality of a relationship with a living woman. If, as Traub suggests, romantic idealism and intense misogyny both stem from fear of female erotic power, then Claudio fails to exorcise that fear — at least until Hero is resurrected.

Hero is not resurrected in the more literal way that other Renaissance drama heroines are. She is not transformed into a statue and then back into human form, like Hermione. Nor does she haunt her beloved as a ghost, as the Duchess of Malfi does. Hero never dies in the literal sense. However, she plays dead, and Claudio believes that she is dead. Her epitaph ritual cleanses her of body and face — her two most unstable features.[150] Her "ambiguous blood has been purged away," notes Cook, and "she is redefined so as to be reappropriated to the patriarchal order as a disembodied ideal." It may be argued, then, that by faking her death, Hero loses her personhood. She is contained both as an ideal and as a physical monument. Hero has been "read" throughout the play; now her epitaph is literally read aloud by the men: "Claudio's placement of the epitaph on her tomb," Cook argues, "explicitly dramatizes the silencing of the woman's voice, the substitution of the man's."[151] Hero loses her voice in death and is only resurrected into physical personhood after Borachio has confessed. She is socially undone and redone by men's speech. If she is nothing more than an ideal in the eyes of men, torn down and destroyed to be built back up once her chastity can be reclaimed, then there is no question that Hero has experienced a resurrection arc as real as that of Hermione or the Duchess of Malfi. It is simply that, instead of

150. The purity of her body is called into question by the men, and her blush is read ambiguously.

151. Cook, 97.

becoming a statue or a ghost, Hero becomes an idea: a figment of men's imagination, solely defined by her chastity.

During the wedding ceremony, Leonato forbids Claudio from seeing the face of his veiled bride until he swears before the friar to "marry her" (5.4.57). He has lost the privilege of trusting his own eyes because he poorly perceived Hero in the past. Thus, Hero regains a small amount of autonomy, though she is still following the friar's and her father's orders throughout the ceremony. In this scene, she lays claim to her body, resurrected first as her cousin and then as her pure self. Claudio places himself in a vulnerable position, declaring that:

> Claudio: I am your husband, if you like of me.
> Hero: [unmasks.] And when I lived I was your other wife;
> And when you loved, you were my other husband.
> Claudio: Another Hero!
> Hero: Nothing certainer.
> One Hero died defiled, but I do live,
> And surely as I live, I am a maid.
> Don Pedro: The former Hero! Hero that is dead!
> Leonato: She died, my lord, but whiles her slander lived. (5.4.59-66)

In this moment of simultaneous empowerment and disempowerment, Hero calmly stands in the spotlight. She is the center of attention *and* she is vindicated. Yet when she speaks, she affirms her reputation as synonymous with her life. Instead of declaring herself inherently chaste no matter what she is accused of, or proudly stating that she will be judged as pure by a higher power (as Hermione does), she appears to endorse the notion that if a powerful man accuses her of being unchaste, then she is genuinely unchaste and must die (to then be resurrected as a "maid") (5.4.64). With her name cleared, she can reemerge as an indisputably virginal Hero. Hero's identity has always been malleable. However, this flexibility to the point of near-personalitylessness contrasts Hero's previous argument to Leonato, in which she tells him to "torture me to death" if — and only if — he can prove her unchastity (4.1.184). In the latter

argument, she equates her chastity to her life but feels she has a core of honor beyond the reaches of slander. She sees herself as a full person, not just the amalgam of others' speculations. By the veil scene, it appears that she has either lost her sense of a core or chosen to masterfully play along with the duplication narrative to save Claudio's ego.

By declaring that she used to be Claudio's "other wife" when she lived, Hero lends credence to his claims of infidelity (5.4.61). "By applying 'defiled' to her 'dead' self," Jane Wells argues, "Hero does not clearly or fully differentiate between the slanders of the accusers and the crimes for which she was accused. 'Defiled' ironically suggests that the label attached to the Hero before has stuck, as if the counterfeit claim made the reality on its own."[152] Hero not only suggests that Claudio was right, but she verbally duplicates herself so that his slander can hold true. The old Hero can be "defiled," and the new Hero can be a pure "maid," and Claudio never has to admit his inconstancy (5.4.63-4). Rhetorically, Hero gives Claudio a "get out of jail free" pass, reaffirming her status as a chaste lady from the perspective of conduct books: in her resurrected form, she fulfills the virtues of patience and forgiveness.

Before we categorize Hero as the archetype of conduct book-endorsed subservience, let us consider that Hero's duplications extend beyond herself. If she is another wife, then Claudio is another husband. From this angle, we may read Hero as espousing a more egalitarian narrative: she has changed, and so has Claudio. Yet she ties Claudio's identity not to defilement but rather to love — his one weak suit.[153] While Hero "lived," she was his other wife (5.4.60). When she

---

152. Jane Wells, "The Counterfeit Trap in Shakespeare's Comedies: *Twelfth Night, The Taming of the Shrew,* and *Much Ado About Nothing,*" *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium,* vol. 18 (1. Jul. 2018), 88.

