Title *Much Ado about Nothing* the word ‘note’ had several meanings to Elizabethans including ‘observe’, ‘notice’, ‘pay special attention to’, ‘listen to’, and ‘overhear’, actions which are all especially significant to the way the play’s plot develops at several junctures. The pronunciations of ‘nothing’ and ‘noting’ were also very similar, and the title puns on this, as it does, more crudely, on the sense of ‘nothing’ as female genitalia (compare *Hamlet* 9.103), taking in confused overhearing, misogynistic male sexual jealousy, and matters of no consequence as causes of the titular ‘much ado’; conversely, the word ‘nothing’ is used to effect the stripped-back, confessional directness of the play’s emotional fulcrum at 4.1.264–7.
ACT 1 · SCENE 1

Enter Leonato (governor of Messina), [reading a paper, Innogen (his wife), Hero (his daughter), and Beatrice (his niece), with a Messenger

Leonato I learn in this letter, that Don Pedro of Aragon comes this night to Messina.

Messenger He is very near by this. He was not three leagues off when I left him.

Leonato How many gentlemen have you lost in this action?

Messenger But few of any sort, and none of name.

Leonato A victory is twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers. I find here that Don Pedro hath bestowed much honour on a young Florentine called Claudio.

Messenger Much deserved on his part, and equally remembered by Don Pedro. He hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age, doing in the figure of a lamb the feats of a lion. He hath indeed bettered expectation than you must expect of me to tell you how.

Leonato He hath an uncle here in Messina will be very much glad of it.

Messenger I have already delivered him letters, and there appears much joy in him—even so much, that joy could not show itself modest enough without a badge of bitterness.

Leonato Did he break out into tears?

Messenger In great measure.

Leonato A kind overflow of kindness, there are no faces truer than those that are so washed. How much better is it to weep at joy than to joy at weeping!

Beatrice I pray you, is Signor Montanto returned from the wars, or no?

Messenger I know none of that name, lady. There was none such in the army of any sort.

Leonato What is he that you ask for, niece?

Hero My cousin means Signor Benedick of Padua.

Messenger O, he's returned, and as pleasant as ever he was.

Beatrice He set up his bills here in Messina, and challenged Cupid at the flight; and my uncle's fool, reading the challenge, subscribed for

Sc. 1.1.0.2 Hero for Shakespeare's audience the name would have immediately recalled the Greek legend famously retold in Marlowe's Hero and Leander (printed in 1598), in which Hero renounced her duties as a priestess of Venus for her lover, Leander, who drowned while swimming the Hellespont to be with her; she in turn drowned herself, and is therefore a winner, not just in victory, but in respect of how she faced death. Hero and Leander are more than just a love story: the tragedy of Hero's death would have brought to mind the Greek tradition of Chastity as well as both chastity and sensual love (forgoing one for the other), as with her; she in turn drowned herself, and is therefore a winner, not just in victory, but in respect of how she faced death. Hero and Leander are more than just a love story: the tragedy of Hero's death would have brought to mind the Greek tradition of Chastity as well as both chastity and sensual love (forgoing one for the other), as with Brandida. Hero was a Roman mythological figure, whose name was a feminine form of the Greek hero; her story was famously retold by Ovid in his Metamorphoses, and was the subject of numerous works of art. In Shakespeare's time, the story of Hero and Leander was well-known and popular, and would have been a natural reference for his audience. Shakespeare's Hero is not simply a passive figure in the story, but a strong and independent woman who makes a difficult decision for herself. Her name is derived from the Greek word "heros," meaning 'one who blesses'; Benedick somewhat reciprocally derives from "benedictus" meaning 'blessed.'

1.1.0.2 Beatrice from the Latin beatrix meaning 'one who blesses'; Benedick somewhat reciprocally derives from benedictus meaning 'blessed'

1.1.1 Aragon region in north-west Spain
1.1.2 Messina port city in north-east Sicily
1.1.3 three leagues about 9 miles
1.1.5 action battle
1.1.6 sort high social rank
1.1.6 name reputation; noble family
1.1.7 achiever winner
1.1.8 Florentine native of Florence, in modern-day central Italy, a powerful ducal city-state at the time of the play's composition
1.1.10 remembered rewarded
1.1.11 borne carried

1.1.1 promis...age i.e. what is expected of one his age
1.1.2 figure form; image
1.1.12 bettered exceeded
1.1.17 badge ... bitterness servants wore badges to show themselves inferior to their masters; the uncle's tears show his modesty in honouring, but not sharing in, his nephew's glory
1.1.20 kind natural (because of their familial relationship); humane
1.1.23 Montanto fencing term meaning 'upthrust', variously connoting the witty banter of braggart fencers; Benedick as more braggart than soldier; sexual innuendo, both in the phallic image of the thrusting sword and the phonetic wordplay of 'mount onto'
1.1.25 sort (social) rank
1.1.27 Benedick see note to 1.1.0.2
1.1.27 Padua city in north-east Italy, famous for its university; compare Taming of the Shrew 3.1–3
1.1.28 pleasant good-humoured; witty (facetious)
1.1.29 bills advertisements
1.1.30 flight i.e. archery contest, though specifically 'flight' arrows were light and well-feathered to cover long distances
1.1.30 fool house jester; possibly Beatrice herself
1.1.30 subscribed for signed up in the name of

Sc. 1.1.1.0.1 Innogen Few known performances have staged this 'ghost' character. In one production, Innogen was mute and used sign language to communicate.

1.1.1 Leonato Interpretations of Leonato range from a powerful governor with a lavish costume and air of nobility to a doddering, good-natured rural gentleman with a simple costume and friendly countenance.

1.1.23 Beatrice Beatrice's delivery may range from playful to caustic. Sometimes she wears masculine clothing or relatively simple women's wear compared to the lavish costumes of the other females.
Cupid and challenged him at the bird-bolt. I pray you, how many hath he killed and eaten in these wars? But how many hath he killed? For indeed I promised to eat all of his killing.

**Leonato** Faith, niece, you tax Signor Benedick too much. But he’ll be meet with you, I doubt it not.

**Messenger** He hath done good service, lady, in these wars.

**Beatrice** You had musty victual, and he hath holp to eat it. He is a very valiant trencherman, he hath an excellent stomach.

**Messenger** And a good soldier too, lady.

**Beatrice** A lord to a lord, a man to a man, stuffed with all honourable virtues.

**Beatrice** It is so indeed, he is no less than a stuffed man, but for the stuffing—well, we are all mortal.

**Leonato** You must not, sir, mistake my niece. There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signor Benedick and her. They never meet but there’s a skirmish of wit between them.

**Beatrice** Alas, he gets nothing by that. In our last conflict, four of his five wits went halting off, and now is the whole man governed with one, so that if he have wit enough to keep himself warm, let him bear it for a difference between himself and his horse, for it is all the wealth that he hath left, to be known a reasonable creature. Who is his companion now? He hath every month a new sworn brother.

**Messenger** Is’t possible?

**Beatrice** Very easily possible: he wears his faith but as the fashion of his hat, it ever changes with the next block.

**Messenger** I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your books.

**Beatrice** No. An he were, I would burn my study. But I pray you, who is his companion? Is there no young squarer now that will make a voyage with him to the devil?

**Messenger** He is most in the company of the right noble Claudio.
BEATRICE  O Lord, he will hang upon him like a disease. He is sooner caught than the pestilence, and the taker runs presently mad. God help the noble Claudio. If he have caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand pound ere a be cured.

MESSENER  I will hold friends with you, lady.

BEATRICE  Do, good friend.

LEONATO  You will never run mad, niece.

BEATRICE  No, not till a hot January,

MESSENER  Don Pedro is approached.

Enter Don Pedro [the Prince], Claudio, Benedick, Balthasar and John the bastard.

PRINCE  Good Signor Leonato, are you come to meet your trouble? The fashion of the world is to avoid cost, and you encounter it.

LEONATO  Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your grace; for trouble being gone, comfort should remain, but when you depart from me, sorrow abides and happiness takes his leave.

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

LEONATO  Her mother hath many times told me so.

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

LEONATO  Signor Benedick, no, for then were you a child.

PRINCE  You have it full, Benedick. We may guess by this what you are, being a man. Truly, the lady father’s herself. Be happy, lady, for you are like an honourable father.

BENEDICK  If Signor Leonato be her father, she would not have his head on her shoulders for all Messina, as like him as she is.

BEATRICE  I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor Benedick. Nobody marks you.

BENEDICK  What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?

BEATRICE  Is it possible disdain should die while she hath such meet food to feed it as Signor Benedick? Courtesy itself must convert to disdain if you come in her presence.

BENEDICK  Then is courtesy a turncoat. But it is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted. And I would I could find in my heart that I had not a hard heart, for truly I love none.

BEATRICE  A dear happiness to women: they would else have been troubled with a pernicious suitor. I thank God and my cold blood I am

1.1.63 pestilence  plague
1.1.64 taker  victim
1.1.65 runs  becomes (is made)
1.1.66 presently  immediately
1.1.67 thousand pound  i.e. a huge number of visits by the doctor (one of which would cost about 50 shillings), though the ‘hang upon’ may also imply that Benedick leeches money; either way, he is portrayed as very hard to get rid of
1.1.68 ere  a before he
1.1.69 hold  remain
1.1.70 run mad  i.e. by catching ‘the Benedick’
1.1.70.1 is approached  has arrived
1.1.70.2 bastard  Don John is an illegitimate child (see 4.1.185), thought of as naturally envious and covetous
1.1.71 trouble  burden, i.e. guests
1.1.72 fashion  custom
1.1.73 cost  expense (of entertaining the Prince and his men)
1.1.74 encounter  go towards
1.1.75 likeness  appearance
1.1.76 charge  expense; responsibility
1.1.77 for . . . child  i.e. too young to seduce his wife; implies that Benedick is the only one he would suspect
1.1.78 You . . . full  you are fully answered, i.e. there’s no reply to that
1.1.79 what . . . are  i.e. a womanizer
1.1.80 father’s herself  i.e. shows who her father is through her resemblance to him
1.1.81 his head  i.e. because he is a white-bearded old man, through there is a possible secondary reference to cuckold’s horns, which were said to grow on the heads of men with unfaithful wives
1.1.82 marks  takes notice of
1.1.83 meet  suitable (puns on ‘meat’)
1.1.84 would  wish
1.1.85 dear happiness  precious good fortune
1.1.86 else  otherwise
of your humour for that. I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.

**Benedick** God keep your ladyship still in that mind! So some gentleman or other shall scape a predestinate scratched face.

**Beatrice** Scratching could not make it worse, an ’twere such a face as yours were.

**Benedick** Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.

**Beatrice** A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours.

**Benedick** I would my horse had the speed of your tongue, and so good a continuer. But keep your way, o’ God’s name, I have done.

**Beatrice** You always end with a jade’s trick. I know you of old.

**Prince** That is the sum of all, Leonato. Signor Claudio and Signor Benedick, my dear friend Leonato hath invited you all. I tell him we shall stay here, at the least a month, and he heartily prays some occasion may detain us longer. I dare swear he is no hypocrite, but prays from his heart.

**Leonato** If you swear, my lord, you shall not be forsworn. [To John] Let me bid you welcome, my lord. Being reconciled to the Prince your brother, I owe you all duty.

**John** I thank you. I am not of many words, but I thank you.

**Leonato** [To Prince] Please it your grace lead on?

**Prince** Your hand, Leonato. We will go together.

_Exeunt. Manent Benedick and Claudio_

**Claudio** Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of Signor Leonato?

**Benedick** I noted her not, but I looked on her.

**Claudio** Is she not a modest young lady?

**Benedick** Do you question me as an honest man should do, for my simple true judgement, or would you have me speak after my custom, as being a professed tyrant to their sex?

**Claudio** No, I pray thee speak in sober judgement.

**Benedick** Why, i’faith, methinks she’s too low for a high praise, too brown for a fair praise, and too little for a great praise. Only this commendation I can afford her, that were she other than she is, she were unhandsome, and being no other but as she is, I do not like her.

**Claudio** Thou thinkest I am in sport. I pray thee tell me truly how thou likest her.

**Benedick** Would you buy her, that you enquire after her?

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1.1.96 _humour_ disposition
1.1.98 _still_ always
1.1.99 _scape_ escape
1.1.99 _predestinate_ inescapable
1.1.100 _an ’twere_ if it were
1.1.102 _rare_ exceptional
1.1.102 _parrot-teacher_ i.e. one who repeats themselves over and over to teach a parrot to talk
1.1.104–5 _so . . . continuer_ i.e. could go on as long
1.1.105 _keep . . . way_ carry on
1.1.105 _have am_
1.1.106 _jade_ worn-out horse
1.1.106 _jade’s trick_ refusing to budge, like an old, stubborn horse; throwing the rider, like an old crafty horse; Benedick is denying her the chance to reply by bowing out of the game
1.1.109 _occasion_ matter
1.1.112 _forsworn_ proved false
1.1.113 _Being_ now you are
1.1.118 _note_ notice; pay special attention to (Benedick picks up on this meaning); the first of many uses of this word, which had several meanings for Shakespeare’s audience; see note to Title.
1.1.122 _after . . . custom_ in my customary manner
1.1.123 _professed_ well-known
1.1.125 _low_ short
1.1.125 _high_ lavish, playing on ‘tall’
1.1.126 _brown_ brown-haired/skinned
1.1.126 _fair_ generous; flattering; of her beauty, playing on ‘blonde/pale’
1.1.127 _afford_ give (spare)
Can the world buy such a jewel?

Yea, and a case to put it in, too. But speak you this with a sad brow, or do you play the flouting jack, to tell us Cupid is a good hare-finder and Vulcan a rare carpenter? Come, in what key shall a man take you to go in the song?

In mine eye, she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on.

Can you see yet without spectacles, and I see no such matter. There's her cousin, an she were not possessed with a fury, exceeds her as much in beauty as the first of May doth the last of December. But I hope you have no intent to turn husband, have you?

I would scarce trust myself, though I had sworn the contrary, if Hero would be my wife.

Is't come to this? In faith, hath not the world one man but he will wear his cap with suspicion? Shall I never see a bachelor of three-score again? Go to, i'faith, an thou wilt needs thrust thy neck into a yoke, wear the print of it, and sigh away Sundays. Look, Don Pedro is returned to seek you.

Enter Don Pedro [the Prince]

What secret hath held you here that you followed not to Leonato's?

I would your grace would constrain me to tell.

You hear, Count Claudio? I can be secret as a dumb man, I would have you think so. But on my allegiance, mark you this, on my allegiance! [To the Prince] He is in love. With who? Now that is your grace's part. Mark how short his answer is: with Hero, Leonato's short daughter.

If this were so, so were it uttered.

Like the old tale, my lord—it is not so, nor 'twas not so, but indeed, God forbid it should be so.

If my passion change not shortly, God forbid it should be otherwise.
Prince: Amen, if you love her, for the lady is very well worthy.
Claudio: You speak this to fetch me in, my lord.

Prince: By my troth, I speak my thought.
Claudio: And in faith, my Lord, I spoke mine.
Benedick: And by my two faiths and troths, my lord, I spoke mine.
Claudio: That I love her, I feel.
Prince: That she is worthy, I know.

Benedick: That I neither feel how she should be loved nor know how she should be worthy is the opinion that fire cannot melt out of me. I will die in it at the stake.

Prince: Thou wast ever an obstinate heretic in the despite of beauty.
Claudio: And never could maintain his part but in the force of his will.

Benedick: That a woman conceived me, I thank her. That she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks. But that I will have a recheat winded in my forehead, or hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick, all women shall pardon me. Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none. And the fine is (for the which I may go the finer), I will live a bachelor.

Prince: I shall see thee ere I die look pale with love.

Benedick: With anger, with sickness, or with hunger, my lord; not with love. Prove that ever I lose more blood with love than I will get again with drinking, pick out mine eyes with a ballad-maker’s pen and hang me up at the door of a brothel house for the sign of blind Cupid.

Prince: Well, if ever thou dost fall from this faith, thou wilt prove a notable argument.

Benedick: If I do, hang me in a bottle like a cat, and shoot at me, and he that hits me, let him be clapped on the shoulder and called Adam.

Prince: Well, as time shall try.

‘In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke’,

Benedick: The savage bull may, but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull’s horns, and set them in my forehead, and let me be

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1.1.164 fetch . . . in trick me
1.1.165 troth truth, i.e. upon my word
1.1.167 two . . . troths i.e. because he owes loyalty to both Claudio and the Prince
1.1.173 heretic picks up on the image of burning at the stake in the previous line; Benedick’s refusal to acknowledge women’s beauty and worth is parodied as akin to a religious heretic refusing the true faith even while being tortured to death
1.1.174 despite scorn
1.1.175 maintain justify
1.1.177 recheat hunting horn or the call made through it; either way, another reference to a cuckold’s horns
1.1.177 winded blown
1.1.177 bugle . . . baldrick complex pun; ‘bugle’ is another (cuckold’s) horn reference, with secondary innuendo on ‘penis’; a ‘baldrick’ was a shoulder belt worn across the body to carry a horn or sword, suggestive of a vagina, more so because it is ‘invisible’ or concealed; on one level he therefore means he has no intention of having sex, leading him to marry and end up a cuckold; on another he is recasting the image at 1.1.145 about having to conceal his cuckold’s horn somehow
1.1.179 fine conclusion
1.1.180 for . . . go as a result of which I will be
1.1.180 finer better dressed (without the cost of a wife)
1.1.183 Prove if you prove
1.1.183–4 lose . . . drinking love melancholy was thought to draw blood away from the heart; drinking wine was thought to restore the blood flow
1.1.184 ballad-maker’s pen many ballads were about love
1.1.184–5 hang . . . Cupid brothels, like taverns, had signs outside them; Benedick’s image of himself hanging up with his eyes plucked out is a grotesque mockery of love imagery; he is also referencing the blindness caused by venereal disease, as well as suggesting that love is reducible to the activities of a brothel
1.1.185 for in place of
1.1.187 argument topic of conversation
1.1.188 hang . . . cat cats suspended in wicker baskets or ‘bottles’ were used as targets for archers; Benedick continues to subvert Cupid imagery (see 1.1.184–5).
1.1.189 Adam Adam Bell, an outlaw famed in ballads as a great archer
1.1.190 try tell
1.1.191 In . . . yoke proverbial (compare 1.1.146–7); in addition to the idea of a wild, horny masculine spirit being tamed, the bull’s horns suggest cuckoldry
1.1.193 pluck . . . forehead another cuckold reference
vilely painted, and in such great letters as they write, 'Here is good horse to hire' let them signify under my sign, 'Here you may see Benedick, the married man'.

Claudio If this should ever happen, thou wouldst be horn-mad.

Prince Nay, if Cupid have not spent all his quiver in Venice thou wilt quake for this shortly.

