

DOI 10.1515/rjes -2015-0014

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING: THREE RESPONSES TO SHAKESPEARE'S PLAY

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Abstract: *The paper looks at Shakespeare's comedy Much Ado about Nothing, as well as two film adaptations of the play, from a reader-oriented perspective, offering samples of an expert reading of the play, an initiated reading and a so-called "innocent" reading. We compare the three approaches taking into consideration the reception of the play's motifs (such as the bedtrick) and the conventional reaction of the readers to them.*

Keywords: *reader-orientedness, expert, initiated and innocent reading, reception.*

1. Introduction

In the past several years, there have been substantial transformations of approaches in literary and cultural studies in undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate education in English. An important role of departments of Eng. Lit has been to create interpretations of the texts of various historical periods, including – if not especially – Shakespeare. The key to progressive educational policy in departments of Eng. Lit worldwide today is combining the values of canonical literary texts with the values of universal access, presenting literature as an occasion for education, not merely a subject matter. This comes as a result of a complex set of relations between critical thinking about literature and the politics of education.

The academic study we propose draws on the receiving end of Shakespeare's work, more precisely on reader-oriented theories. We are broadly interested in how Shakespeare's work is viewed and interpreted and, for this reason, we are conducting an exploratory case study which focuses on the comedy *Much Ado about Nothing* and two of its best known film adaptations. The interpretations we instantiate in the study are done by three different kinds of readers, what we labelled as: expert, initiated and innocent. An expert reading is provided, in our view, by the academic-critical approach to Shakespeare's comedy, both in the traditional line of expertise and in the context of contemporary, culturally-oriented studies. For the other two types of readers, we conduct an experiment among representatives of two levels of studies: an MA student who has been exposed to formal English literature courses in literature in general and a course on Shakespeare, for the initiated reader, while an innocent reader is a junior student, a fresh person in English language and literature BA study programme. Due to the fact that the outcome of this entire endeavour cannot be reported in one sitting, in this paper we will focus on the issues pertaining to the framing of our study and we will report on the expert readership. The subsequent phases and outcomes of the study focusing on the initiated and innocent readings will be reported on other occasions and the entire study will constitute the substance of a larger research report.

Reader oriented theories all start from the assumption that the receiver is active and not passive in the act of perception and meaning making therefore – the literary text has no real existence until it is read/viewed. Several concepts of reader-oriented origins were considered as relevant for our study: phenomenology, horizon of expectations, and literary competence and conventions.

When it comes to the study of literature, phenomenology refers to “a type of criticism which tries to enter into the world of a writer’s works and to arrive at an understanding of the underlying nature or essence of the writings as they appear to the critic’s consciousness” (Raman, 1989:118). Our own endeavour has such a dimension since it draws on phenomenology, more precisely on hermeneutics in the study of Shakespeare’s work. Thus, broadly speaking, we view Shakespeare as both a literary and a social phenomenon and we try to explore and understand how he is experienced by different receivers. Furthermore, our study is situated between the two extremes of a continuum in the study of literature. We conceptualize this continuum as having at one end Russian formalism which completely ignores the context in which the text was produced and at the other end social theories which ignore the text. Consequently, we start from the assumption that, without ignoring the text itself, its interpretation is highly dependent on the historical contexts in which it was produced and in which it is read. Additionally crucial to the study is the belief that the interpretation of a text is also dependent on the reader and his/her knowledge and skills. We call these two aspects the contextual factor and the reader factor.

The contextual factor starts from the concept of “horizons of expectations” whose proponent was Jauss (1982). In Jauss’ view, it would be wrong to say that a work is universal, that its meaning is fixed forever and open to all readers in any period. The criteria readers use to judge literary texts vary in time and place. In this line of thought, interpretations instantiate (or not) a reader’s ability to move between past and present. In other words, an interpretation of the text depends on the questions prompted by the reader’s own culture and/or their knowledge of the past (i.e. the period in which the text was produced).

The reader factor in this study mainly refers to what Culler (1975) first labelled as literary competence and which he later on (1997) claimed them to be conventions of reading. Literary competence should clearly be delimited from reading conventions as they put forth very different constructs. Thus we take the view that literary competence comes in various degrees and shades and refers to the reader’s exposure to knowledge of various literary theories as well as practice in the actual analysis of various texts. Reading conventions, on the other hand, we view as being culturally rooted and putting forth the values, beliefs, and practices emerging from a particular culture. In the same line of thought, Torell (2010:371) argues that stereotypes and clichés as reading conventions can be mistakenly taken as internalized literary conventions.

2. Some Ado about Expertly Reading *Much Ado*

Much Ado about Nothing is one of Shakespeare’s very few plays written almost exclusively in prose. It features a fashionable, Italianate plot, about the tribulations of suspicious, jealous lovers, and a more original English subplot, about the war of the sexes. *Much Ado* is also one of the most remarkably stable comedies in terms of its critical reception, less vulnerable to newer academic approaches to Shakespeare, such as (mainly, though not exclusively) postcolonialism and gender studies. It is, at the same time, a light, romantic comedy, and a text containing the germs of a problem play. It is appreciated for its elegance and aristocratic taste, its evidence of court life, being thus more typical of the English Renaissance spirit than other instances of Elizabethan drama.

Still, the play has a substantial potential for embeddedness, given the interplay of meanings, announced from the very beginning by the pun in the title, between *nothing*, a trifle, and *noting*, as the word was pronounced in the 16th century (Marion Wynne Davies 2001), in a play where observation and misobservation are the engines that drive the story. The habit of *noting* makes the discrepancy between appearance and essence one of the main themes of the play, materialized in the bed-trick. This is a rather common motif in numerous comedies and problem plays, with variations, the main “trick” being the fact that a male lover thinks himself in bed with the wrong woman or (less frequently) viceversa. In *Much Ado*, the motif is complicated further by macabre elements, such as an alleged death and a tomb. This has led critics to a newly coined term, a tomb-trick, which in Wendy Doniger’s opinion, is only a quasi-trick (2000:21). If a complete trick is available in the tragi-comedies, where the eager male heroes cannot escape the amorous traps laid by the women who love them but are not loved in return, *Much Ado* offers only a half of several tricks: the bed-trick is incomplete because neither Claudio nor Hero go to bed with anyone and the tomb-trick places Claudio in front of an empty grave and then in front of a falsely resurrected bride. Thus, the trick in this play is not only a technical element in the development of the plot, but a *mise en abyme*, by means of which Shakespeare explores the discomfort of jealousy, the tension between monogamy and promiscuousness, the fragile borderline between sex and gender, between power and identity. The bed-trick hints at the gap between physical closeness and mental alienation, between reality and imaginary projection. George Volceanov (2003:19) regards the bed-trick as a ritual of deception which becomes, in Shakespeare’s plays, an archetypal situation. To understand this motif, one must read and watch the play with the eyes of the 17th century spectator, in a cultural and material world which was very different from ours. Once the nights have grown less dark, due to artificial lightning, once the intimacy of couples has increased, making the sexual act less ritualized and conventional, the bed-trick has started losing its likelihood, the modern reader and watcher growing more sceptical. Apart from this pragmatic aspect, the ethic connotations have also made traditional critics impatient (Muir 1965:47), as with something which, seen once, presents no potential for a repeat. Although no one ends in bed with other fellows than the intended ones, most of the characters are victimizers or victims in this game of deception and doubling. Hero makes Beatrice believe Benedick is in love with her, Don John makes Claudio believe Hero is unfaithful to him, Don Pedro woos Hero for Claudio, Leonato gives Claudio a bride he believes to be Hero’s cousin, after he mourns Hero over an empty grave. This partial enumeration successfully proves that, instead of one complete trick, the play offers a multitude of quasi-tricks which, in quantitative terms, come to dominate the entire story. Still, the most relevant scenes which are conventionally labelled as “tricks” are scene 3 Act III (the quasi-bed-trick, in which Claudio is reported to have seen a woman wearing Hero’s clothes in Borachio’s arms), scene 4 in Act V (the quasi-tomb-trick, in which Claudio believes Hero has been miraculously brought back to life) and the final reconciliation scene, in which yet another trick (a full trick, this time, I would argue, a perfectly orchestrated optical illusion, in fact) solves the previous two quasi-tricks.

In this play about *noting*, watching and eavesdropping are obsessive, each character understanding, as it happens in the romantic comedies, “what they will”. In Act I, the noblemen of Aragon “note” Hero’s distinguished figure, which persuades them of her honesty. However, the same figure carries signs of betrayal and debauchery in Act IV. The blood in her cheeks is, for Claudio, a mark of lust, while for the good friar, it is a note of maidenly innocence. At the wedding, Claudio does not note the real woman behind the veil, though he swears to note well all her virtues. This almost deliberate confusion is

backed by the attitude most characters declare to have towards slander. Ironically, the first one showing eagerness to practice “honest slanders” (III, 1) is the very victim of slander, Hero herself, who makes up things about her cousin Beatrice in order to force destiny and see her married. Of course, the oxymoron has a tinge of irony. Hero’s lie may be innocent, but it is a lie all the same. Hero and Don Pedro invent a love story between Beatrice and Benedick in order to bring them together, a false and shaky scaffolding which could collapse at the slightest perturbation. When the two pseudo-lovers realize they are the victims of “honest slanders”, it is too late – they are already genuinely infatuated with each other. The slander against Hero is dishonest but only apparently different from the “honest” ones, as the mechanisms are the same. Claudio is shown a woman wearing his fiancée’s dress and needs no further evidence of Hero’s infidelity. Leonato, the girl’s father, needs even less, since he accuses his daughter of treason having only Claudio’s and Don Pedro’s words. This impatience would seem a gross exaggeration if one forgot, like in the case of the bed-trick, the background to which the play explicitly alludes several times. One of the most frequent “jokes” of this comedy is about cuckolding: when he introduces his daughter to Aragon and his men, Leonato joins this witty exchange:

DON PEDRO

You embrace your charge too willingly. I think this is your daughter.

LEONATO

Her mother hath many times told me so.

BENEDICK

Were you in doubt, sir, that you asked her?

LEONATO

Signior Benedick, no; for then were you a child. (I, 1)

Leonato hides behind words, avoiding the sophisticated irony of the Aragon court, but exposes his daughter, whose vulnerability grows later. The fact that Leonato’s line is not random is proved by Benedick, who repeats the joke about the cuckolded husband, symmetrically, in the last act, when he addresses Don Pedro: “Prince, thou art sad; get thee a wife, get thee a wife: there is no staff more reverend than one tipped with horn.” (V, 4)

The script being already known by the male characters, they do not hesitate to repudiate Hero at the slightest innuendo. Her dishonesty being presented as *vraisemblable* by her father, it takes very little thinking for her fiancé to accept Don John’s fabricated evidence as true. Both Claudio and Leonato react violently: the lover expected “chaste Dian” and found a “witch”, while Leonato wanted his only child to “have his head on her shoulders for all Messina” and, in exchange, thinks she is a false mirror of his good name. S. P. Cerasano (in Barker and Kamps 1995:31) correctly points out that, in Shakespeare’s age, guarding one’s reputation was harder than avoiding slander. The evidence lies in the countless slander trials recorded in the early modern age. If, in earlier centuries, slander was controlled by the laws of the Church, in the 16th century, the line between lay and religious authorities grows dimmer and the trials held by civil courts seem to be all the more hostile when the complaint is issued by a woman. The trials were problematic anyway, since the woman could make an appeal only with the approval of a male protector and the object of the trial – the woman’s reputation – was volatile. Still, the great number of such court appeals shows both how vulnerable women were to slander and how eager they were to protect one of their few assets, their good name. In many Shakespearean tragicomedies, a woman’s reputation is the synonym of physical survival. In *Measure for Measure*, a stained reputation is enough to send anyone to the scaffold and Isabella, a

promised nun, would rather see her brother dead than her good name put to shame. In *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*, a wife stays alive after a husband's wrath only by means of travesty and concealment. In *Much Ado about Nothing*, Hero faints and is believed dead, which, if guilty, in the men's eyes, would only serve her right. It takes the rehabilitation by means of yet another trick for the men to rejoice the sight of her being alive and well.

It is not by accident that the slander is uttered and annulled in the church, under the surveillance of the good friar (a constant figure, who is also the final solution in *Measure for Measure*). He orchestrates the tomb-trick and makes the truth finally evident to the men who build and destroy Hero's life. The monk turns out to be the only person who sees clearly, although everyone is watching carefully. More realistic than Beatrice (who, convinced of Hero's virtue, asks Benedick to kill Claudio and avenge her cousin's shame), he suggests the only possible solution for a woman with a bad reputation: "die to live" (IV, 1). Since her compromised life cannot continue, only the resurrection, which implies purification, is acceptable. According to tradition, this would have implied the discretion and penitence of a convent. Since this is a Shakespearean comedy, the good friar, with the father's approval, offers another way out. The strategy works well literally, as Don Pedro and Claudio receive the "new" Hero not as a rehabilitated person, but as someone who has risen from the dead.

The interplay between deception and verisimilitude is one of the play's great assets, but also one of the major problems in the process of reception and adaptation. Reading and interpreting the play conventionally is very different from a pragmatic, sceptical approach. This is not such a far cry from the Romantic desideratum formulated by S.T. Coleridge as "the suspension of disbelief". It does take such a conventional suspension to assimilate the intricacies of the *Much Ado* plot. Good examples of how such a conventional reading – an expert reading, in the terms we used in the theoretical part of this paper – operates are the two film adaptations of Shakespeare's comedy, Kenneth Branagh's 1993 and Joss Whedon's 2013 works. The 1993 version, featuring Branagh as director and male star in Benedick's role, received surprisingly little critical acclaim despite the cast, the quality of the film features and the interventions in the original storyline, most observers regretting the absence of naturalness and spontaneity (Canby 1993). The film's success in reading the bed-trick and the tomb-trick "expertly" (and then conveying them to the public in the spirit of verisimilitude) lies in the choice for an atemporal (possibly Italianate) décor, with an impressive number of extras, including soldiers in brightly coloured uniforms and Messinan citizens in white, under the heat and light of a continuous summer sun, giving the impression that the characters' only goal is the single-minded pursuit of pleasure. All the actors are surprisingly young and healthy, with the plain Hero interpreted by the beautiful Kate Beckinsale, the evil Don John by the handsome and exotic Keanu Reeves, or the royal Don Pedro by Denzel Washington. The whiteness of the costumes, the universal gaiety, the dancing and singing and frolicking give the impression of a game, perhaps an extension of the costume party evoked in the second act of the play, which contributes to the "suspension of disbelief" effect.

In 2013, when Hollywood offered a new version of *Much Ado*, Joss Whedon was a novice of Shakespearean adaptations. However, although Branagh was a consecrated Shakespearean actor and director (*Hamlet* and *Henry V* being only the most obvious examples), his *Much Ado* was less acclaimed than Whedon's, who was trained in fantasy thrillers like *The Avengers*. Moreover, while Branagh's film had cost a fortune, Whedon's version was a low-budget movie, shot exclusively in the director's own house, with virtually unknown actors. Still, the 2013 film was a genuine critical success. The elements that contributed to this are those which also secure "the suspension of disbelief". Shot in black and white in a Hispanic Californian villa, with the Aragon court and Don John looking more like Prohibition gangsters, the film is presented as a farce, in the spirit of the screwball comedy

(Shoard 2012), a genre which was very popular in the glamour age of the 1930s and 1940s movieland. The characters return from “abroad”, give casual parties and keep “hanging out”. In a story about watching and hearing, the house where the plot unfolds has thin walls and poor acoustics, where no secret can be kept for long – a technical detail which completes the message of the original Shakespearean text. The conventions of the screwball comedy, with male and female heroines exchanging witty repartee, also contribute to a general farcical atmosphere, which makes the tricks deployed by the plot acceptable and convincing.

3. The Reception of *Much Ado*. A Case Study

The expert interpretation which represents the first phase of our study presented above has also served the purpose of generating our main hypothesis for the second phase. It can be framed as follows: the less expertise the reader has, the more difficult it is for them to suspend disbelief and to accept the conventions of the dramatic text. With little or no background about the tricks so massively employed by the Shakespearean comedy, we assume the readers will attach little credibility and even less *vraisemblance* to the scenes which are the epitome of illusion and deception, as these concepts were employed in the classical theatre. Our secondary assumption, we aim to validate, during this semester, when we applied the experiment and discussed its outcomes of reading and watching *Much Ado about Nothing* with one senior and one junior student at Research Methods tutorials, is that the two film adaptations facilitate the reception of the play’s tricks and the conventional acceptance of illusion and deception as the major engines of the plot.

The instrument we used for eliciting the response to the texts proposed took the shape of a task sheet. When designing this task sheet we tried to be as less prescriptive as possible. First, we thought of adopting a purely open-ended, uncontrolled approach in the form of a reflective account. Then, we took into consideration the danger of ending up with entirely irrelevant (to our micro-theory presented above) data. Consequently, we designed a more guided instrument that served the purpose of directing the respondents’ thoughts towards our research interest, without however, planting ideas into our respondents’ minds and at the same time allowing for reflection and prompting both introspection and retrospection. Both retrospective and introspective methods seek access to the “invisible”, i.e. to what goes on in the head of the respondent. Nunan (1992:115) defines them as being “The process of observing and reflecting on one’s thoughts, feelings, motives, reasoning processes and mental states with a view to determining the way in which these processes and states determine our behaviour.”

The difference between them is time related and has some serious implications when it comes to data analysis. Thus, introspective methods refer to techniques or instruments in which the data generation is simultaneous with the mental tasks or events under scrutiny. Retrospective methods, on the other hand, lead to instruments that elicit data some time after the events have taken place.

This idea of “some time after” has triggered a fair amount of criticism, which mainly says that such methods produce unreliable data because it is in our human nature to forget things. To minimise this danger, it is advisable to ensure that the data are generated as soon as possible after the event has taken place. The bottom line is that in the choice of an introspective or retrospective instrument all depends on the interest and focus of research as well as on the practical issues involved (for example, it might be difficult, if not impossible, in some circumstances, to collect data in an introspective kind of way). In our case, we wanted our respondents both to introspect while being exposed to the texts and to retrospect by reflecting upon it in a very immediate circumstance. We thus prompted them to read the

task before the texts in the hope that introspection would be automatically triggered, followed then by the advice that they should actually set out to complete the task immediately after.

All in all, we aimed for our respondents to produce a written piece in which they should, as Dörnyei (2007:148) puts it, “verbalise their thoughts process immediately after” they have been exposed to the phenomenon investigated.

The task sheet handed out was shaped as follows:

- A short background presentation
- The task *per se*
- Excerpts from the play to be read and analysed (see the Appendix)

4. A Reading of the Readings

Our two readers were Alex, an MA student in Literary Studies, who studied Shakespeare for one semester during his BA English Major Studies and Bianca, a junior student in Modern Languages, who was exposed to literature only adjacently, during general courses of literary theory and literary translation. Their feedback, despite the differences in approach and tone, are strikingly similar. Both respondents consider the Branagh film version better. While Bianca has a sentimental approach, referring to the 1993 *Much Ado* as a film of the year when she was born, Alex has a canonical approach: “it invites more attention to the Shakespearean text” and “it grasps the spirit of Shakespeare’s play”. For Bianca, Whedon’s version is “Surreal, inexplicably modern”, while Alex sees it as a “postmodernized” product, which “sacrifices the social and historical conventions inherent to the setting of the play”.

Secondly, the two students approach the church scene in a similar manner, despite the fact that they start from fundamentally different assumptions. Bianca considers that Claudio’s emotional outburst in Branagh’s film makes more sense, also commenting that Emma Thompson’s Beatrice in the same church scene is more credible, her desire to kill Claudio coming more from grief than from hatred. Alex also observes Claudio’s reaction, which he considers more faithful to Shakespeare’s original intentions. He notices the clever change of order in the lines uttered by the characters at the end of the second church scene (also the end of the play), “boosting emphasis on Hero’s presence”. While Alex appreciates the church scene in Branagh’s film for its accelerated tempo, Bianca thinks it has more “warmth” than Whedon’s garden party approach.

As for the two “tricks”, both readers agree they are the ones to give the two films the quality of dark humour inherent in Shakespeare’s original text. Bianca thinks that Whedon’s Jillian Morgese gives her Hero more substance as a character who is “a person, not only a victim” than Branagh’s Kate Beckinsale, who obscures the original Shakespearean female character. Alex, noticing that Branagh’s Claudio bursts into tears in front of Hero’s tomb, considers him more humane in the 1993 version, his behaviour during the tomb-trick absolving him of some of the guilt resulting from the bed-trick: “One can’t fully blame him for believing Hero has slept with Borachio”. The tricks, given “a strong and heavy tone” in the original play, remain “solemn” in Branagh’s film, for Alex, while Bianca regards Claudio’s repentance as being “severely reduced” in Whedon’s farcical version.

In terms of credibility, both agree that Whedon’s version works better for the modern audience. Bianca argues that the 2013 *Much Ado* has “a more disturbing aura” in the reconciliation of the Claudio-Hero couple, which, she assumes, is more in accordance with the “dark” or “problem” potential Shakespeare’s play must have had for the Elizabethans. In this, the camerawork is more effective in the actual display of the bed-

trick, as it is worked out by Whedon, with the shadows of two human figures, at a window, engaged in sexual intercourse, where, in the original Shakespearean text, the scene was only indirectly conveyed, in the narrative versions of several characters. Alex also concludes that the 2013 plotline is made to have more relevance and credibility to a modern audience because of its transportation in the house and gardens of a Los Angeles millionaire, although “more attention is given to entertaining representation than to substance”.

5. Findings and Conclusions

The most interesting (and unanticipated) finding of our endeavour is the absence of major differences in the way our two respondents read the texts proposed. They put forth similar reactions, with only minor variations (in tone and language), mostly due to Alex’s more mature stance, rather than a more initiated one. These similarities encompass all the aspects that were our main concern: from the general reaction produced by the texts to the tricks and the credibility attached to them. Thus we cannot safely claim that, at least when it comes to the first hypothesis, it has been confirmed. The degree of initiation did not impact the way in which the respondents put forward anything connected to their suspension of disbelief and the connection it has to the conventions of the dramatic text. In other words more advanced literary knowledge and skills do not make, at least in the present case study, for the way in which suspension of disbelief and drama conventions work. As for the second assumption, film adaptations indeed seem to facilitate both the reading and the interpretation of Shakespeare’s text in general if not when it comes to the conventions of the dramatic text in particular. It is similarly interesting to note that both respondents consider the most remote in time (1993) version as being the better of the two when it comes to capturing the Shakespearean essence (even though one might expect young audiences to connect better to a film version of their times).

As concerns the instrument used for eliciting our target readers’ reactions to the texts proposed for our study, judging the outcome and the role they played in producing the results is fairly complicated. Since it did not elicit data clearly relevant for our hypotheses one might (rightly) argue that they were inappropriately thought and designed. However, taking this view is, we believe, too extreme and unjust. The instrument did fulfil its purpose in eliciting interesting and useful data, only of a different kind. Consequently, this does seem to show that, when it comes to the study of literary texts, a more open-ended approach might be better suited (as our initial instinct told us), both when it comes to spelling out assumptions (or hypotheses) to the design of the instrument and to the data analysis as such. Under any circumstance further explorations into the nature of the instrument and its impact are still needed.

Reader-orientedness and phenomenology, on the other hand, turned out to be highly appropriate and rewarding. The receiving end of Shakespeare’s work in itself is not only an inexhaustible endeavour but one which never ceases to produce surprising and fresh results and, to this end, we can safely argue its importance and relevance.

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Appendix

TASK SHEET

THE BACKGROUND OF THE TWO SCENES TO ANALYZE

Don John frames Hero, by preparing a masquerade in which another woman in Hero's clothes is shown flirting with a stranger, under her fiancé's (Claudio) eyes.

This is how the situation is explained by Don John's henchmen:

BORACHIO

Not so, neither: but know that I have to-night wooed Margaret, the Lady Hero's gentlewoman, by the name of Hero: she leans me out at her mistress' chamber-window, bids me a thousand times good night,--I tell this tale vilely:--I should first tell thee how the prince, Claudio and my master, planted and placed and possessed by my master Don John, saw afar off in the orchard this amiable encounter.

CONRADE

And thought they Margaret was Hero?

BORACHIO

Two of them did, the prince and Claudio; but the devil my master knew she was Margaret; and partly by his oaths, which first possessed them, partly by the dark night, which did deceive them, but chiefly by my villany, which did confirm any slander that Don John had made, away went Claudio enraged; swore he would meet her, as he was appointed, next morning at the temple, and there, before the whole congregation, shame her with what he saw o'er night and send her home again without a husband.

THE TASK

1. Read the two scenes and watch their adaptations in *Much Ado about Nothing* (1993) and *Much Ado about Nothing* (2013).
2. Write a reflective account (2 pages) about your emotional reaction to the text and film adaptations in terms of similarities and differences.
3. Discuss the degree of credibility you attach to the two scenes.
4. What definition would you give to the concepts of "bed-trick" and "tomb-trick", used by critics discussing this play, after reading these scenes? Can you identify the two tricks? Do you think they work, in the context of the play (as an effect on the characters) and in the context of reception (as an effect on you)?

THE TWO SCENES TO BE READ AND DISCUSSED

SCENE III. A church.

Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, and three or four with tapers

CLAUDIO

Is this the monument of Leonato?

Lord

It is, my lord.

CLAUDIO

[Reading out of a scroll]

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.

Hang thou there upon the tomb,

Praising her when I am dumb.

Now, music, sound, and sing your solemn hymn.

SONG.

Pardon, goddess of the night,

Those that slew thy virgin knight;

For the which, with songs of woe,

Round about her tomb they go.

Midnight, assist our moan;

Help us to sigh and groan,

Heavily, heavily:

Graves, yawn and yield your dead,

Till death be uttered,

Heavily, heavily.

CLAUDIO

Now, unto thy bones good night!

Yearly will I do this rite. [...]

Exeunt

SCENE IV. A room in LEONATO'S house.

Enter LEONATO, ANTONIO, BENEDICK, BEATRICE, MARGARET, URSULA, FRIAR FRANCIS, and HERO

FRIAR FRANCIS

Did I not tell you she was innocent?

LEONATO

So are the prince and Claudio, who accused her

Upon the error that you heard debated:

But Margaret was in some fault for this,

Although against her will, as it appears

In the true course of all the question. [...]

Re-enter ANTONIO, with the Ladies masked

Which is the lady I must seize upon?

ANTONIO

This same is she, and I do give you her.

CLAUDIO

Why, then she's mine. Sweet, let me see your face.

LEONATO

No, that you shall not, till you take her hand

Before this friar and swear to marry her.

CLAUDIO

Give me your hand: before this holy friar,

I am your husband, if you like of me.

HERO

And when I lived, I was your other wife:

Unmasking

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.

FRIAR FRANCIS

All this amazement can I qualify:

When after that the holy rites are ended,

I'll tell you largely of fair Hero's death:

Meantime let wonder seem familiar,

And to the chapel let us presently.

Note on the authors

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