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THE DAY AFTER BATTLE
Much Ado about Nothing and the Continuation of War with other Means

In his famous handbook on war, written in the context of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, Carl von Clausewitz argues that military conflict is the continuation of politics with other means. To highlight the irresolvable antagonism that will continue to be played out once soldiers have returned from battle, Michel Foucault, in his series of lectures, „Society Must Be Defended", takes this definition a step further to suggest that if war merely continues political power struggles, this is so because power is anchored in the particular relationship of force established in and through war. To claim that politics is the continuation of war by other means implies that the political system merely reinscribes an adversarial relationship of force by sanctioning and reproducing the disequilibrium of forces manifested in scenes of war, where a combat decides that the day after battle one party will have triumphed over another party. Far from being averted in times of peace, Foucault claims, war should be thought of as presiding over its birth; „indeed the laws of peace are born in the blood and mud of battles". Not, he adds, in some ideal sense of battles and rivalries dreamed up by philosophers and jurists, however, but of „real battles, victories, massacres, and conquests which can be dated and which have their horrific heroes". Not only does confrontation sustain political power even after a concrete war has come to an end. Foucault goes a step further to suggest that law itself „was born in burning towns and ravaged fields. It was born together with the famous innocents who died at break of day."[1] The critical metaphors deployed by Foucault in themselves resonate with the poetic language of Shakespearean history plays and yet, by the time Foucault reaches the acme of his argument, we have also – thus my wager – entered the dark logic of Shakespeare's problem plays. War, Foucault concludes, is the „motor behind institutions and order". Even in a world after battle, it continues to persist as a force

[1] Michael Foucault, *„Society Must Be Defended". Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976*, ed. by Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, New York: Picador, 2003, p. 50. See also Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, München: Ullstein, 2002.

beneath peace, because „peace itself is a coded war [...] a battle front runs through the whole of society, continuously and permanently, and it is this battlefront that puts us all on one side or the other". There is no such thing as a neutral subject, he adds, because in our social relations „we are all inevitably someone's adversary".[2]

Using Foucault's provocative claim as its point of departure, this essay will unfold a reading of *Much Ado about Nothing* aimed at exploring the way war spills into peace time in the shape of three intrigues which, by structuring the social world of Messina, render visible that in this world after battle, the very articulation of subjectivity is necessarily imbued with military logic. The adversarial nature of self-articulation most obviously comes to the fore in the gender battle between Beatrice and Benedick, foregrounded by scholars and directors alike. From the start, their verbal sparring matches suggest, as Thomas J. Scheff puts it, a sombre „parallel between warfare and romance".[3] The conceptual residues of war haunting peace-time Messina are, however, equally discernable in the continuation of a war between brothers, a civil war brought home, in which Claudio's slandered bride takes on the role of collateral. As John Drakakis notes, „it is no accident that the play begins with a military victory in which Don John was an adversary – if not *the* adversary – and it ends in a similar fashion".[4] Marriage, as the necessary social institution about which so much ado is made in this problem play, emerges as the „domestic bulwark in the fight against ‚evil'" waged over issues of male honour and female chastity. In this internal, domestic battle between the sexes, the „undone body of the Hero", he argues, thus becomes

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[2] Foucault, „Society Must Be Defended" (see note 1), p. 51.

[3] In „Gender Wars: Emotions in *Much Ado about Nothing*" (in: *Sociological Perspectives* 36/1993, p. 149-166), Thomas Scheff makes a point I will discuss at length further on, namely that in the first lines she speaks, Beatrice not only invokes a language of war to describe her feelings for Benedick, but that as the two lovers converse, the dialogue „moves, without transition, from the warfare between men to the warfare between men and women" (p. 152). See also Marjorie Garber's discussion of the play in *Shakespeare After All* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004); she sees their urbane battle of wit as the forerunner of both the Restoration stage comedy and the sophisticated Hollywood comedies of the 30s and 40s.

[4] In his book, *Shakespeare's Theatre of War* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), Nick de Somogyi explains the frequency with which military affairs appear in the Shakespeare canon by recalling that the sustained English involvement in European theatres of war was a vivid memory at the time these plays were written and performed, much as a continuation of the war with Philip II. of Spain remained an immanent threat. This „currency of war among the audiences and players of London between 1585 and 1604", he notes, is confirmed not only in the Tragical Histories. Rather the way war casts its shadow is also „reflected in the military societies" in which Comedies such as *Much Ado About Nothing* and *All's Well That Ends Well* are set (p. 6f.).

„a plural text upon whose surface is inscribed a range of competing meanings that jostle for supremacy".[5]

In addition to these two intrigues, set up in the first act of the play – one staged by Claudio to get Benedick and Beatrice to commit themselves in marriage, the other staged by Don John to prevent a marriage between Claudio and Hero – the after-effects of war are also inscribed in the benign deception Friar Francis proposes at the terrible turning-point of Act 4; albeit as a strategy of redemption, whose purpose is to counter the pervasive military logic structuring the home front of Shakespeare's Messina. Finally, the notion proposed by Foucault of a continuous and permanent war written into the very fabric of peace, has, in Dogberry, the ambitious constable in charge of the watch, a figure who takes the battle of words to a different level. Exploiting the fact that, though semantically unrelated, ‚sword' visually contains ‚word', I want to argue that Dogberry engages in what might best be called a personal war against language; allowing me to pun on the notion of sword fighting as the adversarial subject's privileged mode of self-articulation in language. Dogberry's military logic in peace emerges not as a mode of fighting in which one uses words as one's sword, but rather as a conflicted mode of self-expression in which words are used against themselves. Positioned as the anamorphotic inversion of the aristocratic battle of wit Beatrice and Benedick espouse, Dogberry's language terrorism obliquely *mirrors* but as such also *reflects on* the battle with swords regarding a domestic war which comes to be only barely contained on this home front. As such, his war against words emerges as an equally poignant counter stance to the aristocratic lovers' displacement of warfare into the arena of romance, even while his adversarial gesture, as I will argue in more detail below, undermines the very fabric of the play, attacking (but also enriching) the medium of poetic expression itself.

My intuition to read *Much Ado about Nothing* in relation to the way war spills into a world of peace-time civility the day after a battle has been won and soldiers have returned home (perhaps only on furlough), comes from knowing that Shakespeare would return to the subject of murderous jealousy on the part of a valiant war hero, offering in his tragedy *Othello*, as Stephen Greenblatt puts it, a „ruthlessly disillusioned version of the same story".[6] Seminal for my discussion of the continuation of war in peace is how, in this

[5] John Drakakis, „Trust and transgression. The discursive practices of *Much Ado about Nothing*", in: Richard Machin/Christopher Norris (ed.), *Post-structuralist readings of English poetry*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 59-84, at p. 74 and 76.

[6] See Stephen Greenblatt's introduction to the play in *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by himself along with Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus based on the Oxford Edition, New York: Norton, 1997, p. 1381-1387, at p.1387.

later tragedy, in the absence of a clearly demarcated external enemy (the Turkish forces have been vanquished), woman, embodying a dangerous alterity at home, readily transforms into an internal enemy who must be destroyed. In the tragic version of the story, the heroine is killed not in the name of national security but in the name of radical love. To Lodovico, the emissary from Venice, who will report his terrible deed back home, Othello explains: „then must you speak/Of one that loved not wisely but too well" (*Othello* 5.2.352-3). Given our knowledge that Shakespeare would later come to compose this desperate version of a man, tricked into believing in the sexual faithlessness of his beloved, the question haunting my own reading of the dark comedy addresses the status of the resolution Shakespeare opts for in the earlier text. Apodictically put, why can tragedy be averted in *Much Ado about Nothing*, and why can this not be the case in the later play *Othello*? In other words, what does it take to avert the tragic impulse?

At the same time, I suggest that a second example of Shakespeare, returning to a more ruthless, disillusioned version of the same story links Don John's attempt at instigating a domestic war to *Henry V.*, brought to the stage one year later, given the pains the history play takes to extinguish all internal enmity before war can effectively be waged. The military force which King Henry V. will ultimately lead into victory at Agincourt emerges as unified not least of all because two sources of internal difference have been removed from the stage. On the one hand, the noble conspirators have been discovered and punished, while, on the other hand, Falstaff, Prince Hal's former companion in feasting and whoring, whose carnevalesque deportment stands in opposition to any valorous notion of warfare, has died. The band of brothers whom the warrior King declares shall be remembered for their selfless battle on Saint Crispin's day, are the happy few who have cast off all internal differences, including uncertainty about whether this is a battle worth fighting for. Yet the final act of the play, in fact, invokes the reversal of this perfect unity, forewarning that battle would erupt again on the homeland, once the external enemy, who produced the integrity of this fighting body, has been vanquished. With the final words of the play, the Chorus reminds us that peace would be kept but for a small time, succeeded as the victorious King was by his infant son, Henry the Sixth, „Whose state so many had the managing/That they lost France and made his England bleed" (*King Henry V*, Epilogue 11-12). To recall Foucault's proposition, a successful military campaign simply puts on hold for the time of this state of exception the persistent and permanent war rumbling beneath the surface of peacetime politics.[7]

[7] Since the 20th century, cinema has emerged as the most resourceful and most resilient site for a negotiation of the way war spills over into peace. Stories about men, coming

How, then, does the continuation of war with other means unfold in Shakespeare's dark comedy. The opening scene of *Much Ado about Nothing* immediately raises questions pertaining to the way strategies of re-masculinization are at play, serving to uncover the military logic subtending this period of interim between battles. „How many gentlemen have you lost in this action?" (1.1.5-6)[8] Leonato asks the messenger, only to be told that the victory is „twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers". (1.1.8-9) The casualties that have not occurred in the battlefield, which, after all, define war, will have to be sought elsewhere, namely at home, and we soon discover that both heroes return in the spirit of war. Claudio, our decorated warrior, has bettered what was expected of him, while Benedick also has done good service. The messenger assures Beatrice that her lover has proven himself „a good soldier too, lady" (1.1.50), which she promptly refigures, turning herself into the measure for valour: „And a good soldier to a lady" (1.1.51). By thus drawing a parallel between martial action in a designated battlefield and the marital action at home, she, in turn, prompts Leonato's comment that there has been a kind of merry war going on in Messina, in which she is one of the combatants: „They never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them." (1.1.59-60) By virtue of this allusion, the double victory the messenger's rapport asserts has split, disturbing the very peace his proclamation ascertains. We are prompted to ask: Does the merry war at home *cover for* the achieved action in the field, or does it *uncover* the violence inherent to the conversation men and women have at home? The warriors returning in full numbers do so to a second site that, by virtue of Beatrice's recoding, positions the homefront explicitly in relation to past actions of military valour. We know they are to stay on the homefront for at least a month. Leonato, however, by praying that „some occasion may detain" (1.1.114) them longer, implicitly calls for the occurrence of an event as urgent as war itself, preventing the men from seeking another battlefield.

Indeed, in the most obvious sense, once Benedick appears on stage, a continuation of a military logic and the homosocial bond between men this is premised on, is rendered manifest in his insistence on bachelorhood. Bea-

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home from war, forced to adapt their high-spirited homoerotic camaraderie to the demands of women who have implicitly changed since they went away, was a staple of WWII melodramas as well as Vietnam Veteran melodramas. Indeed, the most recent American military campaign in Iraq has produced far more films about the difficulty of returning home than of any actual battles abroad, see Oren Moverman's *The Messenger* (2009), Katherine Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* (2008), Kimberley Pierce's *Stop Loss* (2008), and Paul Haggis *In the Valley of Elah* (2007) to name just a few.

[8] All quotations are from the Arden 3 edition: William Shakespeare, *Much Ado about Nothing*, ed. by Claire McEachern, London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006.

trice is an objective he must designate as unknowable to him, so that he can, in fact, keep her at bay. What he seeks, above all else, is to maintain his attitude as soldier, even while at home on furlough.[9] Claudio, in turn, seems to have two gazes with which to regard the feminine other: „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", he admits. „But now I am returned, and that war-thoughts/Have left their places vacant, in their rooms/Come thronging soft and delicate desires,/All prompting me how fair young Hero is,/Saying I liked her ere I went to wars." (1.1.279-286) As Janice Hays notes, while it is entirely appropriate for a soldier, going off to battle, to „subordinate the pursuit of love to the pursuit of the enemy", on a more latent level of meaning, „Claudio's words suggest that in him ‚war thoughts' may have substituted for thoughts of love, in fact may have been a defence against them, and that he has embraced the duties of a soldier because he is disinclined, or afraid, to embrace a woman."[10] Furthermore, even as Hero comes in Claudio's mind to fill what war-thoughts have left vacant, she will be seen continually in relation to these. In the domestic battle between Don Pedro and his illegitimate brother Don John, in which she figures as collateral, at stake is the question whether she is true or false. In their paranoid way of seeing the world, with the qui vive so necessary on the battlefield continuing to place everything under suspicion even on the day after battle has been won, Hero's is a clear-cut case: If she is chaste, she can serve as a new object of romantic conquest. If, however, she is false, then she is an enemy to be destroyed, albeit by words of slander not by the sword.

Shakespeare's homefront thus emerges as the site clearly structured along the lines of a ‚before' and an ‚after' of battle. If, while Claudio was looking upon the world with soldiers' eyes, Messina was the base from which the rougher task of a military attack was launched, it now emerges as the site for an erotic attack, regarding soft and delicate desires. If, furthermore, this love

[9] As Michael D. Friedman notes in his discussion of the bonding patterns played through in the text, „Male Bonds and Marriage in *All's Well* and *Much Ado*", in: *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 35/1995, p. 231-249, Benedick's performance attests to an „inflated military disdain for affairs of the heart" with Claudio's desire to marry posing a „serious hazard to the male camaraderie of war" (p. 236).

[10] Janice Hays, „Those ‚soft and delicate desires'. Much Ado and the Distrust of Women", in: Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz/Gayle Green/Carol Thomas Neely (ed.), *The Woman's Part. Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980, p. 79-99, at p. 82. As a further reference analogies between early modern theatre and later modern cinema, Deborah Kerr offers exactly the same assessment of her lover in Fred Zinneman's *From Here to Eternity* (1953) explaining to Burt Lancaster that the reason he will not put in for his officer's stripes, a career move that would allow them to marry is because his is already married, namely to the U.S. Army.

is conceived by the valiant war veteran as merely filling the vacuum war left, then the gaze of the warrior is, in any case, the more primary of the two. Put another way, the means by which war is continued in Shakespeare's Messina the day after a decisive battle has been won, consists explicitly in transferring military strategy to the battle of love. Initially, the „shared vicissitudes of love and war", as Harry Berger Jr. calls the courtship rituals that are set in motion in the first scene of the play, are conventionally benign, with Don Pedro leading the other men in treating courtship as though it were a campaign.[11] At the end of the scene, the Prince unfolds his martial ruse, explaining that he will pretend to be Claudio, and under the cover of this disguise approach Hero „And take her hearing prisoner with the force/And strong encounter of my amorous tale." (1.1.305-6) A more viciously antagonistic spirit is, however, also at work from the start. Even if these homecoming soldiers claim to allow other desires to take the place of the martial ones now left vacant, their codes of behaviour, indeed the very criteria by which they judge the world and act upon this judgement, have remained the same. Words are treated as though they were swords. As Greenblatt argues, „linguistic performance is the social equivalent of the performance in warfare that is both alluded to and conspicuously excluded from the play's action", prompting him to conclude: „Language is violence, and language is the alternative to violence: the play entertains both hypotheses and plays them off against each other."[12]

If Don John's decision to „build mischief" (1.3.42) by continuing his battle with his brother in the form of a domestic intrigue is so successful, then perhaps this is so because it works with, and indeed reflects the continuation of a spirit of war in peace. Setting his enemies up to spy on Hero in her chamber at night simply mirrors the hiding and eavesdropping which Don Pedro and his band of brothers are themselves already practicing. Indeed their willingness to mistrust is already well in place before they fall for the

[11] See Harry Berger Jr.'s discussion of the misogynist aggressivity subtending a wooing ritual which ultimately dissolves the very bond it is based on in „Against the Sink-a-Pace: Sexual and Family Politics in *Much Ado About Nothing*", in: *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33/1982, p. 302-313, at p. 312. See also Elliot Krieger's claim that one of the resolutions sought in the final acts is a combination of a military code and a domestic code into a „more comprehensive aristocratic ideal", while the plays dramatic tension thrives on measuring one code against the other, „Social Relations and Social Order in *Much Ado About Nothing*", in: *Shakespeare Survey. An Annual Survey of Shakespearian Study and Production* 32/1979, p. 49-61, at p.52.