Benedick I look for an earthquake too, then.

Prince Well, you will temporize with the hours. In the mean time, good Signor Benedick, repair to Leonato's, commend me to him, and tell him I will not fail him at supper, for indeed he hath made great preparation.

Benedick I have almost matter enough in me for such an embassage. And so I commit you—

Claudio To the tuition of God, from my house if I had it—

Prince The sixth of July:

Your loving friend,

Benedick.

Benedick Nay, mock not, mock not. The body of your discourse is sometime guarded with fragments, and the guards are but slightly basted on neither. Ere you flout old ends any further, examine your conscience. And so I leave you.

Claudio My liege, your highness now may do me good.

Prince My love is thine to teach. Teach it but how,

And thou shalt see how apt it is to learn

Any hard lesson that may do thee good.

Claudio Hath Leonato any son, my lord?

Prince No child but Hero. She's his only heir. Dost thou affect her, Claudio?

Claudio O, my lord,

When you went onward on this ended action, 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.
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.

Prince  Thou wilt be like a lover presently,
And tire the hearer with a book of words.
If thou dost love fair Hero, cherish it,
And I will break with her, and with her father,
And thou shalt have her. Was’t not to this end
That thou began’st to twist so fine a story?
Claudio  How sweetly you do minister to love,
That know love’s grief by his complexïon!
But lest my liking might too sudden seem,
I would have salved it with a longer treatise.

Prince  What need the bridge much broader than the flood?
The fairest grant is the necessity.
Look what will serve is fit. ’Tis once: thou lovest,
And I will fit thee with the remedy.

I know we shall have revelling tonight.
I will assume thy part in some disguise,
And tell fair Hero I am Claudio,
And in her bosom I’ll unclasp my heart,
And take her hearing prisoner with the force
And strong encounter of my amorous tale.
Then after to her father will I break,
And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.
In practice let us put it presently.  

Exeunt

1.2

Enter Leonato and an old man, brother to Leonato

Leonato  How now brother, where is my cousin your son? Hath he provided this music?

Brother  He is very busy about it. But, Brother, I can tell you strange news that you yet dreamt not of.

Leonato  Are they good?

1.1.225 drive  push (convert)  1.1.242 grant  gift (and the granting thereof)
1.1.226 that  now that  1.1.243 the necessity  that which is needed
1.1.227 places  i.e. posts (military mindset)  1.1.243 Look what  whatever
1.1.227 rooms  places (domestic, civilian mindset)  1.1.243 serve  suffice
1.1.229 prompting  reminding; persuading  1.1.243 fit  suitable
1.1.231 presently  before long  1.1.243 once  once and for all, i.e. settled
1.1.232 book . . . words  lovers were associated both with prolixity and poetry about love
1.1.234 break  broach the matter  1.1.244 fit  provide
1.1.235 end  purpose  1.1.246 part  i.e. person
1.1.237 minister to  provide for; administer (a salve)  1.1.248 in . . . bosom  i.e. to her privately
1.1.238 complexion  appearance  1.1.248 unclasp  open (like a book fastened with clasps)
1.1.240 salved  it  accounted for  1.1.253 presently  immediately
1.1.240 treatise  narrative (explanation)  Sc. 2  1.2.1 cousin  general term for family member or close friend
1.1.241 flood  river (as at 1.2.21); the detail of Leonato’s brother’s son is treated inconsistently in the play (compare 5.1.234–5)
1.2.25 they  i.e. the ‘news’ (often plural in Elizabethan usage)
ACT 1 · SCENE 2

BROTHER As the event stamps them. But they have a good cover, they show well outward. The Prince and Count Claudio walking in a thick-pleached alley in mine orchard, were thus much overheard by a man of mine: the Prince discovered to Claudio that he loved my niece, your daughter, and meant to acknowledge it this night in a dance, and if he found her accordant, he meant to take the present time by the top, and instantly break with you of it.

LEONATO Hath the fellow any wit that told you this?

BROTHER A good sharp fellow. I will send for him, and question him yourself.

LEONATO No, no. We will hold it as a dream till it appear itself. But I will acquaint my daughter withal, that she may be the better prepared for an answer if peradventure this be true.

[Enter attendant]

Go you and tell her of it. [Exit attendant] Cousins, you know what you have to do. O, I cry you mercy, friend. Go you with me and I will use your skill. Good cousin, have a care this busy time. Exeunt

1.3 Enter John the bastard, and Conrad, his companion

CONRAD What the goodyear, my lord, why are you thus out of measure sad?

JOHN There is no measure in the occasion that breeds it, therefore the sadness is without limit.

CONRAD You should hear reason.

JOHN And when I have heard it, what blessing brings it?

CONRAD If not a present remedy, at least a patient sufferance.

JOHN I wonder that thou (being as thou sayest, thou art, born under Saturn) goest about to apply a moral medicine, to a mortifying mischief. I cannot hide what I am. I must be sad when I have cause; and smile at no man's jests; eat when I have stomach, and wait for no man's leisure; sleep when I am drowsy, and tend on no man's business; laugh when I am merry, and claw no man in his humour.

CONRAD Yea but you must not make the full show of this till you may do it without controlment. You have of late stood out against

1.2.6 event outcome
1.2.6 stamps authenticates (will determine), like an official stamp of approval; also plays on the sense of printing, which is continued in the book imagery of 'cover'
1.2.7 show . . . outward look good on the outside
1.2.8 thick-pleached thickly hedged
1.2.9 man servant
1.2.9 discovered revealed
1.2.11 accordant willing
1.2.11 present time opportunity
1.2.11 top topknot/forelock; proverbial, as the goddess Fortuna was depicted as being bald at the back of her head
1.2.12 break speak (broach)
1.2.13 wit sense
1.2.16 hold think of
1.2.16 appear manifest
1.2.17 withal with it
1.2.18 peradventure perhaps
1.2.20 cry . . . mercy beg you pardon

1.3.1 What . . . goodyear mild exclamation, similar to 'what the hell?' or 'what the devil?'
1.3.2 sad gloomy (embittered)
1.3.3 measure limit
1.3.3 occasion source; circumstance
1.3.3 breeds causes (the sadness)
1.3.7 sufferance endurance
1.3.8 wonder marvel
1.3.9 Saturn thought to govern the melancholic humour; those born under its influence were considered naturally morose (saturnine)
1.3.9 goest about take pains (try)
1.3.9–10 mortifying mischief fatal disease; killing misfortune
1.3.11 stomach appetite
1.3.12 leisure i.e. availability to eat with him
1.3.13 claw soothe; flatter
1.3.13 humour ill humour (bad mood)
1.3.15 controlment check (restraint)
1.3.15 of late lately

1.3.1 What . . . goodyear mild exclamation, similar to 'what the hell?' or 'what the devil?'
1.3.2 sad gloomy (embittered)
1.3.3 measure limit
1.3.3 occasion source; circumstance
1.3.3 breeds causes (the sadness)
1.3.7 sufferance endurance
1.3.8 wonder marvel
1.3.9 Saturn thought to govern the melancholic humour; those born under its influence were considered naturally morose (saturnine)
1.3.9 goest about take pains (try)
1.3.9–10 mortifying mischief fatal disease; killing misfortune
1.3.11 stomach appetite
1.3.12 leisure i.e. availability to eat with him
1.3.13 claw soothe; flatter
1.3.13 humour ill humour (bad mood)
1.3.15 controlment check (restraint)
1.3.15 of late lately

1.2.7–12 The Prince . . . it Some productions insert a version of this scene, with both Borachio and Leonato's brother's men listening in on the Prince and Claudio.
your brother, and he hath ta'en you newly into his grace, where it is impossible you should take true root but by the fair weather that you make yourself. It is needful that you frame the season for your own harvest.

20 **John** I had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in his grace, and it better fits my blood to be disdained of all than to fashion a carriage to rob love from any. In this (though I cannot be said to be a flattering honest man) it must not be denied but I am a plain-dealing villain, I am trusted with a muzzle, and enfranchised with a clog. Therefore I have decreed, not to sing in my cage. If I had my mouth I would bite. If I had my liberty I would do my liking. In the mean time, let me be that I am, and seek not to alter me.

**Conrad** Can you make no use of your discontent?

**John** I make all use of it, for I use it only. Who comes here?

[Enter Borachio]

**Borachio** What news Borachio?

**John** I came yonder from a great supper. The Prince your brother is royally entertained by Leonato, and I can give you intelligence of an intended marriage.

**John** Will it serve for any model to build mischief on? What is he for a fool that betroths himself to unquietness?

**Borachio** Marry, it is your brother’s right hand.

**John** Who, the most exquisite Claudio?

**Borachio** Even he.

**John** A proper squire. And who, and who? Which way looks he?

**Borachio** Marry, on Hero, the daughter and heir of Leonato.

**John** A very forward March chick. How came you to this?

**Borachio** Being entertained for a perfumer, as I was smoking a musty room comes me the Prince and Claudio hand in hand, in sad conference. I whipped me behind the arras, and there heard it agreed upon, that the Prince should woo Hero for himself and, having obtained her, give her to Count Claudio.
JOHN Come, come, let us thither, this may prove food to my displeasure. That young start-up hath all the glory of my overthrow. If I can cross him any way, I bless myself every way. You are both sure, and will assist me?

CONRAD To the death, my Lord.

JOHN Let us to the great supper, their cheer is the greater that I am subdued. Would the cook were o’ my mind. Shall we go prove what’s to be done?

BORACHIO We’ll wait upon your lordship. 

Sc. 4 Enter Leonato, his brother, his wife, Hero his daughter, Beatrice his niece, and a kinsman, [Margaret, and Ursula]

LEONATO Was not Count John here at supper?

BROTHER I saw him not.

BEATRICE How tartly that gentleman looks. I never can see him but I am heartburned an hour after.

HERO He is of a very melancholy disposition.

BEATRICE He were an excellent man that were made just in the midway between him and Benedick. The one is too like an image and says nothing, and the other too like my lady’s eldest son, evermore tattling.

LEONATO Then half Signor Benedick’s tongue in Count John’s mouth, and half Count John’s melancholy in Signor Benedick’s face—

BEATRICE With a good leg and a good foot, uncle, and money enough in his purse—such a man would win any woman in the world if a could get her good will.

LEONATO By my troth, niece, thou wilt never get thee a husband, if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue.

BROTHER In faith she’s too curst.

BEATRICE Too curst is more than curst. I shall lessen God’s sending that way, for it is said, God sends a curst cow short horns, but to a cow too curst, he sends none.

LEONATO So, by being too curst, God will send you no horns.

BEATRICE Just, if he send me no husband, for the which blessing, I am at him upon my knees every morning and evening. Lord, I could not endure a husband with a beard on his face, I had rather lie in the woollen!

LEONATO You may light on a husband that hath no beard.

1.3.48 start-up upstart
1.3.48 cross thwart (with play on ‘bless’)
1.3.49 sure loyal (steadfast)
1.3.53 subdued downcast; conquered
1.3.53 o’ . . . mind i.e. having poisonous thoughts
1.3.53 prove try out
2.1.4 heartburned i.e. from the sourness of his looks (indigestion)
2.1.4 an hour for an hour
2.1.7 image statue
2.1.8 my . . . son a widow’s eldest son or a noble family’s eldest son; in either case, a spoilt child
2.1.11 good . . . foot i.e. a nice body (shapely limbs)
2.1.15 shrewd sharp (shrewish)
2.1.16 curst bad-tempered
2.1.18 God . . . horns i.e. if an angry cow gets short horns a very angry one gets none (God curbing the destructiveness of the aggressive was proverbial); figuratively, ‘horns’ again refers to cuckoldry, a cause of anger (compare note to 1.1.197), and ‘curst’ also probably plays on the sense of ‘ill-fated’, i.e. Beatrice’s temperament will keep her free of the curse of marriage and of being cuckolded
2.1.23 beard . . . face the ability to grow a beard was variously a sign of manliness, virility, and maturity (compare 2.1.25–9 and 5.1.172), though ‘lie in the woollen’ means sleep in coarse woollen blankets, making the beard, and therefore the husband, no more than a cause of itchiness and irritation; notably Benedick later shaves (3.2.32–5) though here the image seems more suggestive of her lack of interest in any man
2.1.24 light on alight (fall) upon, i.e. find yourself choosing
BEATRICE  What should I do with him, dress him in my apparel and make him my waiting gentlewoman? He that hath a beard, is more then a youth: and he that hath no beard, is less than a man; and he that is more than a youth, is not for me, and he that is less then a man, I am not for him. Therefore I will even take sixpence in earnest of the bearward, and lead his apes into hell.

LEONATO  Well then, go you into hell?

BEATRICE  No, but to the gate, and there will the devil meet me like an old cuckold with horns on his head, and say, ‘Get you to heaven, Beatrice, get you to heaven. Here’s no place for you maids.’ So deliver I up my apes and away to Saint Peter ’fore the heavens, he shows me where the bachelors sit, and there live we as merry as the day is long.

BROTHER [to Hero]  Well, niece, I trust you will be ruled by your father.

BEATRICE  Yes, faith, it is my cousin’s duty to make curtsy and say, ‘Father, as it please you.’ But yet for all that, cousin, let him be a handsome fellow, or else make an other curtsy, and say, ‘Father, as it please me.’

LEONATO [to Beatrice]  Well, niece, I hope to see you one day fitted with a husband.

BEATRICE  Not ’til God make men of some other mettle than earth. Would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a piece of valiant dust?—to make an account of her life to a clod of wayward marl? No, uncle, I’ll none. Adam’s sons are my brethren, and truly I hold it a sin to match in my kindred.

LEONATO  Daughter, remember what I told you, if the Prince do solicit you in that kind, you know your answer.

BEATRICE  The fault will be in the music, cousin, if you be not wooed in good time. If the Prince be too important, tell him there is measure in everything, and so dance out the answer. For hear me, Hero, wooing, and repenting is as a Scotch jig, a measure, and a cinquepace. The first suit is hot and hasty like a Scotch jig (and full as fantastical); the wedding mannerly modest (as a measure), full of state and ancientry.

And then comes repentance, and with his bad legs falls into the cinquepace faster and faster, ’til he sink into his grave.

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2.1.25 apparel  clothing
2.1.29 earnest  advance payment
2.1.29 of from
2.1.29 bearward  keeper of bears (for bear-baiting) and other animals, probably including apes
2.1.30 lead . . . hell  proverbially, the fate of spinsters, though why is unclear; perhaps punishment for avoiding having children during earthly life.
2.1.34 maids  virgins
2.1.36 bachelors  unmarried people (of either sex)
2.1.41 fitted  matched; fitted out (provided); ‘with’ could also mean ‘by’, a conversion which supplies a secondary sexual innuendo
2.1.43 mettle  material; character
2.1.43 earth  from which man is made in the Christian creation myth (woman is made from one of Adam’s ribs)
2.1.44 with by
2.1.45 wayward  errant (because fallen, continuing the creation reference); erratic; antagonistic
2.1.45 marl  clay (soil)
2.1.47 match . . . kindred  the Book of Common Prayer forbade marriage among blood relations
2.1.49 in . . . kind  on that matter, i.e. propose marriage
2.1.50–1 in . . . time  at the right moment, punning on ‘time’ as musical tempo
2.1.51 important  importunate (urgent)
2.1.51 measure  moderation, punning on the slow, stately dance known as a ‘measure’; ‘measure in everything’ was proverbial
2.1.52 answer  i.e. to his question, punning on ‘answer’ as musical response
2.1.53 Scotch jig  known as a particularly lively dance
2.1.53 cinquepace  five-step dance, involving a leap at the end of each measure, therefore tiring; pronounced ‘sink-a-pace’, leading to Beatrice’s ‘sink’ at 2.1.57, punning both on the word’s sound and the idea of worn-out dancers
2.1.54 suit  courtship (of a suitor)
2.1.54 hot  passionate
2.1.54 full  just
2.1.54 fantastical  extravagant
2.1.55 state  stateliness
2.1.55 ancestry  tradition
2.1.56 bad legs  because old (and tired)
Leonato, Cousin, you apprehend passing shrewdly.

Beatrice I have a good eye uncle, I can see a church by daylight.

Leonato, to Antonio The revellers are entering, brother. Make good room.

Enter Prince [Don] Pedro, Claudio, and Benedick, and Balthasar, and dumb John, [Borachio]

Prince, to Hero Lady, will you walk a bout with your friend?

Hero So you walk softly, and look sweetly, and say nothing, I am yours for the walk; and especially when I walk away.

Prince With me in your company?

Hero I may say so when I please.

Prince And when please you to say so?

Hero When I like your favour; for God defend the lute should be like the case.

Prince My visor is Philemon's roof. Within the house is Jove.

Hero Why then your visor should be thatched.

Prince Speak low if you speak love.

[They move aside]

Benedick, to Margaret Well, I would you did like me.

Margaret So would not I, for your own sake, for I have many ill qualities.

Benedick Which is one?

Margaret I say my prayers aloud.

Benedick I love you the better—the hearers may cry amen.

Margaret God match me with a good dancer.

Balthasar Amen.

Margaret And God keep him out of my sight when the dance is done.

Answer, clerk.

Balthasar No more words. The clerk is answered.

[They move aside]

Ursula, to Antonio I know you well enough, you are Signor Antonio.

Brother At a word, I am not.

Ursula I know you by the waggling of your head.

Brother To tell you true, I counterfeit him.

Ursula You could never do him so ill-well, unless you were the very man. Here's his dry hand up and down. You are he, you are he.

Brother At a word, I am not.

2.1.58 apprehend grasp the matter; perceive; interpret
2.1.58 passing extremely (surpassing)
2.1.58 shrewdly wisely; sharply (harshly)
2.1.59 church . . . daylight i.e. what's plain and obvious (a church being the most conspicuous building in a town)
2.1.62 bout turn (of the dance)
2.1.62 friend friend; partner; lover
2.1.65 So so long as
2.1.68 favour face (looks)
2.1.68 defend forbid
2.1.69 case i.e. the mask or 'visor' Don Pedro is wearing
2.1.70 Philemon's . . . love Jove, king of the gods, was given kind hospitality by the elderly peasant, Philemon, while disguised as a poor traveller (Ovid, Metamorphoses 8)
2.1.71 thatched perhaps suggests the mask is ornate and should be more humble, like Philemon's cottage, or that Don Pedro is bald; in either case, a wry put-down to his egotism (may also simply mean the mask lacks hair, though such banality seems out of keeping with the wit of the exchange)
2.1.78 dancer Margaret is likely to be playing on the sexual connotations of dancing here, meaning she wants a good lover who will leave her alone at all other times; compare 3.4.33
2.1.81 Answer i.e. say 'amen'
2.1.81 clerk i.e. parish clerk, leader of the responses in a church service; Balthasar realizes he has been rejected and does not bother to respond
2.1.84 At in
2.1.85 wagging trembling (a sign of old age, like the 'dry hand')
2.1.86 counterfeit imitate
2.1.87 do perform
2.1.87 ill-well cruelly accurately
2.1.88 dry shrivelled
2.1.88 up . . . down to a tee

2.1.60 The . . . entering The 1623 text adds drummers to precede the entrance of the revellers.

2.1.61–2 Enter . . . Borachio. At least the men must be masked, but most modern performances mask everyone, and the party is often represented as a high visual spectacle. Each character's mask may say something about them. Leonato may stay unmasked to greet his guests, and John sometimes abstains from partying.

