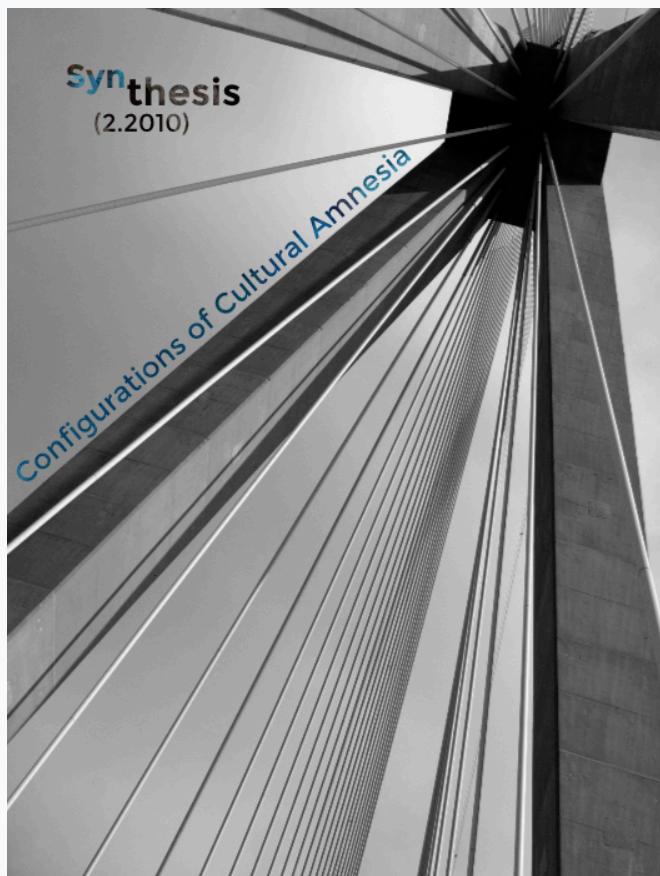


Synthesis: an Anglophone Journal of Comparative Literary Studies

Ap. 2 (2010)

Configurations of Cultural Amnesia



**“Though it be not written down, yet forget not”:
Cultural Amnesia in Shakespeare’s Much Ado About
Nothing**

Alison Findlay

doi: [10.12681/syn.16486](https://doi.org/10.12681/syn.16486)

Copyright © 2010, Alison Findlay



Άδεια χρήσης [Creative Commons Αναφορά 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

“Though it be not written down, yet forget not”: Cultural Amnesia in Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*

Alison Findlay

In Act 5 Scene 1 of Shakespeare’s play, Hero’s father and uncle seem to suffer a curious amnesia: apparently forgetting that she is not really dead in their vehement challenges to Claudio and Don Pedro whose slanders have shamed her. Leonato tells Claudio,

I say thou has belied mine innocent child!
Thy slander hath gone through and through her heart,
And she lies buried with her ancestors—
O, in a tomb where scandal never slept,
Save this of her, fram’d by thy villainy. (5.1.67-71)¹

Antonio adds, “God knows I lov’d my niece, / And she is dead, slander’d to death by villains” (5.1.87-88). Although one could read this as clever acting by the two old men, designed to carry forward the Friar’s plot, their passion suggests that they feel Hero’s metaphorical death in real terms. Their grief is determined by a readiness to forget the innocent Hero they have both known since her birth and to indulge instead their deepest anxieties about a female sexuality that cannot be controlled by fathers or husbands. This moment is characteristic of a much wider cultural amnesia about Hero and about women that the play explores: as a form of misogyny, as an expression of shame, and as a form of theatrical practice.

At the level of action, the success of Don John’s plot relies precisely on the wilful determination of Claudio and Don Pedro to forget all Hero’s previously modest conduct in favour of the dubious evidence of a single, brief encounter: the appearance of Margaret in Hero’s clothes and at her window to woo Borachio. Claudio’s reaction has been prepared for by the masked ball at which he is all too ready to forget Hero and Don Pedro’s love for him in a mistaken belief that Don Pedro has wooed Hero for himself.

The highly-stylised ritual of masking involves playful forms of culturally-sanctioned amnesia where the identity of a partner can be forgotten, ignored, and misrecognised by dancers with greater or lesser degrees of agency. The scene demonstrates that even such managed, localised forms of ‘forgetting’ have the potential to create tragic as well as comic effects. Claudio, listening “in the name of Benedick” is quick to misread Don Pedro’s proxy wooing and Hero’s response, believing that “beauty is a witch / Against whose charms faith melteth into blood” (2.1.172 and 179-80).

