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Claudio and Hero: True Love?

by Kristina Grudem

(English 1102)

The Assignment: Write a five page literary analysis of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Include a clear, specific, arguable thesis supported by specific examples from the primary source and summaries, paraphrases or brief quotations from five secondary sources that relate to your thesis.

The romance between Claudio and Hero in *Much Ado about Nothing* begins very suddenly. Soon after they meet in Messina, Claudio professes his love for Hero. However, throughout the play, this love is shown to be superficial because Claudio's words and actions demonstrate that he is not truly in love with Hero.

Claudio seems too interested in Hero's fortune. Before taking action to make Hero his wife, he first inquires to Don Pedro, "Hath Leonato any son, my lord?" (1.1.182). Claudio's reason for asking this is that he wants to make sure that Hero will inherit all of her father's money. Shakespeare critic, David Bevington, believes that "Claudio's first questions about Hero betray his [...] willingness to let Don Pedro and Hero's father Leonato, arrange a financially advantageous match" (217). Evidently, he wouldn't be as interested in pursuing his marriage with her if she were not the sole heir. After Don Pedro confirms that Hero is indeed the only heir, Claudio then describes how his like of Hero transformed to love: "I looked upon her with a soldier's eye / That liked, but had a rougher task in hand / Than to drive liking to the name of love" (1.1.286-288). This reveals that Claudio's motivation was money. He says that he liked her before, but after finding out she will inherit money, he suddenly loves her. Claudio himself admits that his affections for Hero occur very suddenly: "But lest my liking might too sudden seem / I would have salve it with a longer treatise" (1.1.302-303). Claudio's change of affection occurs because he wants to inherit Hero's money.

Claudio is also quick to give up Hero. When he realizes he has feelings for her, he decides to have Don Pedro win Hero over for him. At the party, Don Pedro does just what Claudio asked him to and yet Claudio is easily led to believe by Don John that Don Pedro has wooed Hero for himself. He despairs: "Friendship is constant in all things / Save in the office and affairs of love" (2.1.169-170). Some readers may interpret his initial feelings of hurt and betrayal as an indication of his love for Hero. Even if this were true, Claudio's feelings are not strong enough to compel him to action. He quickly resigns himself to losing Hero: "Farewell therefore Hero!" (2.1.176). If Claudio truly loved her, it is reasonable to assume he would have fought for her affections or at least asked her if she had feelings for Don Pedro. He even says, "I wish him [Don Pedro] joy of her" (2.1.186). Claudio is willingly to let Hero go without even telling her how he feels about her.

Another illustration that Claudio is not truly in love with Hero is that he wants to leave right after their wedding. After the prince informs Claudio that he will leave for Aragon soon after Claudio's marriage is consummated, Claudio responds, "I'll bring you thither, my lord, if you'll but vouchsafe me" (3.2.3-4). This reveals that Claudio does not want to stay with his new wife. He wants to leave quickly after the marriage. Most readers would think that he would want to spend time with the woman he loves. Don Pedro also believes that Claudio should not leave right away. He says to Claudio, "Nay, that would be as great a soil in the new gloss of your marriage as to show a child his new coat and forbid him to wear it" (3.2.5-7). Even Don Pedro feels that Claudio should stay to spend some time with his new wife.

Claudio is also quick to believe the worst in Hero. Critic Bevington agrees; he says, "To

Claudio, Hero is a saint one moment and a whore the next” (218). This reveals that Claudio is quick to change his view of Hero. One example of this behavior occurs when Don John tells Claudio that Hero is disloyal. He has a very strong reaction and replies, “If I see anything tonight why I should not marry her, tomorrow in the congregation, where I should wed, there will I shame her” (3.2.117-119). This shows that Claudio, on just Don John’s word alone, believes that Hero is disloyal to him. One critic believes, “If Claudio’s love had been ‘all he imagined it to be,’ he would have laughed in Don John’s face” (Auden qtd. in Zitner). Instead of talking with Hero about Don John’s accusation, he opts instead to spy on her. Another critic notes that Claudio should not have “watch[ed] in the distance in night and fog, and take[n] shadows for proofs” (Gervinus). Claudio should have insisted on more substantial evidence of Hero’s infidelity before jumping to the conclusion that she was guilty. If he truly loved her, he would have investigated this matter thoroughly before taking action.

In addition, Claudio is very cruel to Hero when he believes that she has betrayed him. He first goes to the wedding ceremony, pretending that everything is fine between him and Hero, but then he refuses to marry her. He hands her back to her father and refers to her as a “rotten orange” (4.1.31). Claudio then proceeds to expose her sin in front of everyone: “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” (4.1.38-41). When Hero denies the accusation against her, Claudio does not believe her or stop to consider what she has said. Claudio leaves after Hero has fainted. He does not even glance her way or worry in the slightest about her health.

Furthermore, Claudio refuses to accept full responsibility for his hand in Hero’s supposed death. Even after hearing Borachio’s confession that he and Don John had set up Hero, Claudio says, “Yet sinned I not / but in mistaking” (5.1.268-269). He does not admit to himself how cruel his words towards Hero were. Shakespeare critic Sheldon Zitner feels that “even with honor as a motive for his blindness,” one cannot accept this excuse. Claudio may have been tricked into believing that Hero was disloyal, but he alone had control over his reaction to that information. It was his decision to publicly accuse and attack Hero. It was his decision not to talk to Hero directly. He was responsible for his own actions. Claudio should admit his role in what he believes to be Hero’s death.

Another thing that indicates that he is not truly in love with Hero is that he is quick to agree to marry a complete stranger. One reason that he agrees to this is because of Leonato’s statement: “My brother hath a daughter, Almost the copy of my child that’s dead, And she alone is heir to both of us” (5.1.282-284). Claudio’s eagerness to marry someone else may be largely motivated by the wealth that he would inherit with this match. If he were deeply in love with Hero, he would want to take time to properly mourn her death. For Claudio, one night of mourning is sufficient. He spends the night before he is to marry another at Hero’s tomb. He reads an epitaph:

Done to death by slanderous tongues
Was 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).

These do not seem like the words of someone who is in love. Claudio does not once say that he loves Hero, or that he feels sorry for having wrongly accused her. One critic believes, “He has procured a rhyming epitaph, and this he ‘reads from a scroll’ which he never wrote” (Lang). Claudio’s epitaph for Hero is dispassionate and impersonal, not what one would expect from a man grieving for the woman he loved.

Even Claudio’s reaction to learning that Hero is alive is not that of someone in love. The

morning after being at Hero's tomb, Claudio goes to Leonato's to marry whom he believes to be Antonio's daughter. When Hero unmask herself, Claudio's reaction is simply to exclaim: "Another Hero!" (5.4.61). One would think that he would be full of happiness and pay attention to Hero, but "so infinitely is he impressed by it that in the course of three minutes he is teasing Benedick" (Lang). This change in the focus of his attention shows that Claudio is not that excited that Hero is alive. If Claudio were truly in love with Hero, his reaction would have been more dramatic and emotional.

Claudio is not truly in love with Hero. His words and actions towards her are not consistent with those of someone in love. This is demonstrated when Claudio shows too much interest in Hero's money; is quick to give her up to Don Pedro; wants to leave right after the wedding; is quick to believe the worst in Hero and is very harsh towards her when he thinks that she has betrayed him; refuses to accept responsibility for his part in Hero's death; is quick to marry a complete stranger. He may profess that he is in love with her, but that is not the case. Shakespeare critic John Brown believes that "his 'liking' is sudden and seems to be 'engender'd' solely 'in the eyes', to be 'fancy' and not the affection of true love" (241). Claudio's love of Hero is not a true love.

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