2.1.72, 75, 77 Benedick Most productions (and editions) give these three speeches to Balthasar or Borachio. An exchange between Margaret and Borachio foreshadows later events. Both options stop Benedick from a potential romance with anyone other than Beatrice.
90 Ursula Come, come, do you think I do not know you by your excellent wit? Can virtue hide itself? Go to, mum, you are he. Graces will appear, and there’s an end.

[They move aside]

Beatrice [to Benedick] Will you not tell me who told you so?

Benedick No, you shall pardon me.

Beatrice Nor will you not tell me who you are?

Benedick Not now.

Beatrice That I was disdainful, and that I had my good wit out of the Hundred Merry Tales—well, this was Signor Benedick that said so.

Benedick What’s he?

Beatrice I am sure you know him well enough.

Benedick Not I, believe me.

Beatrice Did he never make you laugh?

Benedick I pray you, what is he?

Beatrice Why he is the Prince’s jester, a very dull fool. Only his gift is in devising impossible slanders. None but libertines delight in him, and the commendation is not in his wit, but in his villainy, for he both pleases men and angers them, and then they laugh at him, and beat him. I am sure he is in the fleet. I would he had boarded me.

Benedick When I know the gentleman, I’ll tell him what you say.

Beatrice Do, do. He’ll but break a comparison or two on me, which peradventure (not marked, or not laughed at), strikes him into melancholy, and then there’s a partridge wing saved, for the fool will eat no supper that night.

[Music for the dance]

We must follow the leaders.

Benedick In every good thing.

Beatrice Nay, if they lead to any ill, I will leave them at the next turning.

Dance Exeunt [all but John, Borachio, and Claudio]

John [aside to Borachio] Sure my brother is amorous on Hero, and hath withdrawn her father to break with him about it. The ladies follow her, and but one visor remains.

Borachio [aside to John] And that is Claudio, I know him by his bearing.

John [to Claudio] Are not you Signor Benedick?

Claudio You know me well, I am he.

2.1.93 Will . . . so? Beatrice may drop her mask to make her identity known.

Dance Performances have included dances of every imaginable style including swing dancing, ballroom, Bharatanatyam dance, and traditional Elizabethan dances.

2.1.123 John John may be obviously slouching or otherwise making clear his disdain for Claudio and the celebratory atmosphere.
John, you are very near my brother in his love. He is enamoured on Hero. I pray you dissuade him from her. She is no equal for his birth.

You may do the part of an honest man in it.

Claudio How know you he loves her?

John I heard him swear his affection.

Borachio So did I, too, and he swore he would marry her tonight.

John Come, let us to the banquet.

Claudio Thus answer I in name of Benedick,
   But hear these ill news with the ears of Claudio.
   'Tis certain so, the Prince woos for himself.

Friendship is constant in all other things
Save in the office and affairs of love.
Therefore all hearts in love use their own tongues.
Let every eye negotiate for itself,
And trust no agent: for beauty is a witch
Against whose charms faith melteth into blood.
This is an accident of hourly proof,
Which I mistrusted not. Farewell, therefore, Hero.

Enter Benedick

Benedick Count Claudio?

Claudio Yea, the same.

Benedick Come, will you go with me?

Claudio Whither?

Benedick Even to the next willow, about your own business, County.

What fashion will you wear the garland of? About your neck, like an usurer's chain? Or under your arm, like a lieutenant's scarf? You must wear it one way, for the Prince hath got your Hero.

Claudio I wish him joy of her.

Benedick Why that's spoken like an honest drover; so they sell bullock.

But did you think the Prince would have served you thus?

Claudio I pray you leave me.

Benedick Ho, now you strike like the blind man—'twas the boy that stole your meat, and you'll beat the post.

Claudio If it will not be, I'll leave you.

Benedick Alas poor hurt fowl, now will he creep into sedges. But that my Lady Beatrice should know me, and not know me! The Prince's fool!

Ha! It may be I go under that title because I am merry. Yea, but so I am apt to do myself wrong. I am not so reputed. It is the base (though having 'got' Hero for himself, unaware of what has just passed between Claudio and Don John

2.1.125 near . . . love close to my brother; loved by my brother
2.1.126 birth noble birth (royalty)
2.1.127 part service
2.1.127 honest loyal
2.1.131 banquet course of wine, fruit, and sweets served after the dance
2.1.133 ill bad
2.1.136 Save except
2.1.136 office business
2.1.140 faith loyalty
2.1.140 blood passion (desire)
2.1.141 accident occurrence
2.1.141 hourly i.e. common (happens every hour)
2.1.141 proof testimony, i.e. experience shows how common this is
2.1.142 mistrusted suspected
2.1.147 willow willow trees (and garlands made from them) were emblematic of forsaken love; Benedick jokes about the Prince
bitter) disposition of Beatrice, that puts the world into her person, and so gives me out. Well, I'll be revenged as I may.

[Enter the Prince]

Prince Now, Signor, where's the Count? Did you see him?

Benedick Troth, my lord, I have played the part of Lady Fame. I found him here as melancholy as a lodge in a warren, I told him, and I think I told him true, that your grace had got the goodwill of this young lady, and I offered him my company to a willow tree, either to make him a garland, as being forsaken, or to bind him up a rod, as being worthy to be whipped.

Prince To be whipped, what's his fault?

Benedick The flat transgression of a schoolboy, who, being overjoyed with finding a bird's nest, shows it his companion, and he steals it.

Prince Wilt thou make a trust a transgression? The transgression is in the stealer.

Benedick Yet it had not been amiss the rod had been made, and the garland too, for the garland he might have worn himself, and the rod he might have bestowed on you, who (as I take it) have stolen his bird's nest.

Prince I will but teach them to sing, and restore them to the owner.

Benedick If their singing answer your saying, by my faith you say honestly.

Prince The Lady Beatrice hath a quarrel to you. The gentleman that danced with her, told her she is much wronged by you.

Benedick O, she misused me past the endurance of a block. An oak but with one green leaf on it would have answered her. My very visor o'clock; basic
touch person presents her view as the world's
touch so . . . out presents me in that way
Lady Fame i.e. a gossip ('fame' meaning rumour)
lodge hunting lodge (cabin)
warren large park used for breeding small game (the 'lodge' would be isolated and lonely, and eating hare's meat was understood to induce melancholy)
bind . . . up i.e. bind together
rod bundle of twigs used to beat errant children
flat downright; basic
touch transgression error (i.e. a schoolboy error)
transgression error; sin
answer corroborate (confirm)
touch to with
misused abused
block e.g. of wood (an unfeeling object)
leaf 'oak' pushes the 'block' image to the extreme, 'one green leaf' meaning barely alive
answered i.e. argued back
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block e.g. of wood (an unfeeling object)
leaf 'oak' pushes the 'block' image to the extreme, 'one green leaf' meaning barely alive
answered i.e. argued back

Benedick may be bitter or amused. He may increase speed as his complaints get more and more dramatic.
to make the fire, too. Come, talk not of her, you shall find her the infernal 
Ate in good apparel. I would to God some scholar would conjure her, 
for certainly, while she is here, a man may live as quiet in hell as in 
a sanctuary, and people sin upon purpose because they would go 
thither, so indeed all disquiet, horror, and perturbation follows her.

_Enter Claudio and Beatrice [and Leonato with Hero]

200 PRINCE Look, here she comes.

BENEDIICK Will your grace command me any service to the world’s end? 
I will go on the slightest errand now to the Antipodes that you can 
devises to send me on. I will fetch you a tooth-picker now from the 
furthest inch of Asia, bring you the length of Prester John’s foot, fetch 
you a hair off the Great Cham’s beard, do you any embassage to the 
pygmies, rather than hold three words’ conference with this harpy. You 
have no employment for me?

PRINCE None but to desire your good company.

BENEDIICK O God, sir, here’s a dish I love not, I cannot endure my Lady 
Tongue.

210 PRINCE Come, lady, come, you have lost the heart of Signor Benedick.

BEATRICE Indeed, my Lord, he lent it me awhile, and I gave him use for 
it, a double heart for his single one. Marry, once before he won it of me, 
with false dice. Therefore your grace may well say I have lost it.

215 PRINCE You have put him down, lady, you have put him down.

BEATRICE So I would not he should do me, my Lord, lest I should prove 
the mother of fools. I have brought Count Claudio, whom you sent me 
to seek.

PRINCE Why, how now, Count, wherefore are you sad?

CLAUDIO Not sad, my lord.

220 PRINCE How then? Sick?

CLAUDIO Neither, my lord.

BEATRICE The Count is neither sad, nor sick, nor merry, nor well, but 
civil count, civil as an orange, and something of that jealous complexion.

225 PRINCE I’faith lady, I think your blazon to be true, though I’ll be sworn, 
if he be so, his conceit is false. Here, Claudio, I have wooed in thy name,

2.1.196 Ate . . . apparel Ate, daughter of Zeus, goddess of discord 
and vengeance, was beautiful but usually wore only rags, i.e. 
Beatrice’s nice clothes are the only difference

2.1.196 scholar Latin, the language of scholarship, was needed to 
perform exorcisms of evil spirits

2.1.196 conjure exorcise

2.1.197 here i.e. on earth

2.1.198 sanctuary religious refuge

2.1.199 thither i.e. to hell

2.1.202 Antipodes i.e. the other side of the world

2.1.203 tooth-picker toothpick (a worthless item)

2.1.204 Prester John a figure of legend in the medieval period, 
said to be a Christian ruler of a rich kingdom in the Far East; 
finding him would be impossible, and finding the length of his foot 
pointless

2.1.205 Great Cham the title of the Mongol emperors, the Khans 
(Kublai, Genghis, etc.); Benedick conjures another extremely 
lengthy, dangerous, and pointless errand

2.1.205 embassage mission; message

2.1.206 pygmies a legendary race of tiny people from travellers’ 
tales

2.1.206 harpy mythical rapacious creatures with birds’ bodies and 
beautiful women’s faces, thought to act as ministers of divine 
vengeance

2.1.212 use interest (on a loan, as in ‘usury’)

2.1.213 it i.e. either his own heart back or her heart, though the 
image of the double heart suggests both at once (and that she was 
more loving than he was)

2.1.213 of from

2.1.214 false dice dice weighted to cheat the odds, i.e. false 
promises

2.1.215 put . . . down i.e. defeated or humiliated him, though 
Beatrice’s response puns on sex, compounded by the use of ‘do’

2.1.219 therefore why

2.1.224 civil i.e. neither sad nor merry, with pun on ‘Seville’, 
Spanish city famed for oranges (a fruit considered bittersweet 
because of the sour rind and sweet flesh)

2.1.224 jealous complexion yellow was the jealous colour (possibly 
linked to the idea of jaundice as symptomatic of wasting 
melancholy)

2.1.225 blazon description

2.1.226 conceit thought
and fair Hero is won. I have broke with her father, and his good will obtained. Name the day of marriage, and God give thee joy.

LEONATO Count, take of me my daughter, and with her my fortunes. His grace hath made the match, and all grace say amen to it.

BEATRICE Speak, Count, 'tis your cue.

CLAUDIO Silence is the perfectest herald of joy. I were but little happy if I could say, how much. [To Hero] Lady, as you are mine, I am yours, I give away myself for you, and dote upon the exchange.

BEATRICE Speak, cousin, or, if you cannot, stop his mouth with a kiss, and let not him speak neither.

PRINCE In faith, lady, you have a merry heart.

BEATRICE Yea, my lord, I thank it. Poor fool, it keeps on the windy side of care. My cousin tells him in his ear that he is in her heart.

CLAUDIO And so she doth, cousin.

BEATRICE Good Lord, for alliance! Thus goes every one to the world but I, and I am sunburnt. I may sit in a corner and cry, ‘Heigh-ho for a husband’.

PRINCE Lady Beatrice, I will get you one.

BEATRICE I would rather have one of your father’s getting. Hath your grace ne’er a brother like you? Your father got excellent husbands if a maid could come by them.

PRINCE Will you have me, lady?

BEATRICE No, my lord, unless I might have another for working days, your grace is too costly to wear every day. But I beseech your grace pardon me, I was born to speak all mirth, and no matter.

PRINCE Your silence most offends me, and to be merry, best becomes you; for out o’ question, you were born in a merry hour.

BEATRICE No, sure, my lord, my mother cried. But then there was a star danced, and under that was I born. [To Hero and Claudio] Cousins, God give you joy.

LEONATO Niece, will you look to those things I told you of?

BEATRICE I cry you mercy, uncle. [To Prince] By your grace’s pardon.

Exit Beatrice

PRINCE By my troth, a pleasant-spirited lady.

LEONATO There’s little of the melancholy element in her, my lord. She is never sad but when she sleeps, and not ever sad then; for I have heard my daughter say, she hath often dreamt of unhappiness, and waked herself with laughing.

PRINCE She cannot endure to hear tell of a husband.

LEONATO O, by no means. She mocks all her wooers out of suit.

2.1.227 good will blessing
2.1.230 all grace i.e. God
2.1.232 herald message-bearer (announcer)
2.1.238–9 windy . . . care upwind of sorrows and troubles (thus not scented out and pursued by them)
2.1.241 alliance marriage
2.1.242 goes . . . world everyone gets married (the way of the world)
2.1.245 sunburnt i.e. undesirable (dark skin was considered unattractive)
2.1.247–3 cry . . . husband i.e. go whistle for one; a proverbial lament, also the title of a ballad claiming any husband is better than none, an attitude that Beatrice mocks
2.1.247 getting conception (plays on ‘get’ as obtain in previous line)
PRINCE  She were an excellent wife for Benedick.
LEONATO  O Lord, my lord, if they were but a week married, they would
         talk themselves mad.
PRINCE  County Claudio, when mean you to go to church?
CLAUDIO  Tomorrow, my lord. Time goes on crutches till love have all
         his rites.
LEONATO  Not till Monday, my dear son, which is hence a just sennight,
         and a time too brief, too, to have all things answer my mind.
PRINCE  Come, you shake the head at so long a breathing, but I warrant
         thee, Claudio, the time shall not go dully by us. I will in the interim
         undertake one of Hercules' labours, which is to bring Signor Benedick
         and the Lady Beatrice into a mountain of affection, th'one with th'other,
         I would fain have it a match, and I doubt not but to fashion it, if you
         three will but minister such assistance as I shall give you direction.
LEONATO  My lord, I am for you, though it cost me ten nights' watchings.
CLAUDIO  And I, my Lord.
HERO   I will do any modest office, my lord, to help my cousin to a good
       husband.
PRINCE  And Benedick is not the unhopefullest husband that I know.
       Thus far can I praise him: he is of a noble strain, of approved valour,
       and confirmed honesty. I will teach you how to humour your cousin,
       that she shall fall in love with Benedick, and I, with your two helps,
       will so practise on Benedick, that in despite of his quick wit, and his
       queasy stomach, he shall fall in love with Beatrice. If we can do this,
       Cupid is no longer an archer; his glory shall be ours, for we are the only
       love-gods. Go in with me, and I will tell you my drift.  
Exit

2.2

SCENE 5

Enter John and Borachio

JOHN  It is so. The Count Claudio shall marry the daughter of Leonato.
BORACHIO  Yea, my lord, but I can cross it.  
          Any bar, any cross, any impediment will be medicinable to me.
          I am sick in displeasure to him, and whatsoever comes athwart his
          affection ranges evenly with mine. How canst thou cross this marriage?
BORACHIO  Not honestly, my lord, but so covertly that no dishonesty
          shall appear in me.
JOHN  Show me briefly how.
BORACHIO  I think I told your lordship a year since how much I am in
          the favour of Margaret, the waiting gentlewoman to Hero.
JOHN  I remember.

2.1.271–2 CLAUDIO
Despite Claudio’s professed eagerness for marriage, many productions display a physical awkwardness or shyness between Claudio and Hero, especially if they are very young.

2.1.272 a . sennight a week exactly
2.1.273 answer satisfy
2.1.274 breathing pause
2.1.274 warrant guarantee
2.1.276 Hercules' labours in classical myth, Hercules was set
twelve near-impossible tasks as penance
2.1.278 fain gladly
2.1.278 fashion work (engineer)
2.1.279 minister give
2.1.280 watchings wakefulness
2.1.283 modest proper (seemly)
2.1.283 office service
2.1.285 unhopefullest least promising
2.1.286 strain birth; character
2.1.286 approved proven
2.1.289 practise on work upon (manipulate)
2.1.289 queasy stomach finicky manner; uneasy appetite (for love)
2.2.2 Yea . . . it Some early productions emphasized Borachio’s villainy since he comes up with the plan, which also served to make John a more sympathetic character.
BORACHIO  I can at any unseasonable instant of the night appoint her to
look out at her lady’s chamber window.

JOHN  What life is in that to be the death of this marriage?

BORACHIO  The poison of that lies in you to temper. Go you to the Prince
your brother. Spare not to tell him that he hath wronged his honour in
marrying the renowned Claudio—whose estimation do you mightily
hold up—to a contaminated stale, such a one as Hero.

JOHN  What proof shall I make of that?

BORACHIO  Proof enough to misuse the Prince, to vex Claudio, to undo
Hero, and kill Leonato. Look you for any other issue?

JOHN  Only to despite them I will endeavour anything.

BORACHIO  Go then. Find me a meet hour to draw Don Pedro and the
Count Claudio alone. Tell them that you know that Hero loves me.

Intend a kind of zeal both to the Prince and Claudio (as in love of your
brother’s honour who hath made this match) and his friend’s reputation
who is thus like to be cozened with the semblance of a maid, that you
have discovered thus. They will scarcely believe this without trial. Offer
them instances, which shall bear no less likelihood than to see me at
her chamber window, hear me call Margaret Hero, hear Margaret term
me Claudio. And bring them to see this the very night before the intended
wedding, for in the mean time I will so fashion the matter that Hero
shall be absent, and there shall appear such seeming truth of Hero’s
disloyalty that jealousy shall be called assurance, and all the preparation
overthrown.

JOHN  Grow this to what adverse issue it can, I will put it in practice. Be
cunning in the working this, and thy fee is a thousand ducats.

BORACHIO  Be you constant in the accusation, and my cunning shall not
shame me.

JOHN  I will presently go learn their day of marriage.  Exit

2.3  
Sc. 6  Enter Benedick alone

BENEDICK  Boy!

