

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Part 5: Benedick Is Tricked

Act 2, Scene 3

BEFORE YOU READ

Benedick reflects on how love has changed Claudio and boasts that he could never be transformed in the same way. Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato arrange a conversation for him to overhear. Convinced that Beatrice secretly loves him, Benedick decides he will love her in return.

A HELPFUL SHAKESPEARE HABIT

Read Benedick's asides as if he is thinking out loud directly to the audience. His changing reactions are part of the joke.

Who's Who in This Reading

Benedick: Hides nearby and overhears a conversation staged for his benefit.

Don Pedro (Prince): Directs the trick.

Claudio: Joins the staged conversation and teases Benedick.

Leonato: Adds credibility because he is Beatrice's uncle.

Balthasar: Sings before the plotters begin their performance.

Boy: Briefly serves Benedick.

Beatrice: Appears at the end and unknowingly confirms Benedick's new hope.

SOURCE AND USE

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Quick Word Help

quip

a witty remark

orthography

correct spelling; here, elegant writing

amorous

in love

bear the bucklers

win or carry the prize

ditty

a short song

note

musical note; also notice

savory

pleasing or agreeable

stale

decoy or bait

limed

caught with sticky birdlime

odd quirks

strange habits or witty turns

contemptible spirit

attitude deserving scorn

conference

conversation

censure

judgment

reformed

changed for the better

LOOK AND LISTEN FOR

- Every moment when Benedick interprets the conversation to fit what he wants to believe.
- How the hidden listeners and staged speakers perform for one another.
- Benedick's reasons for changing his mind about love and marriage.

Reading tip: Assign parts aloud. If a sentence feels confusing, read to the punctuation before stopping to define one word.

ACT 2, SCENE 3

BENEDICK Boy!

[Enter Boy.]

BOY Signior?

BENEDICK In my chamber window lies a book. Bring it hither to me in the orchard.

BOY I am here already, sir.

BENEDICK I know that, but I would have thee hence and here again. [Boy exits.] I do much wonder that one man, seeing how much another man is a fool when he dedicates his behaviors to love, will, after he hath laughed at such shallow follies in others, become the argument of his own scorn by falling in love--and such a man is Claudio. I have known when there was no music with him but the drum and the fife, and now had he rather hear the tabor and the pipe; I have known when he would have walked ten mile afoot to see a good armor, and now will he lie ten nights awake carving the fashion of a new doublet. He was wont to speak plain and to the purpose, like an honest man and a soldier, and now is he turned orthography; his words are a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes. May I be so converted and see with these eyes? I cannot tell; I think not. I will not be sworn but love may transform me to an oyster, but I'll take my oath on it, till he have made an oyster of me, he shall never make me such a fool. One woman is fair, yet I am well; another is wise, yet I am well; another virtuous, yet I am well; but till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace. Rich she shall be, that's certain; wise, or I'll none;

virtuous, or I'll never cheapen her; fair, or I'll never look on her; mild, or come not near me; noble, or not I for an angel; of good discourse, an excellent musician, and her hair shall be of what color it please God. Ha! The Prince and Monsieur Love! I will hide me in the arbor. [He hides.]

[Enter Prince, Leonato, Claudio, and Balthasar with music.]

PRINCE Come, shall we hear this music?

CLAUDIO

Yea, my good lord. How still the evening is,
As hushed on purpose to grace harmony!

PRINCE

[aside to Claudio]

See you where Benedick hath hid himself?

CLAUDIO

[aside to Prince]

O, very well my lord. The music ended,
We'll fit the kid-fox with a pennyworth.

PRINCE

Come, Balthasar, we'll hear that song again.

BALTHASAR

O, good my lord, tax not so bad a voice
To slander music any more than once.

PRINCE

It is the witness still of excellency
To put a strange face on his own perfection.
I pray thee, sing, and let me woo no more.

BALTHASAR

Because you talk of wooing, I will sing,
 Since many a wooer doth commence his suit
 To her he thinks not worthy, yet he woos,
 Yet will he swear he loves.

PRINCE Nay, pray thee, come, Or if thou wilt hold longer
 argument, Do it in notes.

BALTHASAR Note this before my notes: There's not a note of
 mine that's worth the noting.

PRINCE

Why, these are very crotchets that he speaks!
 Note notes, forsooth, and nothing. [Music plays.]