Alan Brissenden cleverly noted that the units of dialogue in the dance section of Act 2 Scene 1 are matched to the movements of actors traversing the space in the formal pattern of a pavan (49-50).² Here, the dancers’ bodies move in a pattern of advance and retreat whose turns back and forth kinesthetically represent turns in the conversation. The pavan is a dance of poise in which the partners’ movements are symmetrical. Physical balance reflects the delicate status balance in courtship where the subservient female is temporarily elevated as a mistress and the man ceremonially adopts a lower-status position as suitor. Don Pedro claims he has masked his superiority like Jove in Baucis and Philemon’s house. Hero, perhaps emboldened by the mask she wears, tartly tells him she may walk away when she pleases and turns in step with the dance (2.1.89-92).

Beatrice and Benedick use their masks as an additional form of ceremonial protection from behind which they can freely demonstrate their fascination with each other and simultaneously shame each other in order to maintain an illusion of high status (2.1.125-54). Benedick intrigues Beatrice by refusing information:

Beatrice: Will you not tell me who told you so?
Benedick: No, you shall pardon me.
Beatrice: Nor will you not tell me who you are?
Benedick: Not now.
Beatrice: That I was disdainful, and that I had my
good wit out of "The Hundred Merry Tales": - well,

Alison Findlay, "Though it be not written down, yet forget not":

this was Signor Benedick that said so. (2.1.125-31)

Benedick's wilful amnesia, his refusal to name himself as author of the insult, forces Beatrice to name him and admit her interest in him. She responds by assuming a common cultural memory about the *The Hundred Merry Tales* in order to simultaneously remember and dismiss the insult in a gesture that attributes its outdated jokes to Benedick rather than herself. In order to make the comparison, Benedick must know the jest book and his opinions are therefore also outdated. The following exchange shows that masking allows Beatrice and Benedick to risk elements of self-revelation, including emotional revelations, even as they insult each other. Following the theme of comic repartee, Benedick asks Beatrice's opinion of him:

Beatrice: Did he never make you laugh?

Benedick: I pray you, what is he?

Beatrice: Why he is the Prince's jester, a very dull

fool, only his gift is, in devising impossible slanders.

None but libertines delight in him, and the commendation

is not in his wit, but in his villainy,

for he both pleases men and angers them, and then

they laugh at him, and beat him. I am sure he is in the

fleet; I would he had boarded me. (2.1.135-43)

Masks allow Beatrice to tell Benedick the truth about the cruelty of his wit, its dangers, and its male-centred focus. The "impossible slanders" he devises against women transfer to Claudio in the play. At the same time, Beatrice can openly confess her longing that Benedick "had boarded me," the innuendo plainly admitting her desire for him.

The dance displaces and thus highlights socially threatening forms of sexism but simultaneously creates an illusion of equality in which gender and class differences are suspended or deliberately forgotten. The masked ball affords literally no face-to-face encounters: male characters, no less than females, are recognisable only by an alienated voice (detached from the face as guarantee of authorship), by stance, and by costume. The 'sacred' identities of Benedick, Don Pedro, Balthasar and Antonio are culturally dis-figured by the masks, creating a parallel with the female characters represented by boy actors. Even the evidence of the body is equivocal. When Antonio pretends that he is counterfeiting himself, Ursula tells him, "You could never do him so ill-well, unless you were the very man: here's his dry hand up and down. You are he, you are he" (2.1.115-19). Whatever the age of the actor playing Antonio, the verbal exchange renders corporeal evidence at once conclusive and suspect, as though to prepare the audience for the later events surrounding Hero's supposed infidelity.