BOY  Signor?

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

BOY  I am here already sir.

2.2.23–35 Go... overthrown Some productions also stage the
plan as laid out here by Borachio, in order to clarify
the story for audiences, and to elicit more sympathy for the
Prince and Claudio.

2.3.0 Enter Benedick

This scene is commonly set in
an orchard (2.3.4) or garden.
Benedick, I know that, but I would have thee hence and here again.

[Exit boy]

I do much wonder, that one man seeing how much another man is a fool, when he dedicates his behaviours 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 armour, 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 colour it please God. Ha! The Prince and Monsieur Love. I will hide me in the arbour.

Enter Prince, Leonato, Claudio, [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 See you where Benedick hath hid himself?

Claudio O, very well, my lord. The music ended, We’ll fit the hid-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 then 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!

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

[BALTHASAR]

The Song.
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.

2.3.41 suit courtship
2.3.44 argument discussion
2.3.45 Note consider (pay attention to)
2.3.46 nothing nothing else; noticing; female genitalia; male genitalia; musical notes; virginity (pronounced 'noting')
2.3.49 air melody
2.3.50 sheep's guts from which strings for instruments were made
2.3.50 bale drag
2.3.50 horn hunting horn, a more masculine instrument; may possibly mean that such love songs lead only to cuckoldry in the end
2.3.57 blithe happy
2.3.57 bonny beautiful
Sing no more ditties, sing no moe,
Of dumps so dull and heavy.
The fraud of men was ever so
Since summer first was leafy,
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 singest 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. Exit Balthasar

Prince Do so. Farewell. Come hither, Leonato. What was it you told me of today, that your niece Beatrice was in love with Signor Benedick?
Claudio [aside] O, ay, 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 Signor Benedick, whom she hath in all outward behaviours 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 May be 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 Bait the hook well, this fish will bite.
Leonato What effects, my lord? She will sit you, you heard my daughter tell you how.

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2.3.60 moe pronounced ‘mow’ (to rhyme with ‘woe’ and ‘so’)
2.3.61 dumps sad songs; low spirits
2.3.61 dull gloomy or melancholy (‘heavy’ means the same)
2.3.68 troth truth, i.e. upon my word
2.3.69 ill bad
2.3.70 for a shift for lack of anything better (a makeshift); ‘shift’ can also mean ‘trick’ or ‘stratagem’, so he is perhaps also speaking above the heads of Balthasar and the eavesdropping Benedick, neither of whom know why the other three are really there
2.3.71 An if
2.3.72 bode portend
2.3.73 mischief catastrophe
2.3.73 as lief as soon
2.3.73 night-raven whose croaking was thought to portend disaster; compare Troilus and Cressida 17.184–5
2.3.82 stalk on i.e. carry on moving stealthily towards the prey
2.3.82 fowl sits Benedick is figured as a game bird sitting unawares in the undergrowth, referring both to his being ‘hunted’ and to his hiding
2.3.84 wonderful extraordinary
2.3.86 ever always
2.3.87 Sits . . . corner? is that the way the wind blows (is that how it is)?
2.3.89 enraged furiously intense
2.3.89 infinite infinite capacity, i.e. there’s no amount of thinking that can change the fact
2.3.90 counterfeit pretend
2.3.91 like likely
2.3.93 discovers displays
2.3.94 effects signs
2.3.96 sit you i.e. sit (ethical dative, emphasizing the role of the hearer in what is being said)
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 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, sobes, 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 he, that my daughter is sometime 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
doffed all other respects, and made her half myself. I pray you tell
Benedick of it, and hear what a 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, a 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
seem 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.
CLAUDIO [aside] If he do not dote on her upon this, I will never trust my
expectation.
PRINCE [aside] 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.

[Exit Prince, Claudio, and Leonato]

Benedick 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 seem

2.3.140 dotage passionate love
2.3.141 doffed cast aside
2.3.142 respects considerations
2.3.143 half myself i.e. my wife
2.3.144 a he
2.3.145 ere before
2.3.146 bate abate (lessen)
2.3.147 tender offer
2.3.148 contemptible scornful (contemptuous); worthy of contempt
2.3.149 proper good-looking; worthy
2.3.150 good . . . happiness pleasant appearance
2.3.151 Before God mild oath, similar to 'with God as my witness'
2.3.152 in to
2.3.153 Hector Trojan leader in Homer's Iliad, famed for valour
2.3.154 discretion good judgement
2.3.155 by to judge by
2.3.156 large coarse
2.3.157 counsel advice; self-reflection; resolution
2.3.160 the while for now, i.e. let's leave it in the meantime and
hopefully it will cool off
2.3.161 modestly soberly (reasonably)
2.3.170 upon after (as a result of)
2.3.171 expectation i.e. sense of what to expect (prediction)
2.3.172 carry carry out
2.3.173 merely entirely
2.3.175 dumb show a wordless scene in a play; he imagines Beatrice
and Benedick will be uncharacteristically speechless (and thinks
of it as entertainment)
2.3.176 conference conversation
2.3.177 sadly borne conducted seriously
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 humour? 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, Signor? Fare you well. Exit

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. Exit

3.1

Sc. 7  Enter Hero and two Gentlewomen, Margaret, and Ursula

HERO Good Margaret, run thee to the parlour.
There shalt thou find my cousin Beatrice
Proposing with the Prince and Claudio.
Whisper her ear and tell her I and Ursley
Walk in the orchard and our whole discourse
Is all of her. Say that thou overheardst us,
And bid her steal into the pleachèd bower
Where honeysuckles, ripened by the sun,
Forbid the sun to enter—like favourites,
Made proud by princes, that advance their pride
Against that power that bred it. There will she hide her
To listen our propose. This is thy office,
Bear thee well in it, and leave us alone.

MARGARET  I’ll make her come I warrant you presently.  [Exit]

HERO  Now, Ursula, when Beatrice doth come,
As we do trace this alley up and down
Our talk must only be of Benedick.
When I do name him, let it be thy part
To praise him more than ever man did merit.

My talk to thee must be how Benedick,
Is sick in love with Beatrice. Of this matter
Is little Cupid’s crafty arrow made,
That only wounds by hearsay.

Enter Beatrice

Now begin,
For look where Beatrice like a lapwing runs
Close by the ground to hear our conference.

URSULA  The pleasant’st angling is to see the fish
Cut with her golden oars the silver stream
And greedily devour the treacherous bait.
So angle we for Beatrice, who even now,
Is couchèd in the woodbine coverture.
Fear you not my part of the dialogue.

HERO  Then go we near her, that her ear lose nothing
Of the false-sweet bait that we lay for it.

They approach Beatrice’s hiding-place

No, truly Ursula, she is too disdainful.
I know her spirits are as coy and wild,
As haggards of the rock.

URSULA  But are you sure
That Benedick loves Beatrice so entirely?
HERO  So says the Prince, and my new trothèd Lord.

URSULA  And did they bid you tell her of it, madam?
HERO  They did intreat me to acquaint her of it,
But I persuaded them, if they lov’d Benedick,
To wish him wrestle with affection
And never to let Beatrice know of it.

3.1.7 steal  creep
3.1.8 pleachèd  i.e. made of interlaced branches
3.1.9 favourites  favoured courtiers
3.1.12 propose  conversation
3.1.12 office  duty
3.1.13 Bear . . . it  i.e. do it well
3.1.14 presently  right away
3.1.16 trace  walk (follow)
3.1.22 crafty  cunning; well-made; skilful
3.1.23 only wounds  wounds only
3.1.23 hearsay  rumour (with probable play on overhearing)
3.1.24 lapwing  ground-nesting, wading bird (plover) known for its stealthy, crouched movements through the grass to draw predators away from its nest
3.1.27 oars  i.e. fins
3.1.30 couchèd  lying hidden
3.1.30 woodbine  honeysuckle
3.1.30 coverture  covered bower (canopy)
3.1.35 coy  distant (evasive); disdainful
3.1.36 haggards  mature wild female hawks
3.1.37 entirely  sincerely; completely
3.1.38 new trothèd  newly betrothed
3.1.42 affection  emotion (passion)
Ursula  Why did you so? Doth not the gentleman
Deserve as full as fortunate a bed
As ever Beatrice shall couch upon?

Hero  O god of love! I know he doth deserve
As much as may be yielded to a man,
But nature never framed a woman's heart
Of prouder stuff then that of Beatrice.
Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
Misprising what they look on, and her wit
Values itself so highly that to her
All matter else seems weak. She cannot love,
Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
She is so self-endearèd.

Ursula  Sure, I think so.
And therefore certainly it were not good
She knew his love, lest she'll make sport at it.

Hero  Why, you speak truth. I never yet saw man,
How wise, how noble, young, how rarely featured,
But she would spell him backward. If fair-faced,
She would swear the gentleman should be her sister.
If black, why, nature drawing of an antic
Made a foul blot. If tall, a lance ill headed.

If low, an agate very vilely cut.
If speaking, why, a vane blown with all winds;
If silent, why, a block movèd with none.
So turns she every man the wrong side out,
And never gives to truth and virtue that
Which simpleness and merit purchaseth.

Ursula  Sure, sure, such carping is not commendable.

Hero  No not to be so odd and from all fashions
As Beatrice is cannot be commendable.
But who dare tell her so? If I should speak,
She would mock me into air. O, she would laugh me
Out of myself, press me to death with wit.
Therefore let Benedick like cover'd fire,
Consume away in sighs, waste inwardly.
It were a better death than die with mocks,

Which is as bad as die with tickling.

_ursula_ Yet tell her of it, hear what she will say.

_hero_ No. Rather, I will go to Benedick
And counsel him to fight against his passion.
And truly I’ll devise some honest slanders

To stain my cousin with. One doth not know
How much an ill word may empoison liking.

_ursula_ O, do not do your cousin such a wrong.
She cannot be so much without true judgement,
Having so swift and excellent a wit

As she is prized to have, as to refuse
So rare a gentleman as Signor Benedick.

_hero_ He is the only man of Italy,
Always excepted my dear Claudio.

_ursula_ I pray you be not angry with me, madam,
Speaking my fancy. Signor Benedick,
For shape, for bearing, argument, and valour

Goes foremost in report through Italy.

_hero_ Indeed he hath an excellent good name.

_ursula_ His excellence did earn it ere he had it.

When are you married, madam?

_hero_ Why, every day, tomorrow. Come, go in.
I’ll show thee some attires, and have thy counsel
Which is the best to furnish me tomorrow.

_ursula _ [aside] She’s limed, I warrant you. We have caught her, madam.

_hero _ [aside] If it prove so, then loving goes by haps.
Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps.  [Exit Hero and Ursula]

_beatrice_ What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?
Stand I condemn’d for pride and scorn so much?
Contempt, farewell; and maiden pride, adieu.

No glory lives behind the back of such.
And, Benedick, love on. I will requite thee,
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand.
If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee
To bind our loves up in a holy band.

For others say thou dost deserve, and I
Believe it better than reportingly.

Exit
Enter Prince, Claudio, Benedick, and Leonato

Prince I do but stay till your marriage be consummate, and then go I toward Aragon.

Claudio I’ll bring you thither my lord, if you’ll vouchsafe me.

Prince Nay, that would be as great a soil in the new gloss of your marriage as to show a child his new coat and forbid him to wear it. I will only be bold with Benedick for his company, for from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot he is all mirth. He hath twice or thrice cut Cupid’s bow-string, and the little hangman dare not shoot at him. He hath a heart as sound as a bell, and his tongue is the clapper, for what his heart thinks his tongue speaks.

Benedick Gallants, I am not as I have been.

Leonato So say I, methinks you are sadder.

Claudio I hope he be in love.

Prince Hang him, truant! There’s no true drop of blood in him to be truly touched with love. If he be sad, he wants money.

Benedick I have the toothache.

Prince Draw it.

Benedick Hang it.

Claudio You must hang it first, and draw it afterwards.

Prince What? Sigh for the toothache?

Leonato Where is but a humour or a worm.

Benedick Well, everyone can master a grief but he that has it.

Claudio Yet say I, he is in love.

Prince There is no appearance of fancy in him, unless it be a fancy that he hath to strange disguises, as to be a Dutchman to day, a Frenchman tomorrow, or in the shape of two countries at once, as a German from the waist downward, all slops, and a Spaniard from the hip upward, no doublet.

Unless he have a fancy to this foolery, as it appears he hath, he is no fool for fancy, as you would have it appear he is.

Claudio If he be not in love with some woman, there is no believing old signs. ’A brushes his hat o’ mornings, what should that bode?

Prince Hath any man seen him at the barber’s?

Sc. 8 3.2.31 Hath ... barber’s? Benedick may begin the play with a beard and be clean-shaven by this point.

3.2.1 consummate performed; celebrated; consummated
3.2.2 bring escort
3.2.3 vouchsafe allow
3.2.4 soil blemish
3.2.4 in on
3.2.6 be bold presume (take the liberty)
3.2.7 all mirth the first of a series of mocks about Benedick’s changed state
3.2.8 hangman rascal
3.2.12 sadder more serious or grave (a mark of love melancholy)
3.2.14 truant rogue; one who stays away (a truant from love)
3.2.15 wants lacks
3.2.17 Draw pull; Benedick’s reply combines to set up sense of ‘disembowel’
3.2.18 Hang it i.e. the hell with it (let it go hang), though extracted teeth were also hung outside barbershops to advertise tooth-drawing services
3.2.19 hang ... afterwards puns on hanging, drawing, and quartering, perhaps suggestive of Benedick’s table-turned tortured state (compare 1.1.184–5)
3.2.21 humour ... worm Elizabethans imagined toothache as caused by one of the bodily humours (fluids) rotting into the tooth or by worms boring in
3.2.24 fancy love
3.2.24 fancy whim
3.2.25–26 slops baggy breeches
3.2.26 doublet a close-fitting man’s jacket, in this case concealed by the fashionable Spanish cape
3.2.27 fancy whim
3.2.28 fancy love
3.2.30 bode portend (indicate)
CLAUDIO  No, but the barber's man hath been seen with him, and the old ornament of his cheek hath already stuffed tennis balls.

LEONATO  Indeed, he looks younger than he did by the loss of a beard.

PRINCE  Nay, 'a rubs himself with civet. Can you smell him out by that?

CLAUDIO  That's as much as to say the sweet youth's in love.

[PRINCE]  The greatest note of it is his melancholy.

CLAUDIO  And when was he wont to wash his face?

PRINCE  Yea, or to paint himself? For the which I hear what they say of him.

CLAUDIO  Nay, but his jesting spirit, which is now crept into a lute-string, and now governed by stops.

PRINCE  Indeed, that tells a heavy tale for him. Conclude, conclude, he is in love.

CLAUDIO  Nay, but I know who loves him.

PRINCE  That would I know too, I warrant, one that knows him not.

CLAUDIO  Yes, and his ill conditions, and in despite of all, dies for him.

PRINCE  She shall be buried with her face upwards.

BENEDICK  Yet is this no charm for the toothache. Old Signor, walk aside with me. I have studied eight or nine wise words to speak to you which these hobby-horses must not hear. [Exit Benedick and Leonato]

PRINCE  For my life to break with him about Beatrice.

CLAUDIO  'Tis even so. Hero and Margaret have by this played their parts with Beatrice, and then the two bears will not bite one another when they meet.

Enter John the bastard

JOHN  My lord, and brother, God save you.

PRINCE  Good e'en, brother.

JOHN  If your leisure served I would speak with you.

PRINCE  In private?

JOHN  If it please you. Yet Count Claudio may hear, for what I would speak of concerns him.

PRINCE  What's the matter?

JOHN  [to Claudio]  Means your lordship to be married tomorrow?

PRINCE  You know he does.

JOHN  I know not that when he knows what I know.

CLAUDIO  If there be any impediment, I pray you discover it.

JOHN  I may think I love you not. Let that appear hereafter, and aim better at me by that I now will manifest. For my brother (I think he holds you well, and in dearness of heart) hath holp to effect your ensuing marriage—surely suit ill spent, and labour ill bestowed.

3.2.33 ornament . . . balls  stuffing tennis balls with beard trimmings was an actual practice (and concomitant joke); compare 2.1.26–7
3.2.35 civet  perfume (from the scent glands of a civet cat)
3.2.35 smell him out i.e. find his secret (proverbial, punning on the literal)
3.2.37 note  sign
3.2.38 wont  accustomed
3.2.39 paint himself  use cosmetics
3.2.41–2 lute-string  the lute was the lover's instrument; compare 1 Henry IV 1.2.73–5
3.2.42 governed by stops  played by frets (or holes in a pipe, another lover's instrument); at the mercy of hindrances; kept in check by denials of love (the traditional fate of the courtly lover)
3.2.43 heavy  sorrowful; compelling (weight of evidence)
3.2.47 Yes i.e. yes she does (on the contrary)
PRINCE  Why, what's the matter?

JOHN  I came hither to tell you, and circumstances shortened—for she has been too long a-talking-of—the lady is disloyal.

CLAUDIO  Who, Hero?

JOHN  Even she. Leonato’s Hero, your Hero, every man’s Hero.

CLAUDIO  Disloyal?

JOHN  The word is too good to paint out her wickedness. I could say she were worse. Think you of a worse title, and I will fit her to it. Wonder not till further warrant. Go but with me tonight, you shall see her chamber window entered, even the night before her wedding day. If you love her then, tomorrow wed her. But it would better fit your honour to change your mind.

CLAUDIO  May this be so?

PRINCE  I will not think it.

JOHN  If you dare not trust that you see, confess not that you know. If you will follow me, I will show you enough, and when you have seen more and heard more, proceed accordingly.

CLAUDIO  If I see anything tonight why I should not marry her, tomorrow in the congregation where I should wed, there will I shame her.

PRINCE  And as I wooed for thee to obtain her, I will join with thee to disgrace her.

JOHN  I will disparage her no farther till you are my witnesses. Bear it coldly but till midnight, and let the issue show itself.

PRINCE  O day untowardly turned!

CLAUDIO  O mischief strangely thwarting!

JOHN  O plague right well prevented!—so will you say, when you have seen the sequel.  

[Exeunt]

3.3

Sc. 9  Enter Dogberry and his compartner [Verges], with the Watch

DOGBERY  Are you good men and true?

VERGES  Yea, or else it were pity but they should suffer salvation body and soul.

DOGBERY  Nay, that were a punishment too good for them if they should have any allegiance in them, being chosen for the Prince’s watch.

VERGES  Well, give them their charge, neighbour Dogberry.

DOGBERY  First, who think you the most desertless man to be constable?