[12] Greenblatt, „Introduction" (see note 6), p. 1384. In her introduction to the edition of the play in *The Arden Shakespeare* (see note 8), Claire McEachern makes a similar point, suggesting that throughout the play „[c]onversation is both a dance and a form of combat.", p. 1-143, at p. 63.

conspirator's ruse. A ‚preposterous' reading of this comedy with post-World War II cinema in mind, suggests a link between the ubiquitous spirit of suspicion displayed by Shakespeare's veterans and the conspiracy theories that came to the fore in the late 1940s, finding expression in the bleak figurations of fatal love in *film noir*.[13] Read through the lens of these post-war thrillers, one can detect in Shakespeare's comedy a somber articulation of the unease both men and women feel regarding their return to a state of normalcy that the war had, in fact, irrevocably altered since their men first went away. In the playful eavesdropping that takes place in the first part of the play, the lines of demarcation between the men and the women may be blurred. Yet the disruption of the female alliance, pitting Hero against her childhood friend Beatrice, already indicates the spirit of violence lurking just beneath the surface of all interim revelry.

Above all, however, the fact that all bonds are fragile, as the brief spout of jealousy between Claudio and Pedro illustrates, indicates how sword-happy the men continue to be even after having returned to the home front; or rather, how sword-happy they become in the absence of a clearly designated enemy. Indeed, the military logic ruling the behaviour of these soldiers in a post-war world, is one in which anyone could be a traitor, or a competitor because no one is clearly marked as a traitor or enemy, as would be the case in a battle situation. Or rather, anyone could be the enemy, merely disguised as a friend, because all action continues to be encoded in the lingo of war. Might one not take the game the Prince and his fellow soldiers play with Benedick to be a domestic form of torture, lying to him so as to break him in the war of love they are inflicting on him; using the military ruse of baiting the enemy as their strategy. While speaking to his war buddies, Benedick had himself likened Beatrice's verbal assault on him to standing „like a man at a mark, with a whole army shooting at me. She speaks poniards, and every word stabs." (2.1.225-27) Then, in the arbour scene, Pedro plays exactly this trope back to Benedick, fooling him into believing their version of his military gaze on love, by claiming: „I would have thought her spirit had been invincible against all assaults of affection." (2.3.114-16) Under the pressure

[13] In her book *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999, Mieke Bal offers the term ‚preposterious history' as a mode of critical reading, which treats texts that chronologically precede others (‚pre') as an after-effect (‚post') of their later recyclings. In this spirit, I suggest re-scrutinizing Shakespeare's early modern comedy through the lens of its later refiguration in Hollywood genre cinema, even if such a recycling is primarily implicity. For a similar crossmapping of *film noir* onto a different medium preceding it, see also Elisabeth Bronfen, „Nocturnal Wagner: The Cultural Survival of Tristan and Isolde in Hollywood", in: Jeongwon Joe/Sander L. Gilman (ed.), *Wagner & Cinema*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010, p. 315-332.

of his peers, Benedick himself reroutes his military lingo, responding, „Shall quips and sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humour?" The inclination which will win out is the erotic drive, which Freud (during the interim between the first and the second world war) pits against the death drive, even while he, too, insists that this is a perpetual battle. At this point in the siege of love inflicted upon him by his fellow soldiers, Benedick convinces himself: „[...] the world must be peopled." (2.3.233)[14]

With Foucault's claim that the traces of war are written into all civil laws in mind, one can trace in the third act of the play, how paper bullets can run dangerously close to getting two people killed. Hero pretends to have died as the result of having been unjustly slandered, while Claudio could well find his death in a duel, resulting from a command given to his war buddy by the very woman on whom he has sought to play his own tricks as match-maker. Thus, even while we laugh along with the merry war with words performed so skilfully by Benedick and Beatrice, and laugh at their gullibility at the hands of their friends, we have a sense throughout that the verbal weapons deployed by all sides can readily turn into real swords, with the spirit of thanatos tipping the scale in a direction such that the world comes close to being *devoid of people.* Put another way, the cruel disruption of marriage Don John's intrigue threatens to bring about, simply mirrors the pact among men and the abuse of women (as domestic enemies to this pact) on which military loyalty is grounded.[15] Indeed, his dark intrigue, revolving around Hero's alleged infidelity, feeds on the other soldiers' paranoia regarding the alleged fickleness of all women. As such, it also reflects (and allows us to reflect on) the equally vicious, though implicitly justified intrigue devised by Don Pedro to trick Benedick and Beatrice into confessing their love. One might surmise, Don John's objective is to produce the very bachelorhood Benedick initially professes as being his key to being a soldier. At the same time, although this illegitimate brother's ambition is marked by tragic sensibility, given that he aspires to „misuse the prince, to vex Claudio, to undo Hero and kill Leonato" (2.2.25-26), he can achieve his aim only in the miti-

[14] For Freud's discussion of the way an interminable struggle between erotic and death drives structures the vicissitudes of both individual and collective desire see Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), in: idem, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. by James Strachey, London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974, Vol. 21, 1961, p. 59-148.

[15] The way in which Dogberry, with his malapropisms, brings out the violence of semantic contradiction inherent to language, and, in so doing, offers his own mirroring of the military aggression structuring the world of match-making on the Messina homefront, is a point I will address in the last part of the essay.

gated version of a clandestine battle subtending peacetime law. His intrigue does *not* result in the eruption of a civil war (as is the case in the history plays). All he manages to achieve is a strategic rerouting of Claudio's gaze, turning the lover back into a soldier.

As Jean E. Howard notes, any focus on Don John as origin of evil obscures „the extent to which the assumptions about women upon which his trick depends are shared by other men in the play". The deceiver and those who allow themselves to be duped, share the cultural construction of the feminine as universally prone to impersonation, which, regardless which of the two parties has recourse to it, ultimately „serves the political end of justifying men's control and repression of the volatile and duplicitous female".[16] The sinister tone of Shakespeare's comedy is most bleakly articulated by virtue of the fact that, initially, Hero and the women attendant upon her, side with Don Pedro and his band of brothers, sharing the fun they have at torturing her best friend Beatrice into relinquishing the one weapon she has, her verbal wit. Once this objective falls away, the fault line between men and women upon which it was predicated becomes fatefully visible. Thus, if the gender battle begins as a battle of wit, it bleeds into Don John's aspiration for a civil war, once the real effects of language's violence takes hold, exposing the equally real consequences post-war paranoia can have on the homefront the day after battle.

Significantly, this shift in view is inaugurated by a displacement fantasy of feminine death. After Hero and her women have set upon Beatrice, their men invoke a curious imaginary scene of her death for Benedick. He is once more in the position of the duped eavesdropper, believing himself to be privy to clandestine knowledge which is, in fact, explicitly intended for him. Claudio claims to know who loves him, and who, „in despite of all dies for him" (3.2.60-61). Don Pedro, in turn, responds, „She shall be buried with her face upwards." (3.2.62) Taken as an expression of wit, the metaphor references the *petit mort* of eroticism, yet on the literal level of the utterance, the comment presents both Benedick and us with an image of Beatrice as a corpse. The cruelty consists further in the fact that she is killed off in spirit with the very weapon she shares with the men. Their sword-play with words turns her into the patsy or butt of a joke which the men have recourse to so as to contain the power she has over words. With relish, Don Pedro and his fellow soldiers, who see women primarily as objectives to be conquered, can conceive of Beatrice's giving herself sexually to her lover as a form of slaying.

[16] Jean. E. Howard, „Renaissance antitheatricality and the politics of gender and rank in *Much Ado About Nothing*", in: Jean E. Howard/Marion F. O'Conner (ed.), *Shakespeare Reproduced. The Text in History and Ideology*, New York: Methuen, 1987, p. 163-187, at p. 175.

Given that in any dramatic logic, timing is of issue, it is decisive that at the precise point in the plot when one aspect of the continuation of war on the homefront promises to come to an end, the darker counter-version of Don Pedro's marriage campaign breaks out on stage. Based on Don John's claims regarding Hero's infidelity, the courtship ritual moves from verbal skirmish to a far more sinister enactment of these soldiers' bawdy splice of Eros and Thanatos. The night patrol, which will result in Claudio's cruel change of heart during the wedding ceremony, can readily be associated with a nocturnal search for military intelligence before a clandestine assault on enemy lines the next morning. Furthermore, before he embarks on the patrol, Claudio, as though he were expecting to find proof of his bride's guilt, asserts: „If I see anything tonight why I should not marry her, tomorrow in the congregation where I should wed, there will I shame her." (3.2.111-13) Don Pedro, in turn, is quick to affirm his allegiance, responding, „And as I wooed for thee to obtain her, I will join with thee to disgrace her." (3.2.114-15) Hero's loyalty thus stands in doubt (casting her as a potential enemy) even before the man they stupidly do not recognize as their actual enemy plays his fatal game with their vision. The ease with which they fall into this adversarial conviction suggests that they prefer war's rougher task to the name of love from which the preceding military campaign had liberated them.

In the fourth act, the two aspects of a continuation of war with other means – the merry war of matchmaking and the illegitimate brother's domestic war mongering – come to be conflated, transforming the church into a courtroom, now literally the scene for an adversarial battle with words that will have more than romantic effect. The military logic prevailing is such that all those *not* on the side of the accusers are clearly designated enemies, to be shamed with words rather than slain with swords. Initially Beatrice's father follows suit, responding to Don Pedro's description of the alleged nocturnal scene of deceit with a call for a dagger. After Hero, literally touched by the sharp edge of the accusing words, faints, he adds, „Do not live, Hero; do not ope thine eyes!/For did I think thou wouldst 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) Yet the actual scandal of the transformation of an aggressive marriage drive into manifest gender warfare is less the father's own murderous desire. More astonishing is the fact that, while the spirit of battle takes over what was intended to be a felicitous ceremony, blurring the boundary between performative language and its actual consequences, Benedick and Beatrice do what they always do. They stick to their skirmish of wit, refusing to take sides. Instead Benedick falters, admitting, „For my part, I am so attired in wonder/I know not what

to say." (4.1.144-45) His hesitation is starkly contrasted by Leonato's response, pleading „[...] let her die" (4.1.154), as though willing the bridegroom's violent words to produce the real effect of his daughter's demise.

At the same time, fully in line with Benedick's refusal to follow the other men in their aggressive accusations, Friar Francis inserts his counter-logic to the all-pervasive military logic that has turned the church into the front line of a domestic battle. His response answers to Don Pedro's conspiracy of love, turned lethal by Don John's successful deception, as well as to the merry bullets of words Beatrice and Benedick continue to fire at each other. His intervention consists in pitting forgiveness against all notions of revenge, regardless whether it comes to be voiced by the strangely misprisioned Prince and his companions, or the outraged and bereaved father of the slandered bride. He proposes what Stanley Cavell has suggested to be the best formula for averting tragedy. Rather than going on doing the thing which produces fateful consequences in the first place, we need „the courage, or plain prudence, to see and to stop".[17] So as not to repeat the militaristic attitude on the part of the men that gave rise to the disaster in the first place, Friar Francis appeals to all involved to „Pause awhile [...]" (4.1.200). In the dramatic pause which puts both the playful verbal skirmish of Benedick and Beatrice on hold, as well as Don John's successful redirection of a decorated war hero's suspicion, Friar Francis suggests a third way of using language to produce military action. In his case, however, a war fought with words is not aimed at destroying the opponent, but rather seeks to call forth his remorse.

His plan to have Hero feign her death, so that her father and her friends can wait and see how the strangely misprisioned bridegroom will respond, counters military logic because it is not premised on an adversarial position. While the latter would entail claiming that the one side wins only if the other side loses, Friar Francis' suggestion consists in harnessing death in the name of social rejuvenation. Unwittingly, he anticipates Freud's thoughts on transience, written in 1916. With the catastrophic destruction of WWI clearly before his eyes, Freud notes „[t]ransience value is scarcity value in time. Limitation in the possibility of an enjoyment raises the value of the enjoyment."[18] Faced with personal, not national catastrophe, Shakespeare's friar makes a similar claim: „That what we have we prize not to the worth/Whiles we enjoy it, but being lacked and lost,/Why, then we rack the value, then we find/The virtue that possession would not show us/Wiles it was ours." (4.1.218-22) Friar Francis, too, equates words with swords when

[17] Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Six Plays of Shakespeare*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 81.

[18] See Sigmund Freud, *On Transience* (1916), in: idem, *The Standard Edition* (see note 14), Vol. 14, 1957, p. 305.

he anticipates the response Claudio will have upon discovering about Hero that „she died upon his words" (4.1.223). But with his counter-military ruse, the friar has devised a strategy in which each side can only win, and in so doing, his argument moves beyond any logic of war. Either Claudio's accusation is false, he suggests, and then Hero's death will wondrously sustain the infamy, augmenting the guilt of the accusers. Or, if the accusation is true, she can disappear with impunity into a nunnery.

Equally crucial for an averting of tragedy is that, although Benedick and Beatrice are the ones who blithely hold onto their battle of wit, they are also the ones who can achieve the conversation necessary for a marriage of true minds. Benedick is, after all, not only the one man to stay with the women, and, in so doing, the one man who bonds with those his fellow soldiers deem the domestic enemy. He is also the one soldier who comes out in support of Friar Francis' counter-military logic. It is, indeed, ironic that he can finally make the confession of love he has resisted precisely during (or perhaps only owing to) this outbreak of violence: „By my sword, Beatrice, though lovest me." (4.1.273) He invokes his weapon both as a metonymy for sexuality and as a literal designation of the fact that he continues to be a soldier. Where Claudio sought to exchange *his* soldier's gaze for that of a lover, only to find his military predisposition returning once doubt is cast on his bride, Benedick, by never relinquishing his identity as a soldier, neither gives in to a romantic idealization of woman, nor does he fall prey to an equally blind demonization of the feminine other. Instead, he assesses his relation to Beatrice as she herself did upon hearing that he was returning home, when she claimed him to be „a good soldier to a lady" (1.1.51). He remains the soldier, but does so now in explicit reference to his lady.

One further point regarding the continuation of war, however, needs to be addressed. With her command, „Kill Claudio" (4.1.288) Beatrice, in fact, emerges as the one to call for an explicit military response. More poignantly, she calls for a civil war between men and women, with her warrior lover doing what she (and in this she anticipates Lady Macbeth's desire to be unsexed) is powerless to do as a woman. Indeed, she attempts to incite the very civil war which Don John had also hoped to inspire, but failed. Were she successful in pitting Benedick against his war comrades, she would, at the very least, bring about an internal strife that would undo Don Pedro's power by splitting his troops into opposing camps. We are, thus, called upon to recognize that her skirmish of wit is as prone to produce real damage as Claudio's slander, precisely because it follows his military logic. Since Claudio is now her declared enemy, then, for Benedick to prove that he is on her side, he, too, must declare his former war comrade to be his enemy. By accepting the conditions of their engagement, promising Beatrice that he

will challenge Claudio to a duel, Benedick crosses the friar's counter-military plans which he had initially supported. So as to be a soldier to his lady, he once more resorts to an adversarial conception of self. Decisive is, thus, the fact that while, in making this choice, Benedick supports a continuation of war in peace in precisely the manner Foucault postulates it, namely by asserting that there can be no neutral subject position, this move is undertaken in the name of his future wife. Beatrice is the one to insist that when traces of war rupture the surface of civil skirmishes, you must choose to be on one side or the other of the line of demarcation. At such a moment, neutrality is not an option. You either win or lose.

If Benedick emerges as the soldier willing to abandon his comrades, Beatrice insists on rallying her troops around a desire for death far more vehement than that of the father, Leonato. She wants to set two brothers in arms against each other by using the one sword she can claim to be in possession of, namely her verbal force. The words she now hurls at her enemy are explicitly deployed to counter the other sword she does not have, masculinity and the social power that goes with it: „O that I were a man [...]" (4.1.315). At the same time, manhood is clearly understood by her as being more than words, when she sarcastically claims that in times of civility it has „[...] melted into curtsies, valour into compliment, and men are only turned into tongue, and trim ones, too." (4.1.317-19) Ironically, with the same outburst that she bemoans her limited power as a woman, having only words to assert her interest with, she sides with the very cultural codes that contain her feminine power. She aspires to the paramilitary code of behaviour which measures agency in relation to an ability to move from using words as swords to duelling with actual swords. In this unbridled lust for unmitigated revenge she is, perhaps, the only man on stage at this point. In contrast to the bawdy fantasy Claudio shared with Don Pedro regarding her death in Benedick's erotic embrace, she now herself invokes the image of her own death. She does so, however, not in relation to the erotic act, but rather in response to her grief at being unable to avenge her beloved Hero. As an expression of the logic of war at its purest, insisting that the violence of slander beget blood, she refuses to take Benedick's hand as a sign of romantic commitment to her. Instead, she demands that he „Use it for my love some other way than swearing by it." (4.1.323-24) She is, in fact, asking him to finally act out viscerally the skirmish which, up to this point in their relation, their merry battle of wit has merely linguistically performed.

A certain ambivalence subtends this curious marriage proposal, given that it remains unclear whether Benedick accepts her demand that he challenge Claudio out of conviction, or whether this acquiescence to her is simply a further turning of the screw in his courtship ruse. Less equivocal is the fact

that these two word-warriors are now united in terms of a military logic which implicitly aligns the woman deemed illegitimate when it comes to the swords of war, with the illegitimate brother of the Prince. Beatrice and her beloved are now equally thirsty for the domestic military action in which Don John has shown himself to be so passionately invested, even if he fails to be successful. Though positioned on the other side of the vicious line of demarcation that erupted in the church, Beatrice thus emerges as the mirror image of the disgruntled brother, who was responsible for transforming a festive homefront into a battle zone in the first place. But Beatrice is now also in structural alliance with Dogberry's war on words. Earlier on in the play, Margaret had poignantly called her wit an „illegitimate construction" (3.4.45), unwittingly gesturing not only to Don John's status within the family of the Prince, but also toward Dogberry's idiosyncratic language usage, itself so pointedly illegitimate regarding all codification of meaning. Although the constable in charge of the watch has money, he lacks the linguistic skills of the aristocracy. There is, as Anne Barton suggests, „something almost touching about Dogberry's unrequited passion for words in a play in which other characters possess a mastery of language that is positively dazzling".[19] In his audacious ambition to take possession of words he cannot master, Dogberry wrecks malice on ordinary language the way Don John wrecks malice on the ordinary courtship codes. In so doing, he uncovers a latent meaning which turns the ordinary into something out of the ordinary, and as such discloses the semantic struggle written into the very fabric of seemingly innocent words. Indeed, with his verbal confusion – sometimes banking on semantic opposition, sometimes on fantasy construction – he openly speaks latent meanings adversarial to language conventions. As such he mirrors Don John, whose intrigue also brings latent meanings to the fore, in his case the anger evoked by the social convention of distinguishing between legally acknowledgd and illegitimate progeny.

Ironically, it is Dogberry's violence against verbal conventions, his attack on the linguistic criteria on which the rigidly hierarchical culture of Messina is based, that will ultimately resolve the political conflict between two brothers, even while bringing about the dual wedding anticipated in the final act. It is worth remembering that the men around him come to be as infected by Dogberry's war on language, as the men around Don Pedro are infected by his post-war suspicion. At the same time, the limited power of these policemen offers yet another indication of the perpetual presence of war's traces in

[19] See Anne Barton's introduction to *Much Ado About Nothing* in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, edited by Gwynne Blakemore Evans, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974, p 327-331, at p. 331.

peacetime. The constable and his watch can do nothing more than stall Don John's thugs, even while they are unable to prevent the terrible fallout of their ruse. Dogberry and his men uncover the vicious master-mind only after Hero has been publicly slandered, which is to say only after the comic spirit of restoration has irrevocably been tarnished. After Borachio makes a complete confession, the second watchman notes: „We have here recovered the most dangerous piece of lechery that ever was known in the commonwealth!" (3.3.159-61) The *recovery* is indeed a *discovery*, and the *lechery* a cover for *treachery*. The mixing up of ordinary language usage attests to the seminal double voicing at stake in my discussion of the way war leaves its residues in the world the day after battle. In the language of Dogberry and his men, political treason (taking as its object a feigned scene of erotic deception) appears in the costume of a sexually lewd scene. Semantic play is, thus, shown to be as uncontainable as violent instincts in the returned soldiers, who focus on love once war-thoughts have vacated the scene. In the context of a homefront riddled with threats of enemy attacks and a spirit of suspicion and interrogation attesting to the ubiquitous presence of military logic, Dogberry and his men could be seen as passing on the intelligence, which the Prince and his companions need. However, because it is disfigured, it can not be understood and the enemy not forestalled.

What the inability to transmit intelligence also attests to, however, is that in a world ruled by codes of military desire that can not be contained, only acts speak. When Dogberry explains he has „indeed comprehended two aspicious persons" (3.5.43-44). Leonato trusts not the intelligence given but the fantasies already in place. Yet Dogberry has gained *comprehension*, while *apprehending* his suspects, and their testimony is auspicious, but only to us, who are already in the know. Hitting his mark precisely by missing it, Dogberry's war on words also produces a poetry of its own. With Julia Kristeva's discussion of avant-guard literary practice in mind, notably her claim that it disrupts ordinary language so as to release the aggressively powerful heteroglossia contained beneath all strict codes of conventional meaning, one might – ‚preposteriously' of course – see Dogberry's idiosyncratic utterances as performing a revolution of poetic language. A surrealist subject *avant la lettre*, he literally puts words into our ears, in an 'eftist' way, performing a linguistic feat which comes astonishingly close to the materiality of language sought out by modernist poetics.

How, then, does Shakespeare resolve this insistent and incessant continuation of war with other means, so as to achieve the restoration of peace we associate with the day after battle. In the final act, the domestic war that is on the verge of erupting, is luckily contained. Leonato invokes the violent power of language one last time when he confronts Claudio, but we know he is

doing so in the spirit of the friar's counter-military strategy. The aggression soldiers need, in order to fight valiantly in war, comes to be harnessed in the interest of marriage and the fact that the world must be peopled. Cynically one might surmise, since the Prince and his troops lost no one on the battlefield, they feel compelled to lose someone on the homefront. Indeed, the logical consequence of words becoming swords is one Benedick and Claudio play through in their final skirmish in Act 5, mirroring the skirmish between Benedick and Beatrice in Act 1. The challenge between these former brothers in arms could be the end of all jesting. As Don Pedro mockingly notes, „What a pretty thing man is when he goes in his doublet and hose, and leaves off his wit!" (5.1.194-95) Yet into this tense moment, when, finally, swords threaten to speak for words, Dogberry once more intervenes with his curiously confused logic. As the agent responsible for discovering the knavery of Don John and his men, he is now unequivocally aligned with the clergyman. In tandem with Friar Francis' appeal that everyone pause awhile, tragedy is averted in *Much ado about Nothing* because Dogberry's linguistic confusion, while disclosing the revolutionary potential of poetic expression inscribed in ordinary language, can not be harnessed into any military logic. In his war on language, Dogberry shows that the issue isn't one of taking sides along a line of demarcation (be it one of class, gender or family legitimacy), because unleashing the uncontained power of language makes the taking of sides obsolete.

At the same time, this revolutionary moment of pure poetry must be contained along with the desire for pure destruction on which war is premised. What follows upon Dogberry's linguistic fog of war is Borachio's confession, which can be taken as the statement of a prisoner of war. His confession also has performative power, given that it brings about the transformation from war to peace which Friar Francis foresaw when he assured Leonato, „This wedding day/Perhaps is but prolonged. Have patience and endure." (4.1.253-54) As seamlessly as Claudio had turned against his bride, he once more designates Hero to be an embodiment of ideal womanhood, prompting one to ask: Is the text suggesting that valiant warriors think only in terms of simple oppositions between friend and foe, loyalty and disloyalty, loving and killing? If this were, indeed, the case, one would be led to conclude that although a manifest outbreak of fighting has come to be contained in the name of peace, the spirit of war persists when marriage vows are still a question of winning or losing. The difference is simply that in the final act of *Much Ado about Nothing*, Claudio accepts punishment in the name and in the interest of peace. To undo his slander, he is willing to hang an epitaph on Hero's tomb and marry her alleged surrogate. This harnessing of a soldier's linguistic sword, which in Act 4 almost threatened to leave behind a bride's

corpse, is convincing because the other agent of violence has also come to be contained. Benedick's own willingness to turn in his wit for a sword after Beatrice takes aim at his brother in arms, has also happily reverted back to cheerful camaraderie. At stake is the rhetorical gesture of dislocation, the social deception necessary if, on the day after battle, the world is still to be peopled and not devoid of a next generation. Capitulation occurs on the romantic battlefield. With his final confession of love, Benedick vows to his Beatrice: „I will live in thy heart, die in thy lap, and be buried in thy eyes – and moreover, I will go with thee to thy uncle's." (5.2.93-95) He has given his soldier's surrender, but he also seems to be infected by Dogberry's silly logic. If Beatrice was the one to insist on war in peace at the acme of dramatic tension, Benedick is the one to put an end to tension by giving himself up to her.

Yet one must ask: How secure is this peace? Looking at the final moments of *Much Ado about Nothing* with the gender battle performed in the preceeding acts in mind, we take note that Benedick is the one to name the two things that will impair the double military wedding about to be celebrated in Messina. Because Don Pedro is sad, he recommends him to get himself a wife. A messenger, in turn, informs them that Don John has been apprehended. This prompts Benedick to add: „I'll devise thee brave punishments for him" (5.4.125-26), as though the anticipation of torture might dispel his Prince's sadness in the absence of a ready wife. If, thus, one soldier is still without a mate and the villain is about to return, the possibility of war erupting again is also sustained. If no where else, Don John's mischief will resurface in the trial. In the courtroom, the adversarial battle that has just barely been averted – with Claudio marrying the woman he had wanted dead and Benedick marrying the woman who demanded that he challenge his best friend – will come to be played out again. In the verdict spoken on the insurgent brother, a logic of war will continue, rumbling beneath the romantic happy end this comedy has finally achieved after much ado. Adversarial force promises to spill over into the day after the curtain has fallen.

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