The betrothal, wedding and mourning ceremonies that follow are extended sequences of symbolic action, different from interpersonal rituals like greeting and parting or even dancing. They are self-consciously framed as highly-charged events that are not enacted by the participants every day. The gaps that open up in the play's formal ceremonies are crux points at which the construction of identity is exposed. Ceremony exists on the surface and in the immediate moment of enactment. Like Austin's speech-act, its full meaning is constituted by the diverse surface elements of which it is made: the form of words spoken, the specific gestures enacted, the textiles and objects that are used. Precise spatial dynamics are also essential to ceremony: the spaces between bodies enact kinesthetically a specific relationship between the participants, such as the distance between a man and woman before and after a betrothal. How those enacting the ceremony and participating as witnesses or spectators traverse that space is also important. A man walking through a congregation to present the hand of his daughter to the groom enacts a communal witness and acknowledgement of her transfer from father to husband which is finalised in the gesture of handing her over. The place in which all these elements congregate—whether a great hall, a garden, a presence chamber, a church—makes its own contribution. All these material elements, each with their own particular cultural resonance, are orchestrated according to a set pattern or form in order to constitute a ceremony. The coordination of diverse elements for an event weighted with emotional and cultural significance inevitably produces tensions.

Alison Findlay, "Though it be not written down, yet forget not":

The stilted betrothal ceremony of Hero and Claudio emphasises the formality of gesture and response, and draws attention to the element of risk. Claudio's mistaken jealousy is blazoned in his sulky appearance, having risked wooing Hero only to be ousted in favour of Don Pedro, as he thinks. His interest in Hero (whether financial, romantic or both), remains and produces intense feelings of shame. Claudio refuses to risk a further expression of his interest: Leonato's gesture in offering his daughter is met only with silence until Beatrice prompts Claudio to speak (2.1.302-305). When Claudio does take the risk of offering himself, another awkward moment follows: his words "I give away myself for you and dote on the exchange" (2.1.308-309) are met with silence from Hero. Beatrice retrieves him from the brink of intensified shame by prompting Hero to seal the bargain with words or a kiss (2.1.310-11). The silence and the spaces between Hero and Claudio's bodies and affections in this first rite of passage are more than a superficial embarrassment. They initiate a pattern in which ceremonial practice is desecrated.

How and why do ceremonies work? When Henry V tries to empty out "thrice-gorgeous ceremony" as an "idol" (*Henry V*, 4.1.240-47), he realises that, far from being empty terms, such superficial structures order our existence. Henry recognises "the deep value of surfaces," to borrow a term from the philosopher of aesthetics, Richard Shusterman (1). Shusterman's theories help to explain how the representations of ceremony might have worked in performances of *Much Ado*. He argues that a surface—for example, a wedding or a mourning ceremony—is experienced as a unique event in space and time by the participants. Aesthetic naturalism, following Nietzsche, sees the ceremony as a specialised framework through which a sublime moment of presence, the fullness of expression meeting deep human needs, can be briefly realised. However, a ceremony is, by its very nature, a repeated event. Historicist aesthetics proposes that the surface elements of ceremony are constituted by the socio-historical institutional settings; that ceremony reaches beyond the site of enactment to a world elsewhere—a wider community across time and space and, in some cases, to a spiritual entity. A ceremony is thus something of a paradox. The surface is immediate but it invokes the presence of depth—emotionally, spiritually, and historically via the weight of tradition. Shusterman uses the metaphor of dramatisation to reconcile the opposites of surface immediacy and historical contextualism. By marking off an event or object from its immediate context, the artistic frame of the ceremony, like the performance, intensifies its emotional and sensuous immediacy and simultaneously demarcates it as a particular cultural site in a larger socio-historical framework (Shusterman 231-34). Paradoxically, only because it is scripted and inscribed within a tradition and marked off as such, can it offer participants the freedom to access a more intense, immediate experience of human vitality and presence.

A ceremony on stage, however, is not a real ceremony but a fictional representation of an already framed act. It is thus doubly framed. How do we read such surfaces? They are obviously still spectacular events but do they carry any of the emotional, spiritual and historical charge of their originals when reproduced on stage? According to Shusterman, dramatisation should amplify the experience. Drama's power, he argues, derives from its ability to intensify "our passionate involvement by removing other inhibitions to lived intensity"; its artistic form provides "an indirect route to appreciate the real far more fully or profoundly" by engaging us with a reality "far greater in its experiential depths of vivid feeling" (237). Does staging a ceremony create one meta-theatrical frame too many and dilute or evacuate drama's power to engage spectators in an intensely heightened experience? Critical studies have explored how theatre 'empties out' rituals and ceremonies of power, but it has also been argued that objects re-presented on stage can function as the materials of memory—carrying traces of their former existence that resonate with the actors and audiences who use or view them in their new theatrical context.³ I propose that ceremonies in Shakespeare work in this way: that the surface forms enacted on the stage retain a power like their originals to invoke deep cultural, emotional, and spiritual resonances for those present. The familiarity of the ceremonial script at such moments creates a diffusion of the individual character, actor or spectator into the communally shared event. Actors or audiences engage via their own anticipated or enacted experiences of these rituals. Such superficial moments in Shakespearean drama are thus specially