3.2.72 circumstances  details (specifics)
3.2.73 disloyal  unfaithful
3.2.77 paint out  describe fully
3.2.78 Wonder  marvel
3.2.79 warrant  proof
3.2.81 fit  befit
3.2.85 that  that which
3.2.86 confess  acknowledge (line basically means ‘If you won’t believe what you see, don’t stand by anything you know’)
3.2.94 coldly  calmly
3.2.96 issue  outcome
3.2.98 the sequel  i.e. what follows
Sc. 9 3.3.0 Enter . . . Watch?  Dogberry, Verges, and the Watch are usually marked out as lower class and sometimes even ethnically distinct, with clearly different costumes from the rest of the cast.

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3.2.95 untowardly turned  unluckily changed
3.2.96 mischief  wickedness; misfortune
3.2.96 strangely  surprisingly
3.2.96 thwarting  opposing (his plans)
3.2.97 plague  disaster; affliction
3.2.98 the sequel  i.e. what follows
Sc. 9 3.3.0 Enter . . . Watch?  Dogberry, Verges, and the Watch are usually marked out as lower class and sometimes even ethnically distinct, with clearly different costumes from the rest of the cast.

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ACT 3  ·  SCENE 3  ·  MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

WATCH 2  Hugh Oatcake, sir, or George Seacoal, for they can write and read.

DOGBERRY  Come hither, neighbour Seacoal. God hath blest you with a good name. To be a well-favoured man is the gift of fortune, but to write and read comes by nature.

WATCH 1  Both which, Master Constable.—

DOGBERRY  You have. I knew it would be your answer. Well, for your favour, sir, why, give God thanks, and make no boast of it. And for your writing and reading, let that appear when there is no need of such vanity. You are thought here to be the most senseless and fit man for the constable of the watch, therefore bear you the lantern. This is your charge: you shall comprehend all vagrom men. You are to bid any man stand, in the Prince’s name.

WATCH 1  How if ‘a will not stand?

DOGBERRY  Why then take no note of him, but let him go, and presently call the rest of the watch together, and thank God you are rid of a knave.

VERGES  If he will not stand when he is bidden, he is none of the Prince’s subjects.

DOGBERRY  True, and they are to meddle with none but the Prince’s subjects.—You shall also make no noise in the streets, for for the watch to babble and to talk is most tolerable and not to be endured.

WATCH 2  We will rather sleep than talk. We know what belongs to a watch.

DOGBERRY  Why, you speak like an ancient and most quiet watchman, for I cannot see how sleeping should offend. Only have a care that your bills be not stolen. Well, you are to call at all the alehouses, and bid those that are drunk get them to bed.

WATCH 1  How if they will not?

DOGBERRY  Why then, let them alone ‘til they are sober. If they make you not then the better answer, you may say, they are not the men you took them for.

WATCH 2  Well, sir.

DOGBERRY  If you meet a thief you may suspect him, by virtue of your office, to be no true man; and for such kind of men, the less you meddle or make with them why, the more is for your honesty.

WATCH 1  If we know him to be a thief, shall we not lay hands on him?

DOGBERRY  Truly, by your office you may, but I think they that touch pitch will be defiled. The most peaceable way for you if you do take a thief is to let him show himself what he is, and steal out of your company.

3.3.11 well-favoured  good-looking
3.3.11 fortune  luck
3.3.12 nature  heredity; the number of malapropisms and non sequiturs lead to more than simple inversion here; Dogberry talks about Seacoal’s looks when he is still on the subject of his name (birth or family), and, while luck could be seen to play its part in looks, genetics are ultimately responsible; reading and writing comes by neither, but by learning
3.3.15 favour  appearance (face)
3.3.16–17 let . . . vanity  again, it is hard to see the dividing line between Dogberry’s failures of language and of logic
3.3.17 senseless  he means ‘sensible’
3.3.17 fit  suitable
3.3.19 comprehend  he means ‘apprehend’
3.3.19 vagrom  nonsense word, malapropism for ‘vagrant’
3.3.20 stand  halt
3.3.22 note  notice
3.3.22 presently  immediately
3.3.28 tolerable  i.e. intolerable
3.3.29 belongs to  is the duty of
3.3.30 ancient  experienced (time-worn)
3.3.32 bills  halberds (long-handled weapons with a combined spear and axe-head)
3.3.33 them  themselves
3.3.36 better  i.e. more compliant
3.3.40 office  role
3.3.41 meddle or make  interfere (proverbial)
3.3.41 more is  better it will be
3.3.43 by  by virtue of
3.3.43–4 they . . . defiled  proverbial, i.e. they who meddle with bad affairs will end up tarnished by them (pitch is a black tar-like substance)
3.3.45 show . . . is  show his true nature
3.3.45 steal  creep (with pun on theft)
VERGES  You have been always called a merciful man, partner.

DOGBERRY  Truly, I would not hang a dog by my will, much more a man
who hath any honesty in him.

VERGES  If you hear a child cry in the night you must call to the nurse
and bid her still it.

A WATCHMAN  How if the nurse be asleep and will not hear us?

DOGBERRY  Why then, depart in peace and let the child wake her with
weeping, for the ewe that will not hear her lamb when it bays will never
answer a calf when he bleats.

VERGES  ’Tis very true.

DOGBERRY  This is the end of the charge. You, constable, are to present
the Prince’s own person. If you meet the Prince in the night, you may
stay him.

VERGES  Nay, by’t Lady, that I think ’a cannot.

DOGBERRY  Five shillings to one on’t with any man that knows the
statutes he may stay him. Marry, not without the Prince be willing, for
indeed the watch ought to offend no man, and it is an offence to stay a
man against his will.

VERGES  By’t Lady, I think it be so.

DOGBERRY  Ha ah ha! Well, masters, good night. An there be any matter
of weight chances, call up me. Keep your fellows’s counsels, and your
own, and good night. Come, neighbour.

WATCH  Well, masters, we hear our charge. Let us go sit here upon the
church bench till two, and then all to bed.

DOGBERRY  One word more, honest neighbours. I pray you watch about
Signor Leonato’s door, for the wedding being there tomorrow, there
is a great coil tonight. Adieu. Be vigilant, I beseech you.

Exeunt [Dogberry and Verges. The Watch sit]

Enter Borachio and Conrad

BORACHIO  What, Conrad!

WATCH  [aside]  Peace, stir not.

BORACHIO  Conrad, I say.

CONRAD  Here, man, I am at thy elbow.

BORACHIO  Mass, an my elbow itched, I thought there would a scab
follow.

CONRAD  I will owe thee an answer for that. And now, forward with
thy tale.

BORACHIO  Stand thee close, then, under this penthouse, for it drizzles
rain, and I will, like a true drunkard, utter all to thee.


BORACHIO  Therefore, know I have earned of Don John a thousand ducats.

CONRAD  Is it possible that any villainy should be so dear?

3.3.68, 74, 83 WATCH  Though these lines can
technically be spoken by any
of the watchmen, they are
often assigned to Watch 1
(Seacoal), the de facto leader.

3.3.72.1 Enter . . . Conrad!  Some productions delay this
entrance slightly in order to
give the Watch time to doze
off or otherwise fall to
humorous inattention.

3.3.47 by my will  by my own choice
3.3.47 more  i.e. less
3.3.50 still  quiet (calm)
3.3.56 charge  commission
3.3.56 present  represent
3.3.58 stay  detain
3.3.59 by’t Lady  by our Lady (the Virgin Mary)
3.3.61 statutes  laws
3.3.61 without  unless
3.3.65 An  if
3.3.66 chances  occurs
3.3.66 counsels  confidences (secrets)
Borachio: Thou shouldst rather ask if it were possible any villainy should be so rich? For when rich villains have need of poor ones, poor ones may make what price they will.

Conrad: I wonder at it.

Borachio: That shows thou art unconfirmed. Thou knowest that the fashion of a doublet, or a hat, or a cloak is nothing to a man.

Conrad: Yes, it is apparel.

Borachio: I mean the fashion.

Conrad: Yes, the fashion is the fashion.

Borachio: Tush, I may as well say the fool’s the fool. But seest thou not what a deformed thief this fashion is?

Watch [aside]: I know that Deformed. A has been a vile thief this seven year. A goes up and down like a gentleman. I remember his name.

Borachio: Didst thou not hear somebody?

Conrad: No, ’twas the vane on the house.

Borachio: Seest thou not (I say) what a deformed thief this fashion is, how giddily a turns about all the hot-bloods between fourteen and five-and-thirty, sometimes fashioning them like Pharaoh’s soldiers in the reechy painting, sometime like god Bel’s priests in the old church window, sometime like the shaven Hercules in the smirched, worm-eaten tapestry, where his codpiece seems as massy as his club.

Conrad: All this I see, and I see that the fashion wears out more apparel than the man. But art not thou thyself giddy with the fashion, too, that thou hast shifted out of thy tale into telling me of the fashion?

Borachio: Not so, neither. But know that I have tonight wooed Margaret, the Lady Hero’s gentlewoman, by the name of Hero. She leans me out at her mistress’s 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.

Conrad: And thought they Margaret was Hero?

[It is not clear what is meant by these words.]

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’renight, and send her home again without a husband.

125 **WATCH 1 [to Conrad and Borachio]** We charge you in the Prince’s name. Stand.

**WATCH 2** Call up the right Master Constable. We have here recovered the most dangerous piece of lechery that ever was known in the commonwealth.

130 **WATCH 1** And one Deformed is one of them I know him—‘a wears a lock.

**CONRAD** Masters, masters.

**WATCH 2** You’ll be made bring Deformed forth, I warrant you.

**CONRAD** Masters,—

135 [**WATCH**] Never speak. We charge you. Let us obey you to go with us.

**BORACHIO [to Conrad]** We are like to prove a goodly commodity, being taken up of these men’s bills.

**CONRAD** A commodity in question I warrant you. Come, we’ll obey you.

_Exeunt_

### 3.4
**Sc. 10** Enter Hero, and Margaret, and Ursula

**HERO** Good Ursula, wake my cousin Beatrice, and desire her to rise.

**URSULA** I will, lady.

**HERO** And bid her come hither.

**URSULA** Well.

**MARGARET** Troth, I think your other rebato were better.

**HERO** No, pray thee, good Meg, I’ll wear this.

**MARGARET** By my troth, ’s not so good, and I warrant your cousin will say so.

**HERO** My cousin’s a fool, and thou art another, I’ll wear none but this.

**MARGARET** I like the new tire within excellently, if the hair were a thought browner. And your gown’s a most rare fashion i’faith. I saw the Duchess of Milan’s gown that they praise so.

**HERO** O, that exceeds, they say.

**MARGARET** By my troth, ’s but a night-gown in respect of yours—cloth a gold, and cuts, and laced with silver, set with pearls, down sleeves,
side sleeves, and skirts, round underborne with a bluish tinsel. But for a fine quaint, graceful, and excellent fashion, yours is worth ten on’t.

**HERO**  God give me joy to wear it, for my heart is exceeding heavy.

**MARGARET**  'Twill be heavier soon by the weight of a man.

**HERO**  Fie upon thee, art not ashamed?

**MARGARET**  Of what, lady? Of speaking honourably? Is not marriage honourable in a beggar? Is not your Lord honourable without marriage? I think you would have me say, 'saving your reverence a husband'. An bad thinking do not wrest true speaking, I’ll offend nobody. Is there any harm in 'the heaver for a husband'? None, I think, and it be the right husband, and the right wife, otherwise 'tis light and not heavy. Ask my Lady Beatrice else. Here she comes.

Enter Beatrice

**HERO**  Good morrow, coz.

**BEATRICE**  Good morrow, sweet Hero.

**HERO**  Why, how now? Do you speak in the sick tune?

**BEATRICE**  I am out of all other tune, methinks.

**MARGARET**  Clap’s into 'Light o’ love'. That goes without a burden. Do you sing it, and I’ll dance it.

**BEATRICE**  Ye light o’ love with your heels. Then if your husband have stables enough, you’ll see he shall lack no barns.

**MARGARET**  O illegitimate construction! I scorn that with my heels.

**BEATRICE**  'Tis almost five a’clock, cousin. 'Tis time you were ready. By my troth, I am exceeding ill. Hey-ho!

**MARGARET**  For a hawk, a horse, or a husband?

**BEATRICE**  For the letter that begins them all, 'H'.

**MARGARET**  Well, and you be not turned Turk, there’s no more sailing by the star.

**BEATRICE**  What means the fool, trow?

**MARGARET**  Nothing I. But God send every one their heart’s desire.
HERO These gloves the Count sent me, they are an excellent perfume.

BEATRICE I am stuffed, cousin, I cannot smell.

MARGARET A maid and stuffed! There's goodly catching of cold.

BEATRICE O, God help me, God help me. How long have you professed apprehension?

MARGARET Ever since you left it. Doth not my wit become me rarely?

BEATRICE It is not seen enough. You should wear it in your cap. By my troth, I am sick.

MARGARET Get you some of this distilled Carduus benedictus, and lay it to your heart. It is the only thing for a qualm.

HERO [to Margaret] There thou prickest her with a thistle.

BEATRICE Benedictus, why benedictus? You have some moral in this benedictus.

MARGARET Moral? No, by my troth I have no moral meaning. I meant plain holy-thistle. You may think perchance that I think you are in love.

Nay, by'r Lady, I am not such a fool to think what I list, nor I list not to think what I can, nor indeed I cannot think, if I would think my heart out of thinking, that you are in love, or that you can be in love. Yet Benedick was such another, and now is he become a man. He swore he would never marry, and yet now in despite of his heart he eats his meat without grudging. And how you may be converted I know not, but methinks you look with your eyes as other women do.

BEATRICE What pace is this that thy tongue keeps?

MARGARET Not a false gallop.

Enter Ursula.

MADAME, withdraw. The Prince, the Count, Signor Benedick, Don John, and all the gallants of the town are come to fetch you to church.

HERO Help to dress me, good coz, good Meg, good Ursula. [Exit]
GOODMAN

Goodman Verges, sir, speaks a little of the matter,—an old man sir, and his wits are not so blunt, as God help, I would desire they were. But in faith, honest as the skin between his brows.

VERGES

Yes, I thank God, I am as honest as any man living that is an old man and no honester then I.

DOGBERRY

Comparisons are odorous. Palabras, neighbour Verges.

LEONATO

Neighbours, you are tedious.

DOGBERRY

It pleases your worship to say so, but we are the poor Duke’s officers. But truly for mine own part, if I were as tedious as a king I could find in my heart to bestow it all of your worship.

LEONATO

All thy tediousness on me, ah?

DOGBERRY

Yea, and ’twere a thousand pound more than ’tis, for I hear as good exclamation on your worship as of any man in the city, and though I be but a poor man, I am glad to hear it.

VERGES

And so am I.

LEONATO

I would fain know what you have to say.

VERGES

Marry, sir, our watch tonight, excepting your worship’s presence, ha’ ta’en a couple of as arrant knaves as any in Messina.

DOGBERRY

A good old man sir. He will be talking. As they say, when the age is in, the wit is out, God help us, it is a world to see. Well said, i’faith, neighbour Verges. Well, God’s a good man. An two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind. An honest soul i’faith, sir, by my troth he is, as ever broke bread. But God is to be worshipped, all men are not alike, alas good neighbour.

LEONATO

Indeed, neighbour, he comes too short of you.

DOGBERRY

Gifts that God gives!

LEONATO

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All thy tediousness on me, ah?

DOGBERRY

Yea, and ’twere a thousand pound more than ’tis, for I hear as good exclamation on your worship as of any man in the city, and though I be but a poor man, I am glad to hear it.

VERGES

And so am I.

LEONATO

I would fain know what you have to say.

VERGES

Marry, sir, our watch tonight, excepting your worship’s presence, ha’ ta’en a couple of as arrant knaves as any in Messina.

DOGBERRY

A good old man sir. He will be talking. As they say, when the age is in, the wit is out, God help us, it is a world to see. Well said, i’faith, neighbour Verges. Well, God’s a good man. An two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind. An honest soul i’faith, sir, by my troth he is, as ever broke bread. But God is to be worshipped, all men are not alike, alas good neighbour.

LEONATO

Indeed, neighbour, he comes too short of you.

DOGBERRY

Gifts that God gives!

LEONATO

I must leave you.

DOGBERRY

One word, sir. Our watch, sir, have indeed comprehended two auspicious persons, and we would have them this morning examined before your worship.

LEONATO

Take their examination yourself, and bring it me. I am now in great haste, as it may appear unto you.

DOGBERRY

It shall be suffigance.

LEONATO

Drink some wine ere you go. Fare you well.

[Enter a Messenger]

Messerenger

My lord, they stay for you, to give your daughter to her husband.

LEONATO

I’ll wait upon them, I am ready.

[Exit Leonato and Messenger]

DOGBERRY

Go, good partner, go get you to Francis Seacole, bid him bring his pen and inkhorn to the jail. We are now to examination these men.

3.5.8 Goodman title for one below gentlemanly status
3.5.9 blunt he means ‘sharp’
3.5.13 odorous i.e. ‘odious’
3.5.14 Palabras i.e. quiet, after the Spanish tag pauca palabras meaning ‘few words’
3.5.14 tedious Dogberry thinks it is a compliment, meaning something like ‘rich’
3.5.15 poor Duke’s i.e. Duke’s poor
3.5.20 examination loud complaint (he means ‘acclamation’) 
3.5.23 fain gladly
3.5.24 tonight last night
3.5.24 examining malapropism for ‘respecting’, i.e. if I may be so bold in your presence
3.5.25 arrant downright
3.5.27 it i.e. it’s a marvel
3.5.29 An if
3.5.32 comes . . . of doesn’t measure up to
3.5.35 comprehended i.e. apprehended
3.5.36 auspicious boding of success or favourable (he of course means ‘suspicious’)
3.5.40 suffigance nonsense word, malapropism for ‘sufficient’
3.5.42 stay wait
3.5.46 examination malapropism for ‘examine’
AND we must do it wisely.

We will spare for no wit, I warrant you. Here’s that shall drive some of them to a non-com. Only get the learned writer to set down our excommunication, and meet me at the jail.

4.1

Enter [Don Pedro] the Prince, [Don John] the bastard, Leonato, Friar [Francis], Claudio, Benedick, Hero, and Beatrice

LEONATO Come, Friar Francis, be brief, only to the plain form of marriage, and you shall recount their particular duties afterwards.

FRIAR [to Claudio] You come hither, my lord, to marry this lady?

CLAUDIO No.

LEONATO To be married to her. Friar, you come to marry her.

FRIAR [to Hero] Lady, you come hither to be married to this Count?

HERO I do.

FRIAR If either of you know any inward impediment why you should not be conjoined, I charge you on your souls to utter it.

CLAUDIO Know you any, Hero?

HERO None, my lord.

FRIAR Know you any, Count?

LEONATO I dare make his answer—none.

CLAUDIO O, what men dare do! What men may do! What men daily do, not knowing what they do!

BENEDICK How now! Interjections? Why then, some be of laughing, as, ‘ah, ha, he!’

