

“How does Shakespeare initially present Paulina to the audience?”

Shakespeare introduces the audience to Paulina’s resilient, confidant and independent nature (qualities that a woman under the patriarchal society would have not had, much like Hermione); “the keeper of the prison, call to him” at the beginning of Act 2 Scene 2, though not only the use of commanding language used but also the visual and commanding appearance she would have had on stage, through the use of stage directions; “Enter Paulina, a Gentleman [and Attendants].” Note how Shakespeare has depicted the men to be adopting subservient positions giving the audience a visual image of the respect and authority she possesses as she enters the Scene. The patriarchal oppression and derogatory treatment woman may have felt at the time does not seem to have effect on her, challenging this oppression not only through her commanding attitude towards her followers and prison guards “conduct me to the queen,” but also through her disobedience to Leontes, and her own husband by visiting the prison. Shakespeare highlights the precedence placed on social calls at the time; as Paulina, though her social status, “Call to him. Let him have knowledge who I am,” managing to undermine the patriarchal oppression demonstrated by Leontes through Hermione’s imprisonment.

Throughout Act 2 Scene 2, Shakespeare’s use of an underlying critical tone; “Here’s ado, to lock up honesty and honour from th’access of gentle visitors” depicts Paulina to be confidant and have a somewhat challenging nature, yet not in an aggressive or confrontational way. Through the use of this critical tone, and of Paulina’s commanding language; “withdraw yourselves” Shakespeare depicts Paulina to be advocating women’s rights, and to be subtly and rationally defying male patriarchy within society in which she, and other women were forced to live in. Women at the time were also shunned into taking on the role and responsibility of looking after the child “we do not know how he may soften at the sight” the baby having been brought into prison with Hermione even though this is not the right place for a baby, there is a real sense that Paulina is not only angered by the injustice that is occurring, but she also that she is honest in her action, and cares for the wellbeing of Hermione and her new born baby. Notably critics have argued that Shakespeare was, in fact, an early feminist, thus creating this positive and triumphant depiction of Paulina actually embodies his real attitudes towards the segregation and oppression of women within society. As if her actions didn’t speak for themselves, Shakespeare backs up Paulina’s purity through Emilia “your honour and goodness is so evident” Paulina almost mirroring Hermione’s character aspects.

As the scene progresses, the audience is introduced to Paulina’s caring and loyal nature; “Good lady, no court in Europe is too good for thee,” with the strong bond of friendship becoming apparent between Hermione and Paulina; “Dear gentlewoman, how fares our gracious lady?” Shakespeare’s use of passionate language “gracious lady?” not only reflects Paulina’s genuine concern for Hermione’s well-being, but also her admiration for the Queen. “Good Lady” suggests the value that she places on her friendship. In addition to this, again through the use of a critical tone; “here’s such ado to make no stain a stain.” Shakespeare effectively emphasises Paulina’s loyal nature, with her defence of the Queen’s honour and values, implying that Hermione is too virtuous and honourable to ever “stain” with

misconceptions and jealous assumptions. On another level this can also be seen as a condemnation of Leontes by Paulina, with her implying that Hermione is the bigger person, the one who is respected and honoured by people whilst Leontes is aggressive, the “tyrant” and who’s self created jealousy has not only corrupted his personality but also his relationship with his wife and childhood friend, once again emphasising the positive and honourable depiction of Paulina to the audience in Act 2 Scene 2.

It is also important to note that like other characters such as Leontes and Antigonus who hold higher power, Paulina alongside these noble men talks in verse not prose. This not only shows her social upbringing, but also emphasises her intelligence and her understanding of the events that are occurring around her. She exclaims “I shall do good” not only depicting the clear injustice that she is witnessing, but also her moral integrity, she is actively trying to change the inevitable immoral outcome upon Hermione. Her speech therefore flows naturally and effortlessly, with less punctuation allowing her verse to become more effective; although when punctuation is used “The anger of the king, nor guilty of – if any be – the trespass of the queen” Paulina commands respect instantly, demonstrating this unique skill Shakespeare has given her, the Gaoler responding “I do believe it.” changing his viewpoint instantly.

Alongside Paulina’s effective use of punctuation, Shakespeare gives Paulina a soft, more reasonable tone; “it’t lawfull, pray you, to see her women?” demonstrating her rational yet determined side. Paulina therefore embodies honesty and integrity, much like Hermione, her arguments are constructed in logical, eloquent way; “the silence often of pure innocent, persuades when speaking fails...” the use of the words “pure innocent” again reemphasises not only Hermione’s innocence, but also the fact that Leontes couldn’t be making a greater mistake as Hermione epitomises “pure” and “good natured”. Unlike Leontes, Paulina remains logical during confrontations; “The child was prisoner to the womb, and is by law and the process of great nature thence freed and enfranchised” remaining focused on the issue in hand. Leontes, however, allows self generated jealousy to corrupt himself, clouding his judgement and destroying his relationships with those closest to him, including Hermione, Polixenes and Mamillius, emphasising the stark contrast between the two characters. Critics have argued that Paulina can be seen as a voice from Hermione, with, on one hand, her representing the unseen characteristics of Hermione, the direct and bold nature of the Queen; “command me to the Queen!” and on the other hand, her reflecting Hermione’s very apparent honourable and virtuous nature; “good lady”.

Ultimately I believe that this scene was engineered by Shakespeare, to enhance the moralistic confrontation between Leontes and Hermione. At the same time the audience is introduced to the honourable Paulina, her determination to combat patriarchal society, alongside her loyalty and morals are heavily emphasised throughout the scene.