153. Claudio's inconstancy as a lover transcends the "mariage de convenance" argument. Even if one argues (as Charles Prouty does), that Claudio is not a romantic lover but rather that he planned to marry Hero solely out of pragmatism, his distrust falls outside of the realm of reason; reading their relationship as a mariage de convenance does not disqualify the reader from judging Claudio's reaction as illogical and stemming from insecurity. Harbage declares Claudio "the least amiable lover in Shakespeare (192). McEachern seconds the opinion on gentler terms, claiming that he is "somewhat of a disappointment" (22).

lost her reputation, she lost her life and her identity as Claudio's wife. While Claudio "loved," he was Hero's other husband (5.4.61). When he lost his love, he lost his identity as her husband. This distinction between living and loving may be read as a dig at Claudio's constancy and selfhood. Claudio is not reborn as a worthy husband for Hero until he falls back in love with her. While Claudio distrusts her, he is stuck in purgatory, neither her old husband nor her new husband. In a society in which constancy in a lover is so prized, we may read Hero as playing a disempowerment game: "if my life is reduced to my chastity, then your life is reduced to your constancy. If I fail as a perfect woman, then you certainly fail as a perfect man." Hero brings a metatheatrical perspective to their courtship narrative: they are both attempting to play their roles perfectly, and when they do not succeed, they must exit and re-enter the stage as new characters and restart the scene.

Beyond this potential egalitarian interpretation, though, this scene may be read as powerful men celebrating the resurrection of a slandered woman, reincorporating her into society and returning right to the patriarchal status quo. If tragedies disrupt societal ideals by depicting a character doing everything "right" and still falling from grace, then comedies ultimately affirm current norms. Hero is resurrected to marry the man who slandered her. If we assume she will follow her pattern of perfect feminine behavior in marriage, then she has been granted speech only to be promptly re-silenced. Her resurrection, then, may be read as less of a victory lap and more of a briefly interrupted narrative of objectification: she lives to please Claudio. Leonato is simply teaching Claudio a lesson before fulfilling his side of the bargain, gifting him his daughter. Though "Claudio must accept his second bride without seeing her face, a stipulation

that … forces him to have faith where he once lacked it,"[154] he ultimately gets exactly what he wants: a docile, pure, unslandered wife.[155]

Claudio's final line is not a declaration of undying love, but rather a poorly timed joke about Benedick's future unfaithfulness. Claudio declares that Benedick will certainly be a "double-dealer" if Beatrice does not "look exceedingly narrowly" to him (5.4.112, 113-4). It is an inappropriate joke for the otherwise-romantic moment and an unflattering look for a man who has just spent a large portion of the play slandering a woman for supposedly being a double-dealer. Claudio could simply be reverting to locker room banter, taking a jab at his friend who swore never to wed. However, this joke does hold a disproportionate amount of weight; it is Claudio's last line, so one would expect it to glorify his relationship with Hero. In defense of Claudio as a reformed lover, this joke may indicate that Claudio has transferred his distrust of women onto men, now that he knows that Hero was chaste and truthful and that men were the ones to orchestrate the deception. Maybe he has begun to believe that men are indeed "deceivers ever," and women are the honest ones (2.3.61). Alternatively, Claudio may have not permanently learned his lesson. In this attempt at a joke, he places the onus of fidelity once again on the woman; if Benedick is unfaithful, it will be Beatrice's fault for not watching him closely enough. Claudio seems to forget his own brush with mistaken identities, faulty surveillance, and supposed "double-dealing" all too quickly. Perhaps Claudio has not been reformed after all.

---

154. McEachern 22.

155. The symbolic duplication of Hero raises the question: Does Claudio get Hero, or does he get "another Hero" (5.4.62)? He seems disturbingly content either way.

Chapter 5: Hero as a Teacher

I would like to offer a wrinkle in this fairly straightforward assertion of Hero's docile, anticlimactic subordination to a dominant and unreformed male, by turning to the textual Hero's potential metatheatrical role as a moral teacher. As I have argued above, Claudio may be read as unrepentant and unchanged. However, the text offers plenty of ambiguity for Claudio to indeed be reformed, and Claudio as a character certainly wants to present as a changed man. Let us, then, consider Claudio as a reformed lover. If such is the case, then Hero may take on an additional role in the narrative. The role of "converter" makes it possible for her to be both a failure (exposing the shortfalls of a social system that punishes women who supposedly check every conduct book box) and a success (reaffirming the woman's "moral teacher" role preached by conduct books).[156]

In the script, Hero is not a star character. Her existence certainly propels the plot forward, but she is no Beatrice. We as readers rarely scribble in the margins, "Wow, I know someone just like Hero," or, "So *that* is what Hero wants!" Her textual presence functions more as a plot device than as a characterization tool: her slandering triggers Benedick to break with the men, declare his love for Beatrice, and vow to duel Claudio. To an extent, all characters are plot devices. However, Hero's characteristic blankness makes her a specifically strong candidate for moving the plot forward without monopolizing the action of the play. If we take Claudio's slander of Hero as a foregone conclusion, given his own insecurities, then Hero's performance of

156. The comedic genre also aids in Claudio's "conversion." With the perfectly timed disclosure of Don John's villainy, Claudio learns under no uncertain circumstances that Don John and Borachio, not Hero, have been his real enemies. Borachio's confession serves as a simplistic teaching moment for Claudio: "Villains were out to get you, and you fell right into their trap by slandering the chaste lady. In the future, trust Hero."

silence, obedience, and chastity (the triumvirate of female virtues) takes on an active role.[157] Hero's slandering exposes social flaws and hypocrisies, and highlights the contrast between conduct books and reality, but it also paves the way for her to potentially fulfill the conduct book ideal of reformer, teaching Claudio to be a more constant lover and a more *heroic* nobleman (though the extent to which Claudio is truly reformed is uncertain).

Without Don John's nefarious window scene, Claudio may have distrusted her just in the slightest, throughout the course of their relationship; as discussed in Chapter One, Claudio is primed to distrust Hero from the time he first notes her. With Hero supposedly dead and resurrected, Claudio is no longer the know-it-all slanderer. He is her pupil, asking to be taught *if* she will accept him: before Hero unveils, he tells the mystery lady, "I am your husband, if you like of me" (5.4.59). This is quite the contrast from Claudio's earlier comments about Hero, which revolve around whether *he* likes *her* and whether she is worthy of his love.[158] With this "moral teacher" interpretation, *Much Ado* becomes a comedic (and perhaps satirical) treatise on patience in the face of slander: be quiet, ladies, and you too could reform your husband, and in doing so, achieve perfect conduct book femininity!

Hero's slander, feigned death, and resurrection allow her to fulfill her social responsibility as a moral teacher, as she exercises her trifecta of feminine virtues in the midst of tumult and vitriol. Discussing Robert Snawsel's *A Looking-Glasse for Married Folkes* (1631), Murphy observes that "feminine virtue, performed correctly, is shown to have the power to

157. Silence, obedience, and chastity function as a "familiar triad of female virtues," as noted by Jessica C. Murphy in "Feminine Virtue's Network of Influence in Early Modern England," *Studies in Philology*, (vol. 109, no. 3, 1 Apr. 2012), 258.

158. If she has been unchaste, then the answer is a resounding "no."

reform a bad husband into a good one."[159] It is a wife's duty to reform her husband,[160] and thus, Hero becomes even more of a "perfect woman" in the eyes of conduct books by teaching Claudio to read women better and to be, hopefully, a more constant lover. Instead of slandering the entire female sex, forswearing women, and turning "all beauty into thoughts of harm," Claudio may learn to differentiate between the virtuous and the unfaithful, and to trust virtuous women (4.1.107). As a comedy, *Much Ado* inspires in Claudio a regret that breeds moral and psychological advancement through pupilhood, rather than a regret that impels suicide and eternal mourning; unlike Othello, Claudio learns to be a trusting lover without his beloved physically dying and without needing to die himself. The slandering of Hero offers her the role of teacher and reformer, without the prerequisite physical death of tragic heroines.

While Hero speaks animatedly with her fellow women, the text suggests that she lapses into soft-spoken docility in the company of powerful men.[161] In this way, Hero performs feminine virtue to a stereotypical tee; she makes herself legible to an audience primed for scripted femininity. Though Hero may be more comfortable around women, one would be hard-pressed to argue that she is so unaffected by or ignorant of social ideals that it is pure coincidence that she chooses near-silence in male society. Therefore, when staged, a double-performance ensues. The actor playing Hero is performing, and Hero herself is performing — hardly a rare occurrence in Shakespearean plays. Murphy notes that "the display of feminine virtue," as dictated by conduct books, "necessitates performance, even deceitful performance."[162]

---

159. Murphy, 269.

160. Murphy notes that "early modern women were not taught to be unquestioningly obedient, but rather that they had a responsibility to be virtuous, which requires performing submission so that they could reform others" (260).

161. See pages 11-12 and 59 for previous discussion of Hero's quietness in mixed-gender company.

162. Murphy, 263.

Women playing up and acting out their chastity beyond naturalistic bounds is neither socially shameful nor a secret. Onstage, though, Hero's acting fails to deliver its desired result: Claudio perceives her virtuosic performance of chastity as deceit. We may be tempted, then to see double-performance as the threshold at which the veneer of perfect femininity cracks. When a woman attempts to "play purity" using the script of conduct books, within the script of theatre, she is "read" falsely, as a deceiver. Conduct books fail her, and she must resort to the conventions of theatre — of feigned death and veil scenes — to resuscitate her honor. If Hero is playing a double script for maximal purity, then the conduct book script leaves her hopeless and slandered and she must seek redemption through a dramatic script.

However, Hero's slandering and the events thereafter may represent not a moment in which the dramatic script must take over from the conduct book script's failing, but rather a final convergence of the two scripts that imbues Hero with the power of speech. Invoking Robert Greene's prose romance, *Penelope's Web* (1587), Murphy notes that "performing silence makes one a virtuous woman who then is allowed to perform appropriate speech."[163] Hero's performance of chastity builds to a crescendo of exemplary morality (albeit short-lived, as Benedick and Beatrice's kiss steals the spotlight from the Hero-Claudio resolution). By losing her life, Hero gains the right to speak as a moral authority.

Epilogue: Versions of Hero

Hero is unknowable as a character on the page,[164] but her larger plot function as Claudio's reformer can indeed be known. In performance, we see a convergence of Hero's dual identities,

163. Murphy, 277.

164. Returning to Cook, though Hero can certainly be read on the page in a variety of ways, doing so would further objectify her.

as both character and moral teacher. While Hero's "blankness" may seem apparent on the page, it is in no way set in stone onstage. An actor may choose to portray a lively and multifaceted Hero, circumventing Cook's censure of critics who over-characterize Hero as something she is not.

The stage functions as a metamorphic locus at which all characters become, by necessity, more complex (and often more expressive) than the text strictly dictates. Naturally, there are limits to this development and ornamentation of character; for example, an actor would be hard-pressed to justify an Othello who seems disaffected by Desdemona's death. Likewise, a confident, bawdy Hero would ring false to those familiar with the script. However, because Hero is less embellished on the page, actors can interpret her in various ways without straying far from the script. Some portrayals may be more heavily rooted in the script than others, but in contrast to a heroine like Beatrice with lines aplenty and a robust textual characterization, Hero's blankness on the page offers actors more space for flexibility onstage. In this epilogue, I will only scratch the surface of Hero performances, to examine how an actor's portrayal of Hero (and, in connection to Hero, Claudio) may affect other characters', and the audience's, reactions to her. For these brief case studies, I will touch upon Kenneth Branagh's filmed version of *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993), Joss Whedon's film adaptation of the same name (2012), and the video version of Christopher Luscombe's *Much Ado About Nothing*, performed live at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre (2014).

The performance of chastity is already complicated by the fact that chastity itself is a non-action (an abstention from sex) and thus very difficult to act. In non-staged life, a woman's chastity may be proven and preserved by constant surveillance.[165] That constant surveillance

165. Hero is often accompanied by Ursula or Margaret, her waiting women.

crumbles onstage, as space and temporality are inconstant and dangerously flexible. The audience cannot keep track of where female characters are and what they are doing. There may be swaths of time in which we do not see the heroine at all. A ten-minute scene may add up to hours in the world of the play, and if the lady is offstage, she could be engaging in all sorts of unchaste acts in the meantime. Extending Gestalt theory's Law of Closure,[166] we (as humans, actors, and audience members) naturally fill in gaps, including gaps in characterizations, with perceptions and assumptions. We love to imagine characters in various contexts, both in our own world and in the world of the play beyond what is shown onstage.

Actors fill in gaps in the script: they sigh, deliver lines with a smirk, slap their scene partner, rush onstage wringing their hands – and with Shakespeare's lack of stage directions, the list could extend ad infinitum. Actors have free rein. Audiences, too, fill in gaps to develop opinions of and emotional attachments to characters. We as an audience consider characters' trustworthiness and morality. When that gap between text and performance is the question of chastity, we must make an informed decision based on what an actor has displayed onstage: the actor must prove her character's chastity by convincing an audience that her traits are conducive to *non-action* (abstinence from sex) *alway*s. Not only must she present traits that supposedly mark chastity, but she must *not* present any traits that mark *un*chastity – and she must prove to the audience that she is constant and unwavering in this form of "negative selfhood." She would never leave the stage, move to another location within the world of the play, and have sex or

166. Joseph N. Agostino notes that closure has been studied extensively, beyond simple visual reasoning: "Closure has been studied in many areas of psychology including perception and thinking (Agostino, 1980), personality (Angyal, 1948), aesthetics (Hubbell, 1940), problem-solving in apes (Kdhler, 1925/1927), social attitudes (Taylor, 1960), and problem-solving in humans (Wertheimer, 1959). Closure has also been investigated in areas other than psychology, such as poetry (Smith, 1968), music (Meyer, 1956), and sports (Hartgenbusch, 1926/1927). The interest that this gestalt principle has generated suggested that it was neither restricted nor limited in its expression" (Agostino, 304).

otherwise act unchastely. Her character's chastity may be a performance (this is acceptable in Renaissance society), but it is no mask that she may don and dispose of at will. She possesses a constant, chaste selfhood that she may accentuate in public for the benefit of her reputation, but that does not mean that her chastity itself is false; it has just been adorned.

In Kenneth Branagh's film version of *Much Ado*, Kate Beckinsale's Hero is the picture of innocence, gentleness, and unostentatious beauty. Her romance with Claudio (Robert Sean Leonard) is a sweetly natural one of shy glances and youthful, candid smiles. It reads as first love; their verbal communication may be stilted, but it is only out of mutual adoration – they get butterflies when they see each other. Their romance functions as a contrast to that of the more mature and romantically experienced Beatrice and Benedick,[167] who chiefly interact through public jousts of wit.

In the wedding scene, Leonard's Claudio acts more out of immaturity, Findlay argues, than of a cruel lust for revenge: "the cutting of most of his lines makes [his wedding outburst] appear far less calculated. Leonard's Claudio pushes Hero over a bench and furiously pulls down all the wedding decorations, his rage making him seem more immature than malicious."[168] I would argue that Findlay glosses over Claudio's sudden, physical violence towards Hero: he grabs her by her arms, constrains her as she struggles and screams, and catapults her over the bench and onto the ground. In this moment, he does not care whether he injures her; he is focused solely on his reputation. As he rushes down the aisle, he spews anti-Hero vitriol to the wedding attendees. He then, ironically, declares how dearly he loved Hero as he charges towards

---

167. Though both Benedick and Beatrice forswear love (Benedick claims that he will "live a bachelor" and Beatrice declares that she would "rather hear [her] dog bark at a crow, than a man swear he loves me), Branagh's version focuses in on Beatrice's real pain at their romantic past. The camera lingers on Beatrice as she dispiritedly murmurs, "I know you of old" (1.1.125-6, 230, 138).

168. Findlay, 141.

her half-prone form, sword swinging threateningly by his side. He attempts to slap her after declaring that she is "more intemperate in [her] blood / Than Venus" (4.1.58-9). Her sensuality and the simultaneously deific and blasphemous power associated with it must be struck down, literally, by the patriarchal power standing over her.

Claudio's fury at the wedding scene is justified by the staging of the (otherwise-unscripted) window scene, in which Claudio witnesses two figures having sex at Hero's window. Of course, the audience knows that these two figures are actually Margaret and Borachio, but such an explicit scene lends credence to his "brutality" at the wedding; he has seen "Hero" not simply talking to a man, but rather being explicitly unfaithful.[169] If she is the woman at the window, then she has cruelly deceived him, feigning fidelity and chastity. Claudio's outburst, then, may be quite understandable: the Hero he knows in the daytime would never do what he saw "Hero" do at night. Thus, he believes she must be donning a disingenuous mask, seeming like a chaste flower in the daytime but unleashing animalistic instincts at night. Though the audience can still indict Claudio for his abuse of Hero, the staging of the window scene and Claudio's immaturity at the wedding paint a portrait of a naïve lover, a victim of a villainous scheme. The "close-up on Claudio's face," Findlay notes, "engages the audience's sympathy with a shattering of innocence."[170] Hero may be a sympathetic innocent, but so is Claudio; he is simply an innocent imbued with the social power to destroy a fellow innocent. Claudio may be exaggerating the role of "wronged lover" for the wedding-goers' benefit, but truth rings through his voice. Leonard's Claudio is prone to toddler-like outbursts, but they are just that: outbursts. It is tempting, then, to forgive him despite his physical and verbal cruelty towards Hero.

---

169. Findlay, 141.

170. Findlay, 140.

Beckinsale's Hero transitions from joyous to shocked to terrified to righteously angry as Claudio's performance unfolds. Yet her face – the very object of "seeming" that supposedly torments Claudio – is largely obscured during this scene: once Claudio has thrown her to the ground, she lays there, half-prone, surrounded by her female friends (all dressed in white) and Antonio, while the camera focuses on Claudio and Leonato. When Claudio returns to flip the bench, she shrieks in anguish, but her face is only in profile. Beatrice (Emma Thompson) physically towers over Hero, drawing the audience's eye away from her cowering form. We finally get a glimpse of Hero's full face as she sobs out a refutation: "And seemed I ever otherwise to you?" (4.1.54). Her face is contorted in pain, and her voice cracks on "you," motivating a shift in Claudio's emotionality. He transitions from viciously accusatory to nearly weeping himself as he describes her outward purity, but then he appears to recall her crime and advances again on her for the slap. Her apparent, sincere pain gives Claudio pause, which only heightens his fury when he remembers that she is an excellent actress (as the window scene has supposedly "proven," in Claudio's eyes) and all the pain in her countenance could be feigned – a terrifying prospect for a man who cannot contain his own emotions.

Hero's supposedly dichotomous "seeming" and being threaten Claudio's conception of reality. By the time that Claudio asks "what man" she spoke with between "twelve and one," Hero's voice is ragged (4.1.83, 84). Violently sobbing, she insists that she talked with "no man at that hour" (4.1.86). When Don Pedro substantiates Claudio's claims, she collapses into hysterics, head upturned toward the heavens, eyes squeezed shut, as Beatrice attempts to comfort her. When Don Pedro reports that the ruffian who talked with her has "confessed the vile encounters they have had / A thousand times in secret," Hero lets out a final wail and faints, head still tilted upward (4.1.93-4). Another, powerful man has turned against her. In fainting, she develops a

shocking rigor mortis, her throat completely exposed, head thrown back at an unnatural angle. In the midst of the auditory tumult, this scene is stomach-turning to watch; she looks and sounds like a helpless, dying animal.

Beckinsale's Hero attempts to perform purity through tears, through pained expressions and sobs, and by falling into a physical position of submissiveness. She crafts a metaphorical self-portrait of complete helplessness and potential death. Her vocalizations punctuate this scene in an unsettling manner: her shrieks, sobs, and whimpers, combined with the swirling music and Claudio's overlaid diatribe, coalesce into a claustrophobic sensory experience. In the collapse of the moment, we as an audience, like Claudio, struggle with discriminating between background noise and crucial information, deciding who to listen to, and choosing who deserves our sympathy.

Upon seeing Hero faint, Claudio rushes forwards, presumably to resuscitate her, but Don John (Keanu Reeves) physically restrains and shakes him, forcefully declaring, "Come, let us go; these things come thus to light / Smother her spirits up" (4.1.111-112). He punctuates "smother" with a merciless glance towards Hero; she deserves to die for her crimes. In this cinematic medium, the audience cannot see exactly how Claudio reacts to Don John's aggressive argument (whereas in a staged performance, the audience is imbued with an agency to look where they choose, beyond the confines of the camera lens), but we may assume that he has been swayed. He shifts his intention from "rescuing Hero" to "leaving the wedding" in a matter of seconds. Perhaps he decided he can do no good, and his presence will only further upset Beatrice and the wedding party, or perhaps he decided that Don John's assessment was correct: Hero deserved death for her dishonor. In the next shot, we see Claudio striding up the aisle away from Hero,

leading Don Pedro and Don John, who flank him. He glances backwards once but does not break his stride.

In the unveiling scene, Beckinsale's Hero looks the picture of purity. Tears gently wend their way down her face the moment that she unveils. Orchestral music swells around her. She speaks softly, seemingly overcome with joy and relief that the slandering saga has come to a close. Claudio, for his part, appears highly repentant. He kneels at the veiled mystery woman's feet as he presents himself as her husband, lowering his physical status for this new wife in an inversion of the slandering scene. He will not let his insecurities or pride again persuade him to distrust a chaste lady; he has been humbled. When Hero reveals her face, Claudio audibly gasps in delight and awe. The moment that she proclaims, "I am a maid," he embraces her passionately but remains kneeling. He weeps as she caresses his head and looks down at him, as though she is taking pity on a foolish child. She nods down to him, seemingly giving him permission to rise (both physically and from the depths of his humiliation), and he does so. They embrace, with the camera first displaying Hero's ecstatic smile and then shifting to that of Claudio. The lovers appear perfectly fused. After embracing, they smile into each other's eyes as the onlookers cheer wildly. There is no hint of a "mariage de convenance" in this scene.[171] Hero and Claudio are passionate, sweetly sentimental lovers. Claudio is reformed. Beckinsale and Leonard's fresh, youthful portrayals of Hero and Claudio, coupled with their adoration-filled "first love" romance inspires audience sympathy for the two characters. They seem well matched and indeed almost interchangeable in their characterizations. Even their faces resemble one another. They are

171. Charles Prouty argues that Hero and Claudio's marriage is one of convenience, and thus it is unrealistic to judge Claudio and Hero's relationship through a romantic lens. The actors playing Hero and Claudio may easily depict a more romantic connection onstage.

young, sweetly naïve, and utterly enamored with one another. It would be difficult for an audience to dislike either of them.

The coupling of Jillian Morgese's Hero and Fran Kranz's Claudio in Whedon's *Much Ado* appears genuinely romantic as well, albeit less so, as the lovers are older and seem less impassioned. Kranz's Claudio does not kneel before the veiled lady, but he does stand on a step below her, humbling himself as he lowers his eyes to the ground. When Hero unveils, Claudio gasps in amazement and joy, and when she declares that she is "a maid," he bows his head to her breast and only raises it when she moves to caress his face with her hand. As Claudio took command of the slander scene, she gently controls the forgiveness scene. Hero is the benefactress in this moment, granting mercy. Morgese's Hero is less tearful and more confident than Beckinsale's Hero, but she still speaks tenderly. This couple smiles less than in Branagh's version, as Claudio's love appears more solemnly reverential than joyously youthful, and Hero appears more maturely dignified than tearfully emotional. Nonetheless, they present as deeply enamored and emotionally intertwined. Claudio's solemn worship of Hero and physical humbling of himself offers the audience a clear sense that he regrets his failure as a lover and is now reformed. He will offer himself up to Hero like a sacrifice to a powerful, chaste goddess.

In Christopher Luscombe's *Much Ado About Nothing*, live from Stratford-upon-Avon (2014), a very different Hero and Claudio emerge. Flora Spencer-Longhurst's Hero is older, more voluble, confidently expressive, and self-affirming; she is less of an ingénue and more of a graceful, fully formed lady who knows how to navigate society. In contrast, Tunji Kasim's Claudio appears young, earnest to a fault, entirely unsure of what to do with his emotions, and desperate for validation of said emotions. Dressed in his soldier's uniform, he appears adept on the battlefield and clueless in mixed-gender society. Unlike Leonard and Kranz's Claudios,

Kasim's Claudio appears hardly repentant and does not stoop to Hero (he appears to stand slightly above her) in the unveiling scene. For her part, Spencer-Longhurst's Hero is less gracefully forgiving than the other Heros in the unveiling scene. She speaks clearly and forcefully, adamantly expressing that "when I lived I was your other wife" (5.4.60). She may not be condemning Claudio for his slander, but she certainly is not welcoming him back with open arms. Her tone is reprehensive and indignant; she needs him to accept his part in her destruction before she can love him again. Claudio, instead of embracing her as the aforementioned Claudios do, hastens backwards, away from her, shocked by her supposed ghost. After she makes her case for her maidenhood, a dazed Claudio steps towards her. She extends her hand, and after a moment he sees it and takes hold of it. The interaction lacks youthful joy; though their relationship does not appear to be a passionless "mariage de convenance," it does seem that the unexpressive Claudio has failed to grasp the disastrous ramifications of his distrust in love. Though a broad study of many *Much Ado* performances would be necessary to determine whether there is a correlation between less outwardly forgiving Heros and unrepentant Claudios, such a study could potentially underscore conduct book ideals of purity played out onstage. If soft-spoken, forgiving Heros are treated to repentant, worshipful Claudios, while livelier, less forgiving Heros are paired with unrepentant Claudios, perhaps another convergence between conduct book and dramatic scripts may be discerned. If wittier, louder Heros are generally punished onstage in their concluding moments, then conduct book ideals may have a metatheatrical say onstage, after all.

None of these performances are authoritative versions of *Much Ado*. However, by analyzing multiple skillful actors' interpretations of Hero, it becomes clear that Hero's

"blankness produces marking,"[172] not only by male characters and literary critics but also by actors and audience members. By reading Hero onstage rather than solely textually, we may perceive not a simple "chaste lady" stereotype but a multifaceted woman with a social life, familial expectations, and emotional interiority, struggling not simply to perform chastity but to sustain a relationship that feels too good to be true. Hero textually may be lifeless. She may be forgotten, overshadowed by Beatrice, left unconsidered. Onstage, Hero at least has a *chance* to come alive.

172. Cook, 85.

Bibliography

Agostino, Joseph N. "Closure as it Relates to Perception, Thinking, and Problem-Solving Tasks." *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, vol. 76, no. 3/4, (1 Jul. 2019): 302-312.

Alfar, Cristina León. *Women and Shakespeare's Cuckoldry Plays: Shifting Narratives of Marital Betrayal*. London: Routledge, 2017.

Anger, Jane. *Jane Anger Her Protection for Women*. London, 1589.

Becon, Thomas. Excerpt from *The Book of Matrimony*. In *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, ed. Kate Aughterson. London: Routledge, 1995. 110-3.

Brathwait, Richard. Excerpt from *The English Gentlewoman*. In *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, ed. Kate Aughterson. London: Routledge, 1995. 84-5.

———. *The English Gentleman*. London, 1633.

Cary, Elizabeth. *The Tragedy of Mariam*. Ed. Stephanie J. Wright. Keele: Keele University Press, 1996.

Castiglione, Baldassare. Excerpt from *The Courtier*. In *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, ed. Kate Aughterson. London: Routledge, 1995. 232-3.

Cavell, Steven. "Recounting Gains, Showing Losses: A Reading of *The Winter's Tale*." *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Chalk, Brian. "Webster's 'Worthyest Monument': The Problem of Posterity in *The Duchess of Malfi*." *Studies in Philology* 108, no. 3 (2011): 379-402.

"Christopher Luscombe 2014 Production: *Much Ado About Nothing*." Royal Shakespeare Company. Arts Council England, 2021. https://www.rsc.org.uk/much-ado-about-nothing/past-productions/christopher-luscombe-2014-production.

Cleaver, Robert and John Dod. Excerpt from *A Godly Form of Household Government*. In *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, ed. Kate Aughterson. London: Routledge, 1995. 79-82.

Collington, Philip D. "'Stuffed with All Honourable Virtues': *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Book of the Courtier*." *Studies in Philology*, vol. 103, no. 3 (1 Jun. 2006): 281-312.

Cook, Carol. "'The Sign and Semblance of Her Honor': Reading Gender Difference in *Much Ado about Nothing*," *Shakespeare and Gender: A History*, ed. Deborah E. Barker and Ivo Kamps. London: Verso, 1995. 75-103.

Findlay, Allison. *The Shakespeare Handbooks: Much Ado About Nothing*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

French, Marilyn. *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*. New York: Summit Books, 1981.

Furnivall, F. J. 'Introduction' to *The Leopold Shakespeare*. London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1877.

Gouge, William. *Of Domesticall Duties*. London, 1622.

Harbage, Alfred. *As They Liked It: An Essay on Shakespeare and Mortality*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947.

Johnson, Bonnie Lander. *Chastity in Early Stuart Literature and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Luckyj, Christina. *"A Moving Rhetoricke": Gender and Silence in Early Modern England*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002.

———. "'A Moving Rhetoricke': Women's Silences and Renaissance Texts." *Renaissance Drama*, New Series, 24 (1993): 33-56, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41917294.

Lyly, John. *The Anatomy of Wit*. London, 1578.

Maguire, Laurie. 'Virginity Tests', *The Oxford Companion to the Body*. Ed. Colin Blakemore and Sheila Jennett. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 713–4.

[Middleton, Thomas?]. *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Ed. Brian Gibbons. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967.

Middleton, Thomas, and William Rowley. *The Changeling*. Ed. Matthew W. Black. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966.

Milton, John. *Comus: A Masque*. London: printed for T. Lowndes; T. Caslon; and W. Nicoll, 1774.

Much Ado About Nothing. Directed by Joss Whedon. Lionsgate, 2012. 1 hr., 48 min.

Much Ado About Nothing. Directed by Kenneth Branagh. Burbank, CA: Columbia Tristar Home Video, 1993. 1 hr., 50 min. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vtBsKPokHs.

Much Ado About Nothing. Directed by Stuart Burge. London: BBC Enterprises, 1984. 2 hr., 27 min.

Much Ado About Nothing. Directed by Robin Lough. Stratford-upon-Avon: Royal Shakespeare Company, 2014. 2 hr., 25 min. https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/much-ado-about-nothing-4.

Murphy, Jessica C. "Feminine Virtue's Network of Influence in Early Modern England." *Studies in Philology*, vol. 109, no. 3, (1 Apr. 2012), 258-278.

Oxford English Dictionary. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Prouty, Charles T. *The Sources of Much Ado About Nothing: A Critical Study*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.

Rich, Barnabe. Excerpt from *My Lady's Looking Glass*. In *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, ed. Kate Aughterson. London: Routledge, 1995. 95-6.

Schalkwyk, David. "'A Lady's 'Verily' Is as Potent as a Lord's': Women, Word and Witchcraft in *The Winter's Tale*." *English Literary Renaissance*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1992): 242–272, www.jstor.org/stable/43447394.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006.

Shakespeare, William. *Much Ado About Nothing*. Ed. Claire McEachern. London: Arden Shakespeare 3, 2016.

Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. Ed. E. A. J. Honigmann. London: Arden Shakespeare 3, 2004.

Shakespeare, William. *The Rape of Lucrece*. Ed. J.W. Lever. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981.

Shakespeare, William. *The Winter's Tale*. Ed. Stephen Orgel. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Smith, Emma and Garrett A. Jr. Sullivan, *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Smith, Henry. Excerpt from *A Preparative to Marriage*. In *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, ed. Kate Aughterson. London: Routledge, 1995. 82-3.

Stallybrass, Peter. "Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed." In *Othello: Critical Essays*, ed. Susan Snyder. London: Routledge, 2015. 251-77.

———. "Reading the Body: *The Revenger's Tragedy* and the Jacobean Theater of Consumption." *Renaissance Drama*, vol. 18 (1 Jan. 1987): 121-148.

Thompson, Anne and Sasha Roberts (eds.), *Women Reading Shakespeare* 1660-1900: *An Anthology of Criticism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.

Valerie Traub, "Jewels, Statues, and Corpses: Containment of Female Erotic Power in Shakespeare's Plays." *Shakespeare and Gender: A History*. Ed. Deborah E. Barker and Ivo Kamps. London: Verso, 1995. 120-141.

Vives, Juan Luis. Excerpt of *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*. In *Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook*, ed. Kate Aughterson. London: Routledge, 1995. 69-74.

Webster, John. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Ed. Brian Gibbons. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.

———. *The White Devil*. Ed. Clive Hart. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970.

Wells, Jane. "The Counterfeit Trap in Shakespeare's Comedies: *Twelfth Night*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*." *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium*, vol. 18 (1Jul. 2018), 66-93.