CLAUDIO Stand thee by, Friar, [To Leonato] father by your leave,

Will you with free and unconstrainèd soul

Give me this maid your daughter?

LEONATO As freely, son, as God did give her me.

CLAUDIO And what have I to give you back whose worth May counterpoise this rich and precious gift?

PRINCE Nothing, unless you render her again.

CLAUDIO Sweet Prince, you learn me noble thankfulness.

There, Leonato, take her back again.

Give not this rotten orange to your friend.

She’s but the sign and semblance of her honour.

Behold how like a maid she blushes here!

O, what authority and show of truth

Can cunning sin cover itself withal!

Comes not that blood, as modest evidence

VERGES

Dogberry

And we must do it wisely.

Dogberry We will spare for no wit, I warrant you. Here’s that shall drive some of them to a non-com. Only get the learned writer to set down our excommunication, and meet me at the jail.

3.5.50 non-com presumably means non-plus (state of perplexity), but also recalls, not inaptingly, non compos mentis, i.e. mad

3.5.50 set write

3.5.51 excommunication another malapropism for ‘examination’

Sc. 12 4.1.1 plain form simple form, without preliminary detailing of all the obligations of marriage, i.e. cut to the chase

4.1.8 inward secret or private

4.1.16–17 How . . . he!’ Benedick quotes William Lyly’s standard Latin grammar text for schools (1538) on laughter as an interjection, apparently to make light of the odd scene Claudio is beginning to make

4.1.18 Stand . . . by stand aside

4.1.18 by . . . leave with your permission (either to call him ‘father’ or to speak)

4.1.19 unconstrainèd soul unforced spirit; clear conscience

4.1.23 counterpoise balance (repay)

4.1.24 render . . . again give her back

4.1.25 learn teach

4.1.27 rotten orange oranges were associated with prostitutes (possibly an association between the pitted rind and pock-marked, syphilitic skin) and with deceptiveness, in that their sour rind belies their sweet flesh; compare 2.1.224

4.1.28 sign show

4.1.28 semblance outward appearance

4.1.29 maid virgin

4.1.32 blood i.e. blush
To witness simple virtue? Would you not swear,
All you that see her, that she were a maid,
By these exterior shows? But she is none:
She knows the heat of a luxurious bed.
Her blush is guiltiness, not modesty.

LEONATO What do you mean, my lord?

CLAUDIO Not to be married,
Not to knit my soul to an approvèd wanton.

LEONATO Dear my lord, if you in your own proof
Have vanquished the resistance of her youth,
And made defeat of her virginity—

CLAUDIO I know what you would say. If I have known her,
You will say, she did embrace me as a husband,
And so extenuate the forehand sin.

No, Leonato,
I never tempted her with word too large,
But as a brother to his sister showed
Bashful sincerity and comely love.

HERO And seemed I ever otherwise to you?

CLAUDIO Out on thee, seeming. I will write against it.
You seem to me as Dian in her orb,
As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown.
But you are more intemperate in your blood
Than Venus, or those pampered animals,
That rage in savage sensuality.

HERO Is my lord well that he doth speak so wide?

LEONATO Sweet Prince, why speak not you?
PRINCE What should I speak?

I stand dishonoured that have gone about,
To link my dear friend to a common stale.

LEONATO Are these things spoken, or do I but dream?

JOHN Sir, they are spoken, and these things are true.

BENEDICK This looks not like a nuptial.
HERO ‘True’? O God!

CLAUDIO Leonato, stand I here?

Is this the Prince? Is this the Prince’s brother?
Is this face Hero’s? Are our eyes our own?

LEONATO All this is so. But what of this, my lord?

CLAUDIO Let me but move one question to your daughter,

And by that fatherly and kindly power,
That you have in her, bid her answer truly.

LEONATO [to Hero] I charge thee do so, as thou art my child.

4.1.33 witness bear witness to
4.1.36 luxurious lustful
4.1.39 approved proven
4.1.39 wanton slut
4.1.40 proof test (of her); experience
4.1.43 known i.e. carnally
4.1.45 extenuate lessen
4.1.45 forehand beforehand (prior)
4.1.47 large unrestrained; lewd
4.1.49 comely proper (becoming)
4.1.51 Out on curses upon (damn)
4.1.51 seeming (and your) pretence
4.1.51 write against i.e. publish (and denounce)

4.1.52 Dian or Diana, the Roman goddess of chastity
4.1.52 orb the moon (in which Diana was thought to live, and with which she was associated); the moon’s orbit or sphere (compare Romeo and Juliet 8.351–2)
4.1.53 blown opened
4.1.54 intemperate uncontrolled; immoderate
4.1.54 blood sensual passion
4.1.55 Venus Roman goddess of love
4.1.57 wide i.e. of the mark
4.1.60 stale whore
4.1.69 move put
4.1.70 kindly natural (kin)
HERO O God defend me how am I beset,
What kind of catechizing call you this?
75 CLAUDIO To make you answer truly to your name.
HERO Is it not Hero, who can blot that name
With any just reproach?
CLAUDIO Marry, that can Hero.
Hero itself can blot out Hero’s virtue.
What man was he talked with you yesternight,
80 Out at your window betwixt twelve and one?
Now if you are a maid, answer to this.
HERO I talked with no man at that hour, my lord.
PRINCE Why then are you no maiden. Leonato,
I am sorry you must hear. Upon mine honour,
85 Myself, my brother, and this grievèd Count
Did see her, hear her, at that hour last night
Talk with a ruffian at her chamber window,
Who hath indeed most like a liberal villain,
Confessed the vile encounters they have had
90 A thousand times in secret.
JOHN Fie, fie, they are
Not to be named my lord, not to be spoke of.
There is not chastity enough in language
Without offence to utter them. Thus, pretty lady,
I am sorry for thy much misgovernment.
95 CLAUDIO O Hero! What a Hero hadst thou been
If half thy outward graces had been placed
About thy thoughts and counsels of thy heart!
But fare thee well, most foul, most fair, farewell
Thou pure impiety, and impious purity.
100 For thee I’ll lock up all the gates of love,
And on my eyelids shall conjecture hang
To turn all beauty into thoughts of harm
And never shall it more be gracious.
LEONATO Hath no man’s dagger here a point for me?

[Hero falls to the ground]

105 BEATRICE Why how now cousin, wherefore sink you down?
JOHN Come let us go: these things come thus to light,
Smother her spirits up.
BENEDICK How doth the lady?
BEATRICE Dead, I think. Help, uncle.

BEATRICE Hero, why Hero! Uncle, Signor Benedick, Frier—
110 LEONATO O fate! Take not away thy heavy hand.
Death is the fairest cover for her shame
That may be wished for.
BEATRICE How now, cousin Hero?
FRIAR Have comfort lady.

4.1.73 beset besieged; surrounded
4.1.74 catechizing questioning or examination (the Anglican catechism was a series of questions about faith, the first being ‘what is your name?’)
4.1.75 answer . . . name compare note to 1.1.0.1
4.1.87 Talk . . . window Beatrice may react strongly to this accusation as she mentions it again later in the scene.
4.1.88 liberal licentious; unrestrained (in speech or behaviour)
4.1.92 Without . . . them i.e. to relate them without causing offence
4.1.93 misgovernment misconduct
4.1.94 outward graces physical beauty; apparent virtues
4.1.95 counsels urgings; secrets
4.1.100 For because of
4.1.101 conjecture suspicion
4.1.105 wherefore why
4.1.107 spirits vital powers
Leonato

Dost thou look up?

Friar

Yea, wherefore should she not?

Leonato

Wherefore? Why, doth not every earthly thing

Cry shame upon her? Could she here deny

The story that is printed in her blood?

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. Grieved I had but one?

Chid I for that at frugal nature’s frame?

O, one too much by thee! Why had I one?

Why ever wast thou lovely in my eyes?

Why had I not with charitable hand,

TOKup a beggar’s issue at my gates,

Who smirched thus and mired with infamy,

I might have said ‘No part of it is mine,

This shame derives itself from unknown loins.’

But mine, and mine I loved, and mine I praised,

And mine that I was proud on mine so much,

That I myself, was to myself not mine,

Valuing of her—why she, O she is fallen

Into a pit of Ink, that the wide sea

Hath drops too few to wash her clean again,

And salt too little, which may season give

To her foul tainted flesh.

Benedick

Sir, sir, be patient.

For my part, I am so attired in wonder

I know not what to say.

Beatrice

O, on my soul my cousin is belied.

Benedick

Lady, were you her bedfellow last night?

Beatrice

No, truly not, although until last night

I have this twelvemonth been her bedfellow.

Leonato

Confirmed, confirmed. O, that is stronger made

Which was before barred up with ribs of iron.

Would the two princes lie? And Claudio lie,

Who loved her so, that speaking of her foulness,

Washed it with tears? Hence from her, let her die.

Friar

Hear me a little,

For I have only [silent been] so long,

and given way unto this course of fortune,

[ . . . ]

4.1.116 Leonato

Eighteenth-century performances often cut this speech to make Leonato a more ideal father figure.
By noting of the lady. I have marked
A thousand blushing apparitions
To start into her face, a thousand innocent shames
In angel whiteness beat away those bluses,
And in her eye there hath appeared a fire
To burn the errors that these princes hold
Against her maiden truth. Call me a fool,
Trust not my reading, nor my observations,
Which with experimental seal doth warrant
The tenor of my book. Trust not my age,
My reverence, calling, nor divinity.
If this sweet lady lie not guiltless here,
Under some biting error.

**Leonato**

Friar, it cannot be.
Thou seest that all the grace that she hath left,
Is that she will not add to her damnation
A sin of perjury. She does not deny it:
Why seek'st thou then to cover with excuse
That which appears in proper nakedness?

**Friar**

Lady, what man is he you are accused of?

**Hero**

They know that do accuse me, I know none.

If I know more of any man alive
Then which maiden modesty doth warrant,
Let all my sins lack mercy. O my father,
Prove you that any man with me conversed
At hours unmeet, or that I yesternight
Maintained the change of words with any creature,
Refuse me, hate me, torture me to death.

**Friar**

There is some strange misprision in the princes.

**Benedick**

Two of them have the very bent of honour,
And if their wisdoms be misled in this,
The practice of it lives in John the bastard,
Whose spirits toil in frame of villanies.

**Leonato**

I know not. If they speak but truth of her,
These hands shall tear her. If they wrong her honour
The proudest of them shall well hear of it.

Time hath not yet so dried this blood of mine,
Nor age so eat up my invention,
Nor fortune made such havoc of my means,
Nor my bad life rebuff so much of friends,

4.1.172 proper true
4.1.176 warrant allow
4.1.179 unmeet improper
4.1.180 change exchange
4.1.181 Refuse disown
4.1.182 misprision misconception (error)
4.1.183 very bent true disposition
4.1.185 practice trickery
4.1.186 frame framing (plotting)
4.1.190 dried a sign of old age; compare 2.1.88
4.1.191 eat eaten
4.1.192 invention mental faculties; cunning or inventiveness
4.1.192 means resources (money)
4.1.193 reft bereft

Leonato may seem so agitated in this speech in such a way that the friar feels compelled to calm him.
But they shall find awaked in such a kind
Both strength of limb and policy of mind,
Ability in means, and choice of friends,
To quit me of them throughly.

FRIAR   Pause awhile,
And let my counsel sway you in this case,
Your daughter here the princes left for dead,
Let her awhile be secretly kept in,
And publish it, that she is dead indeed.
Maintain a mourning ostentation,
And on your family's old monument,
Hang mournful epitaphs, and do all rites
That appertain unto a burial.

LEONATO  What shall become of this? What will this do?
FRIAR   Marry, this, well carried, shall on her behalf
Change slander to remorse. That is some good.
But not for that dream I on this strange course,
But on this travail look for greater birth.
She—dying, as it must be so maintained,
Upon the instant that she was accused—
Shall be lamented, pitied, and excused
Of every hearer. For it so falls out
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
Whiles it was ours. So will it fare with Claudio.
When he shall hear she died upon his words,
Th'idea of her life shall sweetly creep
Into his study of imagination,
And every lovely organ of her life,
Shall come apparelled in more precious habit,
More moving-delicate, and full of life,
Into the eye and prospect of his soul
Then when she lived indeed. Then shall he mourn,
If ever love had interest in his liver,
And wish he had not so accusèd her,
No, though he thought his accusation true.
Let this be so, and doubt not but success
Will fashion the event in better shape
Than I can lay it down in likelihood.
But if all aim but this be levelled false,

235 The supposition of the lady's death
Will quench the wonder of her infamy.
And if it sort not well, you may conceal her,
As best befits her wounded reputation,
In some reclusive and religious life,

240 Out of all eyes, tongues, minds, and injuries.

**Benedick** Signor Leonato, let the Friar advise you.
And though you know my inwardness and love
Is very much unto the Prince and Claudio,
Yet, by mine honour, I will deal in this

245 As secretly and justly as your soul
Should with your body.

**Leonato** Being that I flow in grief,
The smallest twine may lead me.

**Friar** 'Tis well consented. Presently away,

250 For to strange sores, strangely they strain the cure.

[to Hero] Come lady, die to live. This wedding day
Perhaps is but prolong'd. Have patience and endure.

Exit [all but Benedick and Beatrice]

**Benedick** Lady Beatrice, have you wept all this while?

255 **Beatrice** Yea, and I will weep a while longer.

**Benedick** I will not desire that.

**Beatrice** You have no reason, I do it freely.

**Benedick** Surely I do believe your fair cousin is wronged.

**Beatrice** Ah, how much might the man deserve of me that would
right her!

260 **Benedick** Is there any way to show such friendship?

**Beatrice** A very even way, but no such friend.

**Benedick** May a man do it?

**Beatrice** It is a man's office, but not yours.

**Benedick** I do love nothing in the world so well as you, is not that strange?

265 **Beatrice** As strange as the thing I know not. It were as possible for me
to say, I loved nothing so well as you, but believe me not, and yet I lie not.
I confess nothing, nor I deny nothing. I am sorry for my cousin.

**Benedick** By my sword, Beatrice, thou loveth me.

**Beatrice** Do not swear and eat it.

270 **Benedick** I will swear by it that you love me, and I will make him eat it
that says I love not you.

**Beatrice** Will you not eat your word?

**Benedick** With no sauce that can be devised to it. I protest I love thee.

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4.1.233 lay it down  work it out (predict it)
4.1.234 if...false  i.e. if all intentions but this one miscarry
4.1.235 levelled false  wrongly targeted
4.1.236 wonder of  amazement at; speculation about
4.1.237 sort  turn out
4.1.238 inwardness  intimacy (close friendship)
4.1.240 Presently  at once
4.1.242 cure  reworking of the proverb 'a desperate disease must have a desperate remedy'
4.1.245 strain  unusual (extreme or abnormal)
4.1.250 to...cure  reworking of the proverb 'a desperate disease must have a desperate remedy'
4.1.252 prolong'd  postponed
4.1.253 even  direct
4.1.254 friend  friend; lover
4.1.255 office  job (duty)
4.1.256 strange  she changes his sense of 'odd' to 'unfamiliar'
4.1.257 the thing  picking up on his 'nothing'; could mean 'anything' or something specific (perhaps love or his love?); compare Title
4.1.258 eat  eat the sword, i.e. eat the oath (eat your words)
4.1.259 to  for
4.1.260 protest  vow (protestation)
BEATRICE Why then, God forgive me.

BENEDICK What offence, sweet Beatrice?

BEATRICE You have stayed me in a happy hour. I was about to protest I loved you.

BENEDICK And do it with all thy heart.

BEATRICE I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest.

BENEDICK Come, bid me do any thing for thee.

BEATRICE Kill Claudio.

BENEDICK Ha! Not for the wide world.

BEATRICE You kill me to deny it. Farewell.

BENEDICK Tarry, sweet Beatrice.

BEATRICE I am gone, though I am here. There is no love in you.—Nay I pray you, let me go.

BENEDICK Beatrice.

BEATRICE In faith, I will go.

BENEDICK We'll be friends first.

BEATRICE You dare easier be friends with me than fight with mine enemy.

BENEDICK Is Claudio thine enemy?

BEATRICE Is 'a not approved in the height a villain, that hath slandered, scorned, dishonoured my kinswoman? O that I were a man! What, bear her in hand, until they come to take hands, and then with public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancour—O God that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the market place.

BENEDICK Hear me, Beatrice.

BEATRICE Talk with a man out at a window—a proper saying!

BENEDICK Nay, but Beatrice.

BEATRICE Sweet Hero, she is wronged, she is slandered, she is undone.

BENEDICK Beat—

BEATRICE Princes and counties! Surely a princely testimony, a goodly count, Count Comfit, a sweet gallant, surely. O that I were a man for his sake! Or that I had any friend would be a man for my sake! But manhood is melted into courtesies, valour into compliment, and men are only turned into tongue, and trim ones too. He is now as valiant as Hercules, that only tells a lie, and swears it. I cannot be a man with wishing, therefore I will die a woman with grieving.

BENEDICK Tarry, good Beatrice. By this hand, I love thee.

BEATRICE Use it for my love some other way than swearing by it.

BENEDICK Think you in your soul the Count Claudio hath wronged Hero?

BEATRICE Yea, as sure as I have a thought, or a soul.

4.1.276 stayed me forestalled me, i.e. prevented me speaking by speaking first
4.1.276 happy hour opportune moment
4.1.285 Tarry wait or stay
4.1.294 approved proved
4.1.295–6 bear … hand lead her on (delude her)
4.1.297 uncovered barefaced
4.1.300 proper saying likely story
4.1.302 undone ruined
4.1.304 counties counts
4.1.304 princely i.e. rich or fine, though refers to Don Pedro's part in all this
4.1.304 testimony assurance (backing up a story); legal witness
4.1.304 goodly fine ('goodly count' in one sense means 'a fine/likely story', as at 4.1.300)
4.1.305 count nobleman; story (account); legal charge in an indictment
4.1.305 Comfit sweetmeat (candy); compare Richard III 3.1.13–14
4.1.307 courtesies showy manners or politeness (linked to 'curtsy')
4.1.307 compliment etiquette; flattery
4.1.308 tongue i.e. talkers (not doers)
4.1.308 trim smooth (glib)
4.1.309 with by
Enough, I am engaged, I will challenge him. I will kiss your hand, and so I leave you. By this hand, Claudio shall render me a dear account. As you hear of me, so think of me. Go comfort your cousin. I must say she is dead. And so farewell.

Enter [the Watch, Dogberry and Verges] the Constables, Borachio, [Conrad] and the [Sexton, the] Town clerk in gowns

Dogberry Is our whole dissembly appeared?
Verges O, a stool and a cushion for the Sexton.
[Sexton sits]
Sexton Which be the malefactors?
Dogberry Marry, that am I, and my partner.
Verges Nay, that’s certain, we have the exhibition to examine.
Sexton But which are the offenders that are to be examined? Let them come before Master Constable.
Dogberry Yea, marry, let them come before me. What is your name, friend?
Borachio Borachio.
Dogberry Pray write down ‘Borachio’. [To Conrad] Yours, sirrah?
Conrad I am a gentleman, sir, and my name is Conrad.
Dogberry Write down ‘Master Gentleman Conrad’. [To Conrad and Borachio] Masters, do you serve God?

CONRAD, BORACHIO Yea, sir, we hope.

Write down, that they hope they serve God. And write ‘God’ first, for God defend but God should go before such villains.

Masters, it is proved already that you are little better than false knaves, and it will go near to be thought so shortly. How answer you for yourselves?

Conrad Marry, sir, we say we are none.

Dogberry A marvellous witty fellow, I assure you, but I will go about with him. Come you hither, sirrah. A word in your ear, sir. I say to you it is thought you are false knaves.

Borachio Sir, I say to you we are none.

Dogberry Well, stand aside. Fore God they are both in a tale. Have you writ down that they are none?

Sexton Master Constable, you go not the way to examine. You must call forth the Watch that are their accusers.

Dogberry Yea, marry, that’s the eftest way. Let the Watch come forth. Masters, I charge you in the Prince’s name accuse these men.
watch 1 This man said, sir, that Don John the Prince’s brother, was a villain.

dogberry Write down Prince John a villain. Why this is flat perjury, to call a prince’s brother villain.

borachio Master Constable.

dogberry Pray thee, fellow, peace, I do not like thy look, I promise thee.

sexton What heard you him say else?

watch 2 Marry, that he had received a thousand ducats of Don John for accusing the Lady Hero wrongfully.

dogberry Flat burglary as ever was committed.

verges Yea, by th’mass that it is.

sexton What else, fellow?

watch 1 And that Count Claudio did mean upon his words to disgrace Hero before the whole assembly, and not marry her.

dogberry O villain! Thou wilt be condemnd into everlasting redemption for this.

sexton What else?

watch This is all.

sexton And this is more, masters, then you can deny. Prince John is this morning secretly stolen away. Hero was in this manner accused, in this very manner refused, and upon the grief of this suddenly died. Master Constable, let these men be bound and brought to Leonato’s. I will go before and show him their examination.

constable Come, let them be opinioned.

verges Let them be in the hands—

[conrad] Off, coxcomb!

dogberry God’s my life, where’s the Sexton? Let him write down the Prince’s officer coxcomb. Come, bind them. Thou naughty varlet.

conrad Away, you are an ass, you are an ass.

dogberry Dost thou not suspect my place? Dost thou not suspect my years? O that he were here to write me down an ass! But, masters, remember that I am an ass, though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass. No thou villain, thou art full of piety as shall be proved upon thee by good witness. I am a wise fellow, and which is more, an officer, and which is more, a householder, and which is more, as pretty a piece of flesh as any is in Messina, and one that knows the law, go to, and a rich fellow enough, go to, and a fellow that hath had losses, and one that hath two gowns, and everything handsome about him. Bring him away. O that I had been writ down an ass! Exit

4.2.31 flat downright
4.2.39 burglary perhaps the proper sense, accusing them of stealing Don John’s money rather than him giving it, though perhaps also a malapropism for ‘villainy’ or ‘perjury’
4.2.42 upon as a result of
4.2.45 redemption malapropism for ‘damnation’ or perhaps ‘perdition’
4.2.50 refused rejected; disowned
4.2.53 opinioned he means ‘pinioned’ (tied or chained up)
4.2.54 Let...hands i.e. let their hands be bound
4.2.55 coxcomb fool
4.2.57 naughty wicked
4.2.59 suspect malapropism for ‘respect’
4.2.59 place position (authority)
4.2.60 years age
4.2.62 piety he means ‘impiety’
4.2.64 householder owner of property
4.2.66 go to intensifying expression with several meanings, often ‘away with you’ or the like (it can also be a literal command to move), here with an added sense of something like ‘you’d better believe it’
4.2.66 had losses has lost money, and yet can still afford two gowns (cloaks)
4.2.67 handsome fine
Enter Leonato and his brother

Brother If you go on thus, you will kill yourself, And 'tis not wisdom thus to second grief Against your self.

Leonato I pray thee cease thy counsel, Which falls into mine ears as profitless, As water in a sieve. Give not me counsel, Nor let no comforter delight mine ear But such a one whose wrongs do suit with mine. Bring me a father that so loved his child, Whose joy of her is overwhelmed like mine, And bid him speak of patience, Measure his woe the length and breadth of mine, And let it answer every strain for strain, As thus for thus, and such a grief for such, In every lineament, branch, shape, and form.

If such a one will smile and stroke his beard, And sorrow, wag, cry 'hem' when he should groan, Patch grief with proverbs, make misfortune drunk With candle-wasters, bring him yet to me, And I of him will gather patience.

But there is no such man, for brother, men Can counsel, and speak comfort to that grief, Which they themselves not feel, but tasting it Their counsel turns to passion, which before Would give preceptial medicine to rage, Fetter strong madness in a silken thread, Charm ache with air and agony with words. No, no, 'tis all men's office, to speak patience To those that wring under the load of sorrow, But no man's virtue nor sufficiency To be so moral, when he shall endure The like himself. Therefore give me no counsel. My griefs cry louder then advertisement.

Brother Therein do men from children nothing differ.

Leonato I pray thee peace, I will be flesh and blood,

For there was never yet philosopher That could endure the toothache patiently, However they have writ the style of gods, And made a pish at chance and sufferance.

Of from
Preceptial made of precepts (wise sayings)
Bound (chain up)
Breath (words; compare 5.2.35–6); insubstantial nothings
Duty, i.e. all men take it upon themselves
Writhe (as if in pain)
Ability
Like same
Advertisement good advice
Writ the style signed with (claimed) the titles; written (expressed themselves) in the manner of
Dismissive scoff
Suffering; endurance of pain (assuming it is easy); fate
BROTHER Yet bend not all the harm upon yourself.  
Make those that do offend you suffer too.

LEONATO There thou speakest reason, nay I will do so.  
My soul doth tell me Hero is belied,  
And that shall Claudio know, so shall the Prince,  
And all of them that thus dishonour her.

Enter Prince and Claudio

BROTHER Here comes the Prince and Claudio hastily.  
PRINCE Good e’en, good e’en.

CLAUDIO Good day to both of you.

LEONATO Hear you, my Lords?  
PRINCE We have some haste, Leonato.

LEONATO Some haste, my lord! Well, fare you well, my lord.  
Are you so hasty now? Well, all is one.

PRINCE Nay, do not quarrel with us, good old man.  
BROTHER If he could right himself with quarrelling,  
Some of us would lie low.

CLAUDIO Who wrongs him?

LEONATO Marry, thou dost wrong me, thou dissembler, thou.  
Nay, never lay thy hand upon thy sword,

I fear thee not.

CLAUDIO Marry, beshrew my hand  
If it should give your age such cause of fear.  
In faith my hand meant nothing to my sword.

LEONATO Tush, tush, man, never fleer and jest at me.  
I speak not like a dotard, nor a fool,

As under privilege of age to brag  
What I have done being young, or what would do,  
Were I not old. Know Claudio to thy head,  
Thou hast so wronged mine innocent child and me,  
That I am forced to lay my reverence by,

And with grey hairs and bruise of many days  
Do challenge thee to trial of a man.  
I say thou hast belied mine innocent child.  
Thy slander hath gone through and through her heart,  
And she lies buried with her ancestors.

O, in a tomb where never scandal slept  
Save this of hers, framed by thy villainy.

CLAUDIO My villainy?

LEONATO Thine, Claudio, thine I say.

PRINCE You say not right old man.

LEONATO My Lord, my Lord,  
I’ll prove it on his body if he dare,
Despite his nice fence, and his active practice,
His May of youth and bloom of lustihood.

CLAUDIO Away, I will not have to do with you.
LEONATO Canst thou so doff me? Thou hast killed my child.
If thou kill’st me, boy, thou shalt kill a man.

BROTHER He shall kill two of us, and men indeed,
But that’s no matter, let him kill one first.
Win me and wear me. Let him answer me.
Come follow me, boy, come, sir boy, come follow me,
Sir boy, I’ll whip you from your foining fence.

Nay, as I am a gentleman I, will.

LEONATO Brother

BROTHER Content yourself. God knows, I loved my niece,
And she is dead, slandered to death by villains
That dare as well answer a man indeed
As I dare take a serpent by the tongue.
Boyes, apes, braggarts, jacks, milksops!

LEONATO Brother Anthony—

BROTHER Hold you content. What man, I know them, yea,
And what they weigh, even to the utmost scruple.

Scambling, outfacing, fashion-monging boys
That lie, and cog, and flout, deprave, and slander,
Go anticly, and show an outward hideousness,
And speak of half a dozen dangerous words,
How they might hurt their enemies, if they durst,

And this is all.

LEONATO But, brother Anthony—

BROTHER Come, ’tis no matter,
Do not you meddle, let me deal in this.

PRINCE Gentlemen both, we will not wake your patience.
My heart is sorry for your daughter’s death,

But on my honour she was charged with nothing
But what was true, and very full of proof.

LEONATO My Lord, my Lord—

PRINCE I will not hear you.

LEONATO No? Come, brother, away. I will be heard.
BROTHER And shall, or some of us will smart for it.

[Exeunt Leonato and Antonio [his brother]

Enter Benedick

PRINCE See, see, here comes the man we went to seek.

CLAUDIO Now, Signor, what news?
BENEDICK [to Prince] Good day, my lord.

5.1.75 nice artful (adept)
5.1.75 fence fencing skill
5.1.76 lustihood youthful vigour
5.1.78 doff put off (brush aside)
5.1.78 Win . . . me i.e. if you beat me then you can brag about it
(‘wear’ like a trophy or sign of victory)
5.1.82 answer give his answer to the challenge; fight (face up to)
5.1.84 foining thrusting
5.1.89 man indeed i.e. a real man
5.1.91 apes imitators (of men); fools
5.1.91 jacks rogues
5.1.91 milksops cowards
5.1.94 scruple tiny amount
5.1.95 Scambling uncouth
5.1.95 outfacing confrontational; bullying
5.1.95 fashion-monging i.e. fashion victims (vain and shallow)
5.1.96 cog cheat
5.1.96 flout insult
5.1.96 deprave defame
5.1.97 Go dress; go about
5.1.97 anticly grotesquely (like jesters or fools)
5.1.97 show . . . hideousness i.e. try to look intimidating
5.1.98 dangerous threatening
5.1.99 dust dared (i.e. if their enemies dared face them)
5.1.101 wake disturb
PRINCE Welcome, Signor. You are almost come to part almost a fray.
CLAUDIO We had liked to have had our two noses snapped off with two
old men without teeth.
PRINCE Leonato and his brother. What thinkest thou? Had we fought, I
doubt we should have been too young for them.
BENEDICK In a false quarell there is no true valoure. I came to seek you
both.
CLAUDIO We have been up and down to seek thee, for we are high
proof melancholy, and would fain have it beaten away. Wilt thou use
thy wit?
BENEDICK It is in my scabbard, shall I draw it?
PRINCE Dost thou wear thy wit by thy side?
CLAUDIO Never any did so, though very many have been beside their
wit. I will bid thee draw, as we do the minstrels, draw to pleasure us.
PRINCE As I am an honest man he looks pale. Art thou sick, or angry?
CLAUDIO What, courage, man. What though care killed a cat, thou hast
mettle enough in thee to kill care.
BENEDICK Sir, I shall meet your wit in the career and you charge it
against me. I pray you choose another subject.
CLAUDIO Nay then, give him another staff. This last was broke cross.
PRINCE By this light, he changes more and more. I think he be angry
indeed.
CLAUDIO If he be, he knows how to turn his girdle.
BENEDICK [aside to Claudio] Shall I speak a word in your ear?
CLAUDIO God bless me from a challenge.
BENEDICK You are a villain. I jest not. I will make it good how you dare,
with what you dare, and when you dare. Do me right, or I will protest
your cowardice. You have killed a sweet lady, and her death shall fall
heavy on you. Let me hear from you.
CLAUDIO Well, I will meet you, so I may have good cheer.
PRINCE What, a feast, a feast?
CLAUDIO I'faith, I thank him he hath bid me to a calf's head and a
capon, the which if I do not carve most curiously, say my knife's naught.
Shall not find a woodcock too?

5.1.138 BENEDICK
Benedick's posture is often stiff, formal, or even aloof in
this scene.

5.1.138 BENEDICK
Benedick's posture is often stiff, formal, or even aloof in
this scene.
Benedick. Sir, your wit ambles well, it goes easily.

Prince. I'll tell thee how Beatrice praised thy wit the other day. I said thou hadst a fine wit. 'True,' said she, 'a fine little one.' 'No,' said I, 'a great wit.' 'Right,' says she, 'a great gross one.' 'Nay,' said I, 'a good wit.' 'Just,' said she, 'it hurts nobody.' 'Nay,' said I, 'the gentleman is wise.' 'Certain,' said she, 'a wise gentleman.' 'Nay,' said I, 'he hath the tongues.' 'That I believe,' said she, 'for he swore a thing to me on Monday night which he forswore on Tuesday morning. There's a double tongue, there's two tongues.' Thus did she an hour together trans-shape thy particular virtues, yet at last she concluded with a sigh, thou wast the properest man in Italy.

Claudio. For the which she wept heartily and said she cared not.

Prince. Yea, that she did. But yet for all that, in if she did not hate him deadly, she would love him dearly. The old man's daughter told us all.

Claudio. All, all. And, moreover, God saw him when he was hid in the garden.

Prince. But when shall we set the savage bull's horns on the sensible Benedick's head?

Claudio. Yea, and text underneath, 'Here dwells Benedick the married man.'

Benedick. Fare you well, boy. You know my mind. I will leave you now to your gossip-like humour. You break jests as braggarts do their blades, which God be thanked, hurt not. [To Prince] My lord, for your many courtesies I thank you. I must discontinue your company. Your brother the bastard is fled from Messina. You have among you killed a sweet and innocent lady. For my Lord Lackbeard there, he and I shall meet, and till then peace be with him. [Exit]

Prince. He is in earnest.

Claudio. In most profound earnest, and, I'll warrant you, for the love of Beatrice.

Prince. And hath challenged thee.

Claudio. Most sincerely.

Prince. What a pretty thing man is, when he goes in his doublet and hose, and leaves off his wit!

Claudio. He is then a giant to an ape, but then is an ape a doctor to such a man.

Prince. But soft, you, let me be. Pluck up, my heart, and be sad. Did he not say my brother was fled?

Claudio. Compare note to 2.1.23.

Prince. [Exit]

Claudio. He is in earnest.

Claudio. In most profound earnest, and, I'll warrant you, for the love of Beatrice.

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ambles goes at a slow pace (of a horse moving)
goes easily doesn't exert itself; is easily gone and forgotten
wit plays on the secondary sense of 'penis'
fine excellent; small
gross big; bad (poor); vile
wise gentleman perhaps ironic, with connotations of being an old fool
hath . . . tongues i.e. he speaks other languages
double deceitful
trans-shape transmute (alter the shape of)
propest best; most handsome
an if
old . . . daughter i.e. Hero
garden allusion to Adam's vain attempt, after his transgression, to hide from God (Genesis 3:8), hinting at Benedick's overhearing in 2.3
But . . . man' compare 1.1.101–6

gossip gossip old woman

glass mood
glass jests crack jokes, though again with the idea of a weapon breaking ineffectually (compare 2.1.110)

braggarts . . . blades i.e. breaking their own blades to make it look as though they've been in a fight

Lackbeard compare note to 2.1.23

meet i.e. to fight

in earnest serious

pretty fine; naive

goes around (dresses)

eaves off does not wear (i.e. doesn't use)

giant i.e. hero or colossus
to in the eyes of

doctor learned man

soft, you slow down or be quiet a moment

Pluck up rouse up (pull yourself together)

sad serious
[Enter Constables [Dogberry and Verges, the Watch], Conrad, and Borachio]

Dogberry  Come you, sir, if justice cannot tame you, she shall ne’er weigh more reasons in her balance. Nay, an you be a cursing hypocrite once, you must be looked to.

Prince  How now, two of my brother’s men bound? Borachio one.

Claudio  Hearken after their offence, my lord.

Prince  Officers, what offence have these men done?

Dogberry  Marry, sir, they have committed false report, moreover they have spoken untruths, secondarily they are slanders, sixth and lastly, they have belied a lady, thirdly they have verified unjust things, and to conclude, they are lying knaves.

Prince  First I ask thee what they have done, thirdly I ask thee what’s their offence, sixth and lastly why they are committed, and to conclude, what you lay to their charge.

Claudio  Rightly reasoned, and in his own division, and by my troth there’s one meaning well-suited.

Prince [to Conrad and Borachio]  Who have you offended, masters, that you are thus bound to your answer? This learned Constable is too cunning to be understood. What’s your offence?

Borachio  Sweet Prince, let me go no farther to mine answer. Do you hear me, and let this Count kill me. I have deceived even your very eyes. What your wisdoms could not discover, these shallow fools have brought to light, who in the night overheard me confessing to this man how Don John your brother incensed me to slander the Lady Hero, how you were brought into the orchard and saw me court Margaret in Hero’s garments, how you disgraced her when you should marry her. My villany they have upon record, which I had rather seal with my death, than repeat over to my shame. The lady is dead upon mine and my master’s false accusation, and briefly, I desire nothing but the reward of a villain.

Prince [to Claudio]  Runs not this speech like iron through your blood?

Claudio  I have drunk poison whiles he uttered it.

Prince [to Borachio]  But did my brother set thee on to this?

Borachio  Yea, and paid me richly for the practice of it.

Prince  He is composed and framed of treachery And fled he is upon this villany.

Claudio  Sweet Hero, now thy image doth appear In the rare semblance that I loved it first.

5.1.185 Come you The Prince and Claudio may be especially irreverent or dismissive of Dogberry at first.

5.1.203 Borachio Borachio is often portrayed as genuinely remorseful and in some performances he delivers this speech while kneeling and begging.
Come, bring away the plaintiffs. By this time our Sexton hath reformed Signor Leonato of the matter. And, masters, do not forget to specify when time and place shall serve, that I am an ass.

Enter Leonato, [Antonio] his brother, and the Sexton

LEONATO Which is the villain? Let me see his eyes,
That when I note another man like him,
I may avoid him. Which of these is he?

BORACHIO If you would know your wronger, look on me.

LEONATO Art thou the slave that with thy breath hast killed
Mine innocent child?

BORACHIO Yea, even I alone.

LEONATO No, not so, villain, thou beliest thyself.
Here stand a pair of honourable men,
A third is fled that had a hand in it.

I thank you, Princes, for my daughter's death.
Record it with your high and worthy deeds.
'Twas bravely done, if you bethink you of it.

CLAUDIO I know not how to pray your patience,
Yet I must speak. Choose your revenge yourself,
Impose me to what penance your invention
Can lay upon my sin. Yet sinned I not
But in mistaking.

PRINCE By my soul, nor I,
And yet to satisfy this good old man,
I would bend under any heavy weight
That he'll enjoin me to.

LEONATO I cannot bid you bid my daughter live—
That were impossible—but I pray you both,
Possess the people in Messina here
How innocent she died, and if your love
Can labour aught in sad invention,
Hang her an epitaph upon her tomb
And sing it to her bones, sing it tonight.
Tomorrow morning come you to my house,
And since you could not be my son-in-law,
Be yet my nephew: my brother hath a daughter,
Almost the copy of my child that's dead,
And she alone is heir to both of us.
Give her the right you should have giv'n her cousin,
And so dies my revenge.

CLAUDIO O noble sir!

Your overkindness doth wring tears from me.
I do embrace your offer and dispose,
For henceforth of poor Claudio.

LEONATO Tomorrow then I will expect your coming.
Tonight I take my leave. This naughty man

5.1.225 much do about nothing act 5 scene 1

5.1.222 plaintiffs malapropism for 'defendants'
5.1.223 reformed he means 'informed'
5.1.230 breath i.e. words
5.1.237 bravely courageously; worthily (excellently)
5.1.240 impose subject
5.1.240 invention imagination
5.1.248 possess inform
5.1.250 aught at all
5.1.250 sad serious; sorrowful
5.1.250 invention inventiveness (creativity)
5.1.258 right i.e. proper treatment, punning on 'rite' (of marriage)
5.1.261 dispose you may dispose; I dispose, i.e. I put myself last
5.1.264 naughty wicked
Shall face to face be brought to Margaret,
Who I believe was packed in all this wrong,
Hired to it by your brother.

Borachio  No, by my soul, she was not,
Nor knew not what she did when she spoke to me,
But always hath been just and virtuous,

In anything that I do know by her.

Dogberry [to Leonato]  Moreover, sir, which indeed is not under white
and black, this plaintiff here, the offender, did call me ass. I beseech
you let it be remembered in his punishment. And also the Watch heard
them talk of one Deformed. They say he wears a key in his ear and a
lock hanging by it, and borrows money in God’s name, the which he hath
used so long, and never paid that now men grow hard-hearted and will
lend nothing for God’s sake. Pray you examine him upon that point.

Leonato  I thank thee for thy care and honest pains.

Dogberry  Your worship speaks like a most thankful and reverend
youth, and I praise God for you.

Leonato [giving him money]  There’s for thy pains.

Dogberry  God save the foundation.

Leonato  Go. I discharge thee of thy prisoner, and I thank thee.

Dogberry  I leave an arrant knave with your worship, which I beseech
your worship to correct yourself, for the example of others. God keep
your worship, I wish your worship well. God restore you to health. I
humly give you leave to depart, and if a merry meeting may be wished,

Leonato  Until tomorrow morning, lords, farewell.

Brother  Farewell, my lords. We look for you tomorrow.

Prince  We will not fail.

Claudio  Tonight I’ll mourn with Hero.

Leonato [to the Watch]  Bring you these fellows on,—we’ll talk with
Margaret,

How her acquaintance grew with this lewd fellow.  Exeunt

5.2

Sc. 15  Enter Benedick and Margaret

Benedick  Pray thee, sweet Mistress Margaret, deserve well at my
hands by helping me to the speech of Beatrice.

Margaret  Will you then write me a sonnet in praise of my beauty?

Benedick  In so high a style, Margaret, that no man living shall come

over it, for in most comely truth, thou deservest it.
Margaret To have no man come over me—why, shall I always keep below stairs.

Benedick Thy wit is as quick as the greyhound’s mouth, it catches.

Margaret And yours as blunt as the fencer’s foils, which hit but hurt not.

Benedick A most manly wit, Margaret, it will not hurt a woman. And so, I pray thee, call Beatrice. I give thee the bucklers.

Margaret Give us the swords, we have bucklers of our own.

Benedick If you use them, Margaret, you must put in the pikes with a vice—and they are dangerous weapons for maids.

Margaret Well, I will call Beatrice to you, who I think hath legs.

Exit Margaret

Benedick And therefore will come.

The god of love
That sits above,
And knows me, and knows me,
How pitiful I deserve—
I mean in singing; but in loving, Leander the good swimmer, Troilus the first employer of panders, and a whole book full of these quondam carpet-mongers whose names yet run smoothly in the even road of a blank verse, why they were never so truly turned over and over as my poor self in love. Marry, I cannot show it in rhyme. I have tried, I can find out no rhyme to ‘lady’ but ‘baby’, an innocent rhyme; for ‘scorn’, ‘horn’, a hard rhyme; for ‘school’, ‘fool’, a babbling rhyme. Very ominous endings. No, I was not born under a rhyming planet, nor I cannot woo in festival terms. Sweet Beatrice, wouldst thou come when I called thee?

Enter Beatrice

Beatrice Yea, Signor, and depart when you bid me.

Benedick O, stay but till then.

5.2.6 come over i.e. sexually mount (the sense of ‘come’ as ‘ejaculate’ was not current at this time)
5.2.7 below stairs stay unmarried in the servants’ lodgings
5.2.8 catches seizes quickly
5.2.9 foils blunted swords
5.2.12 give . . . bucklers surrender; bucklers were small, round shields used with swords for defence (compare 1 Henry IV 1.3.228); the screw-in spikes in their centres initiates a string of sexual wordplay
5.2.13 swords innuendo for ‘penises’
5.2.13 bucklers possibly hymens, vulvas, or thighs (seen as defending virginity); vaginas (a buckler having a central hole made to receive a screw-in spike)
5.2.14 pikes spikes
5.2.15 vice screw (possibly also punning on ‘sin’ and the idea of legs clamped around the body like a vice holding an object)
5.2.16 hath legs can move, and will come; possibly continuing to pun on either the sense of closing legs to defend against sexual advances, or the opposite
5.2.17 come come when called; yield
5.2.18–21 The . . . deserve lyrics to a popular Elizabethan song by William Elderton
5.2.21 How . . . deserve how much pity I deserve; how badly undeserving I am (this is the sense he applies to his singing)
5.2.22 Leander . . . swimmer ironic; see note to 1.1.0.1
5.2.22–3 Troilus . . . panders another lover of classical fame, whose tale of betrayal and heartbreak at the hands of his lover, Cressida, was enshrined in English in Chaucer’s epic poem; Cressida’s uncle, Pandarus, brought them together, acting in Chaucer as in Shakespeare as the archetypal go-between after whom all panders are named
5.2.23 panders go-betweens (pimps)
5.2.23 quondam former (erstwhile)
5.2.24 carpet-mongers ladies’ men or bedroom warriors (frequerntes of carpeted boudoirs); compare Richard III 1.1.9–13
5.2.27 innocent childish; foolish
5.2.28 horn cuckold’s horn; penis
5.2.28 hard poor; harsh or tough; erect
5.2.28 babbling i.e. nonsense, though suggests the baby talk or infant babble of the children of the ‘fool’ (the cuckolded old man) going to school, as well as the fool’s own babble
5.2.29 endings rhyme endings; consequences (of falling in love)
5.2.30 festival light-hearted (befitting a holiday)
Beatrice  ‘Then’ is spoken. Fare you well now. And yet ere I go, let me go with that I came, which is with knowing what hath passed between you and Claudio.

Benedick  Only foul words, and thereupon I will kiss thee.

Beatrice  Foul words is but foul wind, and foul wind is but foul breath, and foul breath is noisome, therefore I will depart unkissed.

Benedick  Thou hast frightened the word out of his right sense, so forcible is thy wit. But I must tell thee plainly, Claudio undergoes my challenge, and either I must shortly hear from him or I will subscribe him a coward. And I pray thee now tell me, for which of my bad parts didst thou first fall in love with me?

Beatrice  For them all together, which maintain so politic a state of evil that they will not admit any good part to intermingle with them. But for which of my good parts did you first suffer love for me?

Benedick  Suffer love! A good epithet. I do suffer love indeed, for I love thee against my will.

Beatrice  In spite of your heart, I think. Alas, poor heart, if you spite it for my sake, I will spite it for yours, for I will never love that which my friend hates.

Benedick  Thou and I are too wise to woo peaceably.

Beatrice  It appears not in this confession. There’s not one wise man among twenty that will praise himself.

Benedick  An old, an old instance, Beatrice, that lived in the time of good neighbours. If a man do not erect in this age his own tomb ere he dies, he shall live no longer in monument than the bell rings, and the widow weeps.

Beatrice  And how long is that, think you?

Benedick  Question—why an hour in clamour and a quarter in rheum. Therefore is it most expedient for the wise, if Don Worm (his conscience) find no impediment to the contrary, to be the trumpet of his own virtues, as I am to myself. So much for praising myself, who, I myself will bear witness, is praiseworthy. And now, tell me, how doth your cousin?

Beatrice  Very ill.

Benedick  And how do you?

Beatrice  Very ill too.

Benedick  Serve God, love me, and mend. There will I leave you too, for here comes one in haste.

Enter Ursula
Enter Claudio, [Don Pedro the] Prince, and three or four with tapers

CLAUDIO Is this the monument of Leonato?

LORD It is my Lord. Epitaph.

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.

CLAUDIO 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 right.

PRINCE Good morrow, masters, put your torches out.

The wolves have preyed, and look, the gentle day
   Before the wheels of Phoebus round about
   Dapples the drowsy east with spots of grey:
   Thanks to you all, and leave us, fare you well.

CLAUDIO Good morrow, masters, each his several way.

PRINCE Come, let us hence, and put on other weeds,
   And then to Leonato’s we will go.

CLAUDIO And Hymen now with luckier issue speed’s
   Then this for whom we rendered up this woe.

Exeunt.
Enter Leonato, Benedick, Margaret, Ursula, [Beatrice, Antonio, an] old man, Friar [Francis], Hero

Friar 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.

Brother Well, I am glad that all things sorts so well.

Benedick And so am I, being else by faith enforced
To call young Claudio to a reckoning for it.

Leonato Well, daughter, and you gentlewomen all,
Withdraw into a chamber by yourselves,
And when I send for you come hither masked.

[Exit Beatrice, Hero, Margaret, and Ursula]

The Prince and Claudio promised by this hour
To visit me. [To Antonio] You know your office, brother,
You must be father to your brother’s daughter,
And give her to young Claudio.

Brother Which I will do with confirmed countenance.

Benedick Friar, I must entreat your pains, I think.

Friar To do what, Signor?

Benedick To bind me, or undo me, one of them.

Signor Leonato, truth it is, good Signor,
Your niece regards me with an eye of favour.

Leonato That eye my daughter lent her, ’tis most true.

Benedick And I do with an eye of love requite her.

Leonato The sight whereof I think you had from me,
From Claudio and the Prince. But what’s your will?

Benedick Your answer, sir, is enigmatical.

But for my will, my will is your good will
May stand with ours this day to be conjoined
In the state of honourable marriage,
In which (good Friar) I shall desire your help.

Leonato My heart is with your liking.

Friar And my help.

Here comes the Prince and Claudio.

Enter Prince, and Claudio, and two or three other [attendants].

Prince Good morrow to this fair assembly.

Leonato Good morrow, Prince. Good morrow, Claudio,
We here attend you. Are you yet determined
Today to marry with my brother’s daughter?
Claudio  I’ll hold my mind were she an Ethiop.
Leonato  Call her forth, brother, here’s the Friar ready.  [Exit Antonio]

Prince  Good morrow, Benedick. Why, what’s the matter
that you have such a February face,
So full of frost, or storm, and cloudiness?
Claudio  I think he thinks upon the savage bull.
       Tush, fear not, man, we’ll tip thy horns with gold,
       And all Europa shall rejoice at thee,
       As once Europa did at lusty Jove
       When he would play the noble beast in love.
Benedick  Bull Jove, sir, had an amiable low,
       And some such strange bull leapt your father’s cow
       And got a calf in that same noble feat
       Much like to you, for you have just his bleat.

Enter [Antonio, Leonato’s] brother [with] Hero, Beatrice, Margaret,
       Ursula [masked]

Claudio  For this I owe you. Here comes other reck’nings.
       Which is the lady I must seize upon?
Leonato  This same is she, and I do give you her.
Claudio  Why then she’s mine. Sweet, let me see your face.
       Before this Friar and swear to marry her.
Claudio [to Hero]  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;
       And when you loved, you were my other husband.

Claudio  Another Hero!
       Nothing certainer.
       One Hero died defiled, but I do live,
       And surely as I live, I am a maid.

Prince  The former Hero, Hero that is dead!
Leonato  She died, my lord, but whiles her slander lived.
Friar  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.

Benedick  Soft and fair, Friar, which is Beatrice?

Beatrice  I answer to that name, what is your will?

5.4.38 Ethiop  Ethiopian, or more generically someone of
different race; compare 2.1.242
5.4.41 February  i.e. gloomy or wintry (frowning)
5.4.43 upon  about
5.4.43 savage bull  compare note to 1.1.191
5.4.44 tip  ... gold  i.e. like an idol; possibly means 'grace your
       marriage', once again equating wedlock with cuckoldry
5.4.45 Europa  Europe
5.4.45 rejoice at  worship
5.4.46–7  As  ... Jove  Jove took the form of a bull to carry the
       beautiful Phoenician princess, Europa, with whom he fell in love,
       to Crete
5.4.49 strange  other (stranger), also epithet for an illicit sexual
       partner; compare Cymbeline 1.4.80
5.4.49 leapt  mounted sexually (more bull/horn/cuckoldry image
       play)
BENEDICK  Do not you love me?
BEATRICE  Why no, no more than reason.

BENEDICK  Why then, your uncle, and the Prince, and Claudio,
          Have been deceived, they swore you did.
BEATRICE  Do not you love me?
BENEDICK  Troth no, no more than reason.
BEATRICE  Why then, my cousin, Margaret, and Ursula
          Are much deceived, for they did swear you did.

BENEDICK  They swore that you were almost sick for me.
BEATRICE  They swore that you were wellnigh dead for me.
BENEDICK  'Tis no such matter. Then you do not love me?
BEATRICE  Do not you love me?

BENEDICK  Why then, my cousin, Margaret, and Ursula
          Are much deceived, for they did swear you did.
BENEDICK  They swore that you were almost sick for me.
BEATRICE  They swore that you were wellnigh dead for me.
BENEDICK  'Tis no such matter. Then you do not love me?
BEATRICE  Do not you love me?

LEONATO  Come, cousin, I am sure you love the gentleman.

CLAUDIO  And I'll be sworn upon't, that he loves her,
          For here's a paper written in his hand,
          A halting sonnet of his own pure brain,
          Fashioned to Beatrice.

HERO     And here's another,
          Writ in my cousin's hand, stolen from her pocket,
          Containing her affection unto Benedick.

BENEDICK  A miracle! Here's our own hands against our hearts. Come,
          I will have thee, but by this light I take thee for pity.
BEATRICE  I would not deny you, but by this good day, I yield upon great
          persuasion, and partly to save your life, for I was told you were in a
          consumption.

LEONATO  Peace, I will stop your mouth!

CLAUDIO  How dost thou, Benedick the married man?

BENEDICK  I'll tell thee what, Prince: a college of wit-crackers cannot
          flout me out of my humour. Dost thou think I care for a satire or an
          epigram? No, if a man will be beaten with brains, 'a shall wear
          nothing handsome about him. In brief, since I do purpose to marry, I
          will think nothing to any purpose that the world can say against it, and
          therefore never flout at me, for what I have said against it. For man is a
          giddy thing, and this is my conclusion. For thy part, Claudio, I did think
          to have beaten thee, but in that thou art like to be my kinsman, live
          unbruised, and love my cousin.

CLAUDIO  I had well hoped thou wouldst have denied Beatrice, that I
          might have cudgelled thee out of thy single life to make thee a double
          dealer, which out of question thou wilt be, if my cousin do not look
          exceeding narrowly to thee.

5.4.83 recompense  repayment, i.e. mutuality
5.4.84 cousin  compare note to 1.2.1
5.4.87 halting  limping, i.e. metrically awkward
5.4.87 pure brain  i.e. invention (composition)
5.4.91 hands  handwriting
5.4.91 against  contrary to
5.4.94–5 in . . . consumption  wasting away
5.4.98 college  school; club; assembly
5.4.99 flout  mock
5.4.99 humour  mood
5.4.100 beaten  battered; defeated
5.4.100 with  with; by
5.4.100 brains  witty remarks; compare 2.3.186–90

5.4.100–1 a . . . him  he shall never wear fashionable clothes (which
          were a popular target for satire); beyond the metaphor, he means
          never achieve anything good
5.4.101 purpose  intend
5.4.102 purpose  effect
5.4.104 giddy  flighty; unsteady (inconstant)
5.4.104 this . . . conclusion  this is what I conclude; this is where I
          stop talking; this is where I’ve ended up (in marriage)
5.4.104 For . . . part  i.e. in all this (as for you)
5.4.105 in that  since
5.4.105 like  likely
5.4.105 kinsman  family member (through marriage)
5.4.108 cudgelled  beaten
5.4.108–9 double dealer  married man; unfaithful husband
5.4.110 narrowly  closely
Benedick Come, come, we are friends, let’s have a dance ere we are married, that we may lighten our own hearts, and our wives’ heels.

Leonato We’ll have dancing afterward.

Benedick First, of my word, therefore play music. Prince, thou art sad—get thee a wife, get thee a wife! There is no staff more reverent then one tipped with horn.

Enter Messenger.

Messenger My Lord, your brother John is ta’en in flight,
   And brought with armèd men back to Messina.

Benedick Think not on him till tomorrow, I’ll devise thee brave punishments for him. Strike up, pipers.

Dance.

FINIS.

5.4.111 Come . . . dance Some productions highlight the Prince looking on forlornly as Beatrice and Benedick lead the final dance.

5.4.120 Strike . . . pipers Some productions introduce a reprise of ‘Sigh no more, ladies’ to close the play, which may have a somewhat ironic effect on the happy ending.

5.4.111 lighten . . . heels i.e. make our wives’ heels lighter for dancing, with sexual pun (compare note to 3.4.143)

5.4.114 of by

5.4.115-16 There . . . horn complex nest of puns on cuckoldry basically saying that there’s no better state than marriage (and the cuckoldry that comes with it)

5.4.115 staff walking stick; staff of office (sign of rule, figuratively in a married man); wife (a support for her husband); penis

5.4.115 reverent revered (for age and wisdom); worthy

5.4.116 tipped set or decorated at the top (walking stick); variant of ‘tipped’ (mounted sexually, as by a horned and horny ram); plays on ‘tