

Sigh No More

Much Ado About Nothing, Act II, sc. 3

This is a pivotal scene in the play. In it, Benedick undergoes a 180° transformation, from a character who professes his indifference, if not aversion, to romantic love, to one who is enamored of Beatrice. How does that happen? And what does the musical part have to do with it? In the following text, Benedick's asides have been given a deeper indentation.

[*Bene*. I know that, but I would have thee hence and here again. 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.

D. Pedro. Come, shall we hear this music?

Claudio. Yea, my good lord. How still the evening is,

As hushed on purpose to grace harmony!

D. Pedro. See you where Benedick hath hid himself?

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

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

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

D. Pedro. 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.

Balth. 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.

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

Balth. Note this before my notes:

There's not a note of mine that's worth the noting.

D. Pedro. Why, these are very crotchets that he speaks! Note notes, forsooth, and nothing.

Music plays.

[*aside: Bene*. 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.

Balth.

*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.*

D. Pedro. By my troth, a good song.

Balth. And an ill singer, my lord.

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

[*aside: Bene.* 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.

D. Pedro. 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.

Balth. The best I can, my lord.

D. Pedro. 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.

Leon. 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.

[*aside: Bene.* Is 't possible? Sits the wind in that corner?

Leon. 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.

D. Pedro. Maybe she doth but counterfeit.

Claudio. Faith, like enough.

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

D. Pedro. Why, what effects of passion shows she?

Claudio., aside to Leonato Bait the hook well; this fish will bite.

Leon. What effects, my lord? She will sit you—you heard my daughter tell you how.

Claudio. She did indeed.

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

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

[*aside: Bene.* 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.

D. Pedro. Hath she made her affection known to Benedick?

Leon. 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?"

Leon. 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.

Leon. O, when she had writ it and was reading it over, she found “Benedick” and “Beatrice” between the sheet?

Claudio. That.

Leon. 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!”

Leon. 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.

D. Pedro. 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.

D. Pedro. 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.

D. Pedro. In everything but in loving Benedick.

Leon. 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.

D. Pedro. 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.

Leon. 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.

D. Pedro. 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.

D. Pedro. He hath indeed a good outward happiness.

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

D. Pedro. He doth indeed show some sparks that are like wit.

Claudio. And I take him to be valiant.

D. Pedro. 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.

Leon. 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.

D. Pedro. 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.

Leon. Nay, that’s impossible; she may wear her heart out first.

D. Pedro. 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.

Leon. 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.

D. Pedro., 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.*

[*Bene., 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.