BENEDICK [aside] Now, divine air! Now is his soul ravished.
 Is it not strange that sheeps' guts should hale souls out
 of men's bodies? Well, a horn for my money, when all's
 done.

BALTHASAR [sings] Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more, Men
 were deceivers ever, One foot in sea and one on shore, To one
 thing constant never. Then sigh not so, but let them go, And be
 you blithe and bonny, Converting all your sounds of woe Into
 Hey, nonny nonny.

Sing no more ditties, sing no mo, Of dumps so dull and heavy.
 The fraud of men was ever so, Since summer first was leavy.
 Then sigh not so, but let them go, And be you blithe and bonny,
 Converting all your sounds of woe Into Hey, nonny nonny.

PRINCE By my troth, a good song.

BALTHASAR And an ill singer, my lord.

PRINCE Ha, no, no, faith, thou sing'st well enough for a
 shift.

BENEDICK [aside] An he had been a dog that should have howled thus, they would have hanged him. And I pray God his bad voice bode no mischief. I had as lief have heard the night raven, come what plague could have come after it.

PRINCE Yea, marry, dost thou hear, Balthasar? I pray thee get us some excellent music, for tomorrow night we would have it at the Lady Hero's chamber window.

BALTHASAR The best I can, my lord.

PRINCE Do so. Farewell. [Balthasar exits.] Come hither, Leonato. What was it you told me of today, that your niece Beatrice was in love with Signior Benedick?

CLAUDIO O, ay. [Aside to Prince.] Stalk on, stalk on; the fowl sits.--I did never think that lady would have loved any man.

LEONATO No, nor I neither, but most wonderful that she should so dote on Signior Benedick, whom she hath in all outward behaviors seemed ever to abhor.

BENEDICK [aside] Is 't possible? Sits the wind in that corner?

LEONATO By my troth, my lord, I cannot tell what to think of it, but that she loves him with an enraged affection, it is past the infinite of thought.

PRINCE Maybe she doth but counterfeit.

CLAUDIO Faith, like enough.

LEONATO O God! Counterfeit? There was never counterfeit of passion came so near the life of passion as she discovers it.

PRINCE Why, what effects of passion shows she?

CLAUDIO [aside to Leonato] Bait the hook well; this fish will bite.

LEONATO What effects, my lord? She will sit you--you heard my daughter tell you how.

CLAUDIO She did indeed.

PRINCE How, how I pray you? You amaze me. I would have thought her spirit had been invincible against all assaults of affection.

LEONATO I would have sworn it had, my lord, especially against Benedick.

BENEDICK [aside] I should think this a gull but that the white-bearded fellow speaks it. Knavery cannot, sure, hide himself in such reverence.

CLAUDIO [aside to Prince] He hath ta'en th' infection. Hold it up.

PRINCE Hath she made her affection known to Benedick?

LEONATO No, and swears she never will. That's her torment.

CLAUDIO 'Tis true indeed, so your daughter says. "Shall I," says she, "that have so oft encountered him with scorn, write to him that I love him?"

LEONATO This says she now when she is beginning to write to him, for she'll be up twenty times a night, and there will she sit in her smock till she have writ a sheet of paper. My daughter tells us all.

CLAUDIO Now you talk of a sheet of paper, I remember a pretty jest your daughter told us of.

LEONATO O, when she had writ it and was reading it over, she found "Benedick" and "Beatrice" between the sheet?

CLAUDIO That.

LEONATO O, she tore the letter into a thousand halfpence, railed at herself that she should be so immodest to write to one that she knew would flout her. "I measure him," says she, "by my own spirit, for I should flout him if he writ to me, yea, though I love him, I should."

CLAUDIO Then down upon her knees she falls, weeps, sobs, beats her heart, tears her hair, prays, curses: "O sweet Benedick, God give me patience!"

LEONATO She doth indeed, my daughter says so, and the ecstasy hath so much overborne her that my daughter is sometimes afeared she will do a desperate outrage to herself. It is very true.

PRINCE It were good that Benedick knew of it by some other, if she will not discover it.

CLAUDIO To what end? He would make but a sport of it and torment the poor lady worse.

PRINCE An he should, it were an alms to hang him. She's an excellent sweet lady, and, out of all suspicion, she is virtuous.

CLAUDIO And she is exceeding wise.

PRINCE In everything but in loving Benedick.

LEONATO O, my lord, wisdom and blood combating in so tender a body, we have ten proofs to one that blood hath the victory. I am sorry for her, as I have just cause, being her uncle and her guardian.

PRINCE I would she had bestowed this dotage on me. I would have daffed all other respects and made her half myself. I pray you tell Benedick of it, and hear what he will say.

LEONATO Were it good, think you?

CLAUDIO Hero thinks surely she will die, for she says she will die if he love her not, and she will die ere she make her love known, and she will die if he woo her rather than she will bate one breath of her accustomed crossness.

PRINCE She doth well. If she should make tender of her love, 'tis very possible he'll scorn it, for the man, as you know all, hath a contemptible spirit.

CLAUDIO He is a very proper man.

PRINCE He hath indeed a good outward happiness.

CLAUDIO Before God, and in my mind, very wise.

PRINCE He doth indeed show some sparks that are like wit.

CLAUDIO And I take him to be valiant.

PRINCE As Hector, I assure you, and in the managing of quarrels you may say he is wise, for either he avoids them with great discretion or undertakes them with a most Christianlike fear.

LEONATO If he do fear God, he must necessarily keep peace. If he break the peace, he ought to enter into a quarrel with fear and trembling.

PRINCE And so will he do, for the man doth fear God, howsoever it seems not in him by some large jests he will make. Well, I am sorry for your niece. Shall we go seek Benedick and tell him of her love?

CLAUDIO Never tell him, my lord, let her wear it out with good counsel.

LEONATO Nay, that's impossible; she may wear her heart out first.

PRINCE Well, we will hear further of it by your daughter. Let it cool the while. I love Benedick well, and I could wish he would modestly examine himself to see how much he is unworthy so good a lady.

LEONATO My lord, will you walk? Dinner is ready.
[Leonato, Prince, and Claudio begin to exit.]

CLAUDIO [aside to Prince and Leonato] If he do not dote on her upon this, I will never trust my expectation.

PRINCE [aside to Leonato] Let there be the same net spread for her, and that must your daughter and her gentlewomen carry. The sport will be when they hold one an opinion of another's dotage, and no such matter. That's the scene that I would see, which will be merely a dumb show. Let us send her to call him in to dinner.
[Prince, Leonato, and Claudio exit.]

BENEDICK [coming forward] This can be no trick. The conference was sadly borne; they have the truth of this from Hero; they seem to pity the lady. It seems her

affections have their full bent. Love me? Why, it must be requited! I hear how I am censured. They say I will bear myself proudly if I perceive the love come from her. They say, too, that she will rather die than give any sign of affection. I did never think to marry. I must not seem proud. Happy are they that hear their detractions and can put them to mending. They say the lady is fair; 'tis a truth, I can bear them witness. And virtuous; 'tis so, I cannot reprove it. And wise, but for loving me; by my troth, it is no addition to her wit, nor no great argument of her folly, for I will be horribly in love with her! I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me because I have railed so long against marriage, but doth not the appetite alter? A man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age. Shall quips and sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humor? No! The world must be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married. Here comes Beatrice. By this day, she's a fair lady. I do spy some marks of love in her.

[Enter Beatrice.]

BEATRICE Against my will, I am sent to bid you come in to dinner.

BENEDICK Fair Beatrice, I thank you for your pains.

BEATRICE I took no more pains for those thanks than you take pains to thank me. If it had been painful, I would not have come.

BENEDICK You take pleasure then in the message?

BEATRICE Yea, just so much as you may take upon a knife's point and choke a daw withal. You have no stomach, signior. Fare you well. [She exits.]

BENEDICK Ha! "Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner." There's a double meaning in that. "I took no more pains for those thanks than you took pains to thank me." That's as much as to say "Any pains that I take for you is as easy as thanks." If I do not take pity of her, I am a villain; if I do not love her, I am a Jew. I will go get her picture. [He exits.]

END OF PART 5

WEEKLY REFLECTION ON COMEDY

Return to these questions as you read, discuss, and notice new kinds of humor during the week.

1. What makes something funny? Think about words, timing, characters, misunderstandings, surprise, or experiences people recognize.

2. Why do people want to watch comedy? What place does humor have in our everyday lives?

3. Why is comedy important? What can it help us understand about ourselves, other people, or the world around us?