Alison Findlay, "Though it be not written down, yet forget not":

'charged' for the temporary community created by the performance. We cannot read the effects for spectator or actor, each of whom has "that within which passes show" (*Hamlet* 1.2.85). However, by paying close attention to the superficial, we can profitably speculate on how the orchestration of immediate circumstances might be the occasion for bringing forth deep effects. By conducting a close reading of the desecrated wedding and the events which follow in *Much Ado*, we can see that ceremonies serve as a means of awakening characters and audiences from their cultural amnesia about women. Furthermore, ceremonies provide a means to communally acknowledge the shame of abusing a feeling human being by treating her as a piece of property.

Hero's supposed infidelity threatens to shame both Claudio and Don Pedro. The thesis that sharing shame is a means to overcome the isolation it brings is amply demonstrated on stage by their responses to the slander of Hero.⁴ They approach the false scenario at Hero's window with a determination to mitigate their own loss of honour by angrily deflecting shame onto Hero:

Claudio: If I see anything to-night why I should
not marry her, to-morrow in the congregation,
where I should wed, there will I shame her.
D. Pedro: And as I woo'd for thee to obtain her,
I will join with thee to disgrace her. (3.2.123-27)

In their anger, both men feel an urgent need to avenge the slight to their own self-image. The only face-saving device they can envisage is to utterly destroy Hero's reputation in the most public way possible. Indeed, the staged wedding ceremony is a highly-charged event. A ceremony on stage is not a 'real' ceremony and some critics have argued that the representation of a ritual on stage empties out the significance of the original. However, I would argue that, for spectators and actors alike, traces of the emotional and cultural significance of a wedding ceremony still operate in the play. Far from being a moment of cultural amnesia, the staged wedding invokes the participants' own cultural memories of weddings; their anticipated or enacted experiences of a highly significant ritual. Claudio's shaming of Hero in a deliberate desecration of the ceremony is all the more shocking because it is anticipated from the first moment of the scene. As the actors enter in the appropriate vestments, take their proper positions, begin to pronounce the "plain form of marriage" (4.1.1-2), and enact the physical handing over of the bride, spectators engage with each element in the knowledge of its imminent collapse. This provokes, I would suggest, shared feelings of shame: shame about the desecration of ceremony and about the misrepresentation of women.

Claudio's anger at having been shamed by the supposed deception produces a blind spot, an amnesia that prevents him from reading Hero as she is and forces him to reject her as an illusion:

She's but the sign and semblance of her honor:
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. (4.1.34-42)

Claudio's accusation gathers speed and emotional weight like a snowball, dragging other characters and spectators into its track as the scene unfolds. Forgetfulness escalates, via a culture of misogynist anxiety, to Hero's father and her uncle. Presuming, like Hamlet, that woman is frail, they spontaneously assume Hero is guilty. When Hero collapses and her accusers leave the stage, the other characters are left to choose between maintaining belief in their memories of the honest Hero or relinquishing them in response to a newly-revealed licentious, deceptive Hero. Only Beatrice and the

Alison Findlay, "Though it be not written down, yet forget not":

Friar immediately attempt to revive the apparently lifeless corpse of the chaste Hero of the past. In contrast, her own father bids her

Do not live, Hero, do not ope thine eyes;
For, did I think thou would'st not quickly die,
Thought I thy spirits were stronger than thy shames,
Myself would, on the rearward of reproaches,
Strike at thy life. (4.1.123-27)

From this point onwards, the play stages a deadly conjunction between amnesia and shame: Hero is trapped in a loop where shame provokes more shame at feeling ashamed and leads to silence and withdrawal; she literally withdraws from the scene by collapsing motionless. Once misrepresented in Claudio's words, she vanishes, banished to *lethe*, under the protection of the Friar. She remains an absent presence that troubles the mind's eye and can only be rescued by the wishes of others to recall her from oblivion.

Claudio and the other characters are trapped in a more aggressive loop: he masks the shame of supposed betrayal with anger and, after Hero is reported dead, he is ashamed at being angry, and thus falls back again to guilt. Like Claudio, Benedick and Beatrice, Leonato and Antonio and Don Pedro all mask their shame at what has happened to Hero in the church (and their complicity in failing to stop it) with anger. Beatrice and Benedick's love for each other is put under erasure by what has happened to Hero. Beatrice unsurprisingly wishes to "fight with mine enemy," but her demand to "Kill Claudio" is shocking in its destructive passion (4.1.289, 299). Benedick, in turn, challenges Claudio to fight to the death since he is "a villain" who has "kill'd a sweet lady" (5.1.145-49). The old men Leonato and Antonio are animated with a furious anger against Don Pedro and Claudio that is often comically exaggerated in productions. Spectators are caught up in the play's destructive loop of shame, anger and revenge. By virtue of their presence in the theatre as a temporary community (or congregation), actors and spectators are interpellated as participants in the ceremony, and as witnesses to this doubly-framed event. In accusing the constructed figure beside him of being only a "show of truth" (4.1.35), Claudio engages spectators in the shaming process that the accusation of Hero brings to the fore. The shame of the blush which spectators are invited to notice is, in fact, designed to include them in a shared guiltiness about their complicity with events on stage.

As so often, the clown Dogberry accidentally hits on an escape route from potentially tragic entrapment. By insisting that everyone "remember that I am an ass; though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass" (4.2.76-78), he inadvertently emphasises the importance of acknowledging shame. The tomb scene at which Claudio remembers Hero's virtue and his own villainy is a symbolic means to transform the unacknowledged shame that is socially divisive into a shared guilt about how she has been misrepresented and abused. As Thomas J. Scheff points out, "Acknowledged shame...could be the glue that holds relationships and societies together and unacknowledged shame the force that tears them apart" (98). The turn towards remembering effectively explains the twist of the play's plot to the comic ending. The staged mourning at Leonato's monument provides an apparently superficial mechanism to free Claudio from the shame/anger loop, by publicly remembering Hero's virtues and acknowledging his own mistake in a ceremony. However, its significance spreads far beyond the superficial redemption of a single, rather unsympathetic character.

The shared mourning ceremony is, for all its brevity, an important social device for transforming unacknowledged shame and anger found in Messina's on-stage society and in the temporary community of the audience. Immediately after the debacle, spectators probably mask their own shame to share the vengeful, anti-social desire to "Kill Claudio" (4.1.289). By 'witnessing' the mourning ceremony in the active, participatory sense alongside Claudio, spectators are offered the opportunity to acknowledge their own complicity in the aggressive, exclusive hegemony that appears to grant women no agency. All should be ashamed of a culture in which a woman can be misrepresented and

Alison Findlay, "Though it be not written down, yet forget not":

destroyed on her wedding day. The memorial epitaph to Hero which is read out at the monument represents the cure for misogynist cultural amnesia in this play:

Done to death by slanderous tongues
Was the Hero that here lies.
Death, in guerdon of her wrongs,
Gives her fame which never dies.
So the life that died with shame
Lives in death with glorious fame. (5.3.3-8)

Claudio hangs up the epitaph as a lasting memorial "praising her when I am dumb" (5.3.10). This and his vow to repeat the rite annually is a means to prevent a slip back into the cultural amnesia that caused the supposed tragedy. It reminds off-stage participants of the need to maintain their faith in the "glorious fame" of women in the context of early modern anti-feminist discourse.

Cultural amnesia operates at a much more practical level in early modern productions of *Much Ado* where the misrepresentation of Hero in the church is characteristic of a universal mis-representation of women on the English stage by young male actors. The final part of my article argues that, at some key points, the play self-consciously acknowledges its own theatrical amnesia in denying women the space to represent themselves. *Much Ado About Nothing* registers its own exclusive male constructions of woman. In *Enter the Body* Carol Rutter wisely reminds us of the power of playing conventions to normalise the effect of boys acting female roles:

The English stage didn't "take" boys for women any more than it "took" commoners for aristocrats or Richard Burbage for Henry V. It did "take" players for the parts they played: that is, Elizabethan spectators, understanding actors as professionals whose business was role play, read the role played, not the player beneath the role (xiv).

I share the view that cross-cast performance of female roles normally worked as an unremarkable stage convention. The boy actor can be read as a metaphor: an indispensable tool or semantic map for presenting female identity. When Beatrice tells Benedick, "I cannot be a man with wishing; therefore I will die a woman with grieving" (4.1.321-22), for example, her female identity is unequivocal, absolute, even though the words are literally absurd in the mouth of a boy. The boy actor is thus simultaneously a dead metaphor—entering theatrical discourse as a normal literal expression—and literally absurd: what sociologist Phil Manning calls a "category error" (79).

Much Ado does not feature character cross-dressing, a theatrical game that explicitly energises the spaces between those two conflicting perceptions. Nevertheless, I want to argue that the boy-as-woman retains the nervous theatrical energy of a live metaphor, something that does not quite fit, that is always at risk and, because of its strangeness, has the potential to lead to different understandings of gendered identity. The play is obsessed with the deceptive nature of surfaces—especially clothes—and sets a keen critical lens on the virtual representation of woman on stage. Benedick pointedly warns his friends in the opening scene, "the body of your discourse is sometime guarded with fragments, and the guards [decorations] are but slightly basted on, neither" (1.1.285-87). As these words suggest, the play's deconstruction of sartorial codes is actually a comprehensive *exposé* of superficial appearances.⁵ *Much Ado* explores an extremely fragile construction of woman: the boy actor's pieces of costume are 'basted' or loosely tacked-on to the body, leaving gaps in between.

On the early modern stage, the boy actor's physical signifiers—his voice, stance and gestures—in curtseying or moving towards or away from the other actor are complemented by elements of costume—a petticoat, kirtle, 'bodies' or bodices, sleeves, accessories such as shoes and gloves, and head attire (a coif or a caule, probably including prosthetic hair and other decorations). Carefully orchestrated in coordination with the unequivocal verbal signifiers, these material elements established a tangible but paradoxically virtual female identity on stage. The preparations for the wedding and the broken ceremony in Act 4 Scene 1 bring to a crisis the tensions in representing female identity. It is important that Margaret impersonates Hero at her window by wearing her costume (3.3.144-48 and 5.1.237-38). Margaret's interest in the wedding clothes in the following scene implicitly suggests that she was practising "how to bride it" (*The Taming of the Shrew* 3.2.251) in Hero's absence, even if the hair on the headdress didn't quite match her own (3.4.13-14).

Alison Findlay, “Though it be not written down, yet forget not”:

Margaret’s willingness to participate in the scheme without intending to hurt her mistress can be explained by the appeal of the persona signified by Hero’s name. The Hero of classical mythology, a priestess of Aphrodite who lived in a tower at Sestos on the banks of the Hellespont, was beloved of Leander who swam across every night of the summer to be with her, guided by a lamp which she lit in her tower, and persuaded her to have sex with him even though they were not married. When the wind blew out the torch one winter night, Leander got lost as he swam across and drowned, and Hero threw herself from the tower to drown as well. Shakespeare may have known of Hero and Leander’s love from Ovid’s *Heroides*, Letters XVIII and XIX. Even if he did not read these texts, their familiarity as models of romantic love would have made them immediately recognizable to many spectators. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Valentine compares himself to Leander, saying that a rope ladder to reach Sylvia’s chamber “would serve to scale another Hero’s tow’r / So bold Leander would adventure it” (3.1.119-20). Rosalind in *As You Like It* expresses a more comic scepticism towards the story, telling Orlando that Leander did not die of love for Hero; he “would have liv’d many a fair year though Hero had turn’d nun” and rejected him. What happened, in fact was that he “but went forth to wash him in the Hellespont, and being taken with the cramp was drown’d” but the story was glamorised to make ‘Hero of Sestos’ the cause of his tragic death (4.1.100-106).⁶

Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing* is most unlike the classical heroine. However, her overdetermined name maps out the men’s ready construction of her as a deceptive and sexually-experienced woman like the lover of Leander. It prefigures the unchaste version of Hero as a “contaminated stale” (2.2.25) conjured up by Don John to destroy her marriage to Claudio: “Leonato’s Hero, your Hero, every man’s Hero” (3.2.106). When Margaret plays at being Hero at her mistress’s chamber window, she is also play-acting as the classical heroine in her tower. Borachio reports that the scene is staged so that Don Pedro and Claudio will “see me at her chamber-window, hear me call Margaret Hero” (2.2.42-44). Imitating Hero of Sestos gives a logic to Margaret’s willingness to be wooed “by the name of Hero” as she “leans me out at her mistress’ chamber window, bids me a thousand times good night” as though she were bidding farewell to Leander (3.3.146-48). Benedick is certainly familiar with the story claiming that “Leander the good swimmer” was never “so truly turn’d over and over” in love as himself (5.2.30-35). The classical heroine effectively functions as Hero’s wanton doppelganger. Indeed, in the continuation of Marlowe’s poem by Chapman, Hero of Sestos is condemned for trying to conceal her loss of virginity, making “never virgin’s vow worth trusting more” (IV.258-59) (50). Claudio likewise rages “out on thee seeming!” (4.1.56) and tells his bride,

Hero itself can blot out Hero’s virtue.
What man was he talk’d with you yesternight
Out at your window betwixt twelve and one? (4.1.82-84)

Don Pedro also recalls the clandestine meetings of Hero and Leander in reporting that Hero talked at the window with “a ruffian” who has “confess’d the vile encounters they have had / A thousand times in secret” (4.1.91-94).

In theatrical terms, Hero’s bedchamber is a tiring house: the pieces of costume from which the boy actor will create the role of Hero-as-bride are disembodied and itemised as if advertising the scene’s own illusion in using boy actors to stage an intimate, female exchange. The mismatch between female costume and corporal identity is then heightened in the public, ceremonial occasion of the staged wedding. The boy playing Hero enters having assembled the headdress, the “fine quaint graceful” (3.4.17) wedding gown, the rebato (wired collar or ruff), and the perfumed gloves into the theatrical metaphor of woman-as-bride.

When Claudio rejects her as an illusion, the “sign and semblance of her honor” (4.1.33), this is precisely what the boy actor is. His subsequent lines continue to tell the truth in metatheatrical terms. He asks everyone:

Would you not swear,
All you that see her, that she were a maid,
By these exterior shows? But she is none. (4.1.38-40)

Alison Findlay, "Though it be not written down, yet forget not":

In accusing the constructed figure beside him of being only a "show of truth" (4.1.35), Claudio raises awareness of both character and actor. He asks spectators "all you that see her" to read "how like a maid she blushes here" (4.1.34), but claims that the blushing face, a corporeal 'exterior show' of maidenhood is just as deceptive as the ceremonially-constructed role of bride as pure gift. He goes on to reinterpret Hero's blush as a physiological mark of shame that exposes guiltiness. What do the audience see? If the boy actor does not blush on demand, he may lower his head. In either case, the audience see neither feminine modesty nor guilt. The blush is a figment of Claudio's fevered imagination in which they are invited to collude. If the boy player's cheeks do colour through identification with the character, it is quite possible that spectators would still regard the figure with incredulity, swearing by that exterior show that s/he is a maid, even though, like Claudio, they know "she is none" (4.1.40). Elspeth Probyn reads the almost involuntary acknowledgement of shame in the blush as a radical re-evaluation of the self from a social perspective, arguing that "through feeling shame, the body inaugurates an alternative way of being in the world" (56). The shame of the blush which spectators are invited to notice here functions in just this way. It is, in fact, designed to include them in a shared guiltiness about their complicity with events on stage. It charts their own easy slip into the belief that "She knows the heat of a luxurious bed: / Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty" (4.1.36-37).

At a sophisticated level of response, once spectators have been reminded that this is not a real woman but only the sign and semblance of one, they might also become aware that this masculine misrepresentation produces the unjust picture of woman as guilty and deceptive. Both are dimensions of the misogynist amnesia that refuses to understand women on their own terms, through their own voices. Given that the skills of boy actors are so often celebrated in Shakespeare's plays, *Much Ado* does not, I think, mount a full-scale criticism of boy actors as another shameful mis-representation of women, an empty space filled only with the 'bodies / bodice' of costume. Nevertheless, I think the play does, at numerous points, hint at the tensions in trying to theatrically represent a woman by superficial, material means. In this way, *Much Ado* seeks to unsettle the theatrical amnesia in which boys are taken for girls, and in which women's inability to speak for themselves is accepted as the norm. The final scene of the play, where Hero is restored to the stage as a bride, brings these problems to the fore.

As critics have frequently recognised, the harmonious resolution glosses over any concerns about the genuineness of Claudio's repentance, his readiness to take on a new bride, and Hero's willingness to go through with a marriage to him. A benign reading of a youthful Claudio allows us to see that "through feeling shame, the body inaugurates an alternative way of being in the world" (Probyn 56). For Hero, however, there appears to be little alternative way of being. Claudio greets her as "Another Hero!" (5.4.62), but Don Pedro more accurately and more darkly points out she is "the former Hero! Hero that is dead!" (5.4.65). After her ordeal of shame, the only position available to Hero is her former one. To reveal herself, she must unveil. Once Hero's name is cleared, she can return from the concealment of supposed death to "glorious fame" and rid herself of the classical namesake who committed suicide along with her lover: "one Hero died defil'd, but I do live, / And surely as I live, I am a maid" (5.4.63-64).

Here, the play's surface appearances of costume and gesture graphically advertise the tensions under which women continue to live, subjected to shame. In rejecting the image of herself as "defiled" to assert her innocence as "a maid" (5.3.63-64), Hero necessarily contravenes the maidenly exhibition of shame prescribed by Vives: "she can not be chaste that is not ashamed: for that is as a cover and vaylle of hir face" (folio 35r sig. K1r). Hero's lack of blush, her shamelessness, is potentially shameful. The play thus offers no guarantee that Hero, or any other woman, will not be misread in the future. Instead, it is a life sentence to play the part of "another Hero," another male construction of female identity on the s(h)ame model: "the former Hero, Hero that is dead!" (5.3.65). Editors have been at a loss to explain Shakespeare's choice of name for the romantic heroine beyond references to the heroine of classical myth celebrated most recently in Marlowe's poem. Its irony, that unlike the classical Hero Shakespeare's character remains chaste before marriage, masks a deeper cultural

Alison Findlay, "Though it be not written down, yet forget not":

affinity between the two; the repetition of her name at the end of the play reminds audience members of their own willingness to accept the exclusively male construction of woman via classical myth and an all-male cast. The gendering of the name "Hero" points very blatantly for once, to the boy actor in a final attempt to remind the audience of the dangers of cultural amnesia. Having been misrepresented, the slandered Hero can return, proclaiming "As surely as I live, I am a maid," but s/he is not a heroine. S/he is always "Another Hero," a male representation of woman (5.4.62-65).

¹ All references to Shakespeare are taken from *The Riverside Shakespeare*.

² Brissenden gives the Madam Sicilia pavin in the Bodleian library as a particularly appropriate example. On dancing as a means to enact harmonious social bonding, see also Howard, chapter 3.

³ See, for example, Stallybrass and Rosalind-Jones.

⁴ Helen Lynd first identified the importance of sharing shame in *On Shame and the Search for Identity* 249.

⁵ For more on clothes, see my "Much Ado About Nothing" 393-410.

⁶ See further the entry 'Hero' in my *Women in Shakespeare: A dictionary* 187-88; Suzuki discusses the universal anxiety concerning women's sexuality that is represented by Hero and her connections with Hero of Sestos.

Works Cited

Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1951*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.

Brissenden, Alan. *Shakespeare and the Dance*. London: Macmillan, 1981.

Findlay, Alison. "Much Ado About Nothing." *Shakespeare: The Comedies*. Eds. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2003. 393-410.

—. *Women in Shakespeare: A dictionary*. London: Continuum, 2010.

Howard, Skiles. *The Politics of Courtly Dancing in Early Modern England*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998.

Lynd, Helen. *On Shame and the Search for Identity*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1958.

Manning, Phil. "Drama as Life: The Significance of Goffman's Use of Theatrical Metaphor." *Sociological Theory* 9.1 (1991): 70-86.

Marlowe, Christopher. *Complete Poems and Translations*. Ed. Stephen Orgel. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 2007.

Probyn, Elspeth. *Blush: Faces of Shame*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

Rutter, Carol. *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage*. London: Routledge, 2001.

Scheff, Thomas J. "Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory." *Sociological Theory* 18. 1 (2000): 84-99.

Shakespeare, William. *The Riverside Shakespeare*. Eds. G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin. 2nd edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.

Alison Findlay, "Though it be not written down, yet forget not":

Shusterman, Richard. *Surface and Depth: Dialectics of Criticism and Culture*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2002.

Stallybrass, Peter and Ann Rosalind-Jones. *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Suzuki, Mihoko. "Gender, Class and the Ideology of Comic Form: *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Twelfth Night*." *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*. Ed. Dympna Callaghan. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2000. 121-43.

Vives, Juan Luis. *A Very frutful and pleasant boke called the Instruction of a Christen Woman*. Trans. Richard Hynde. London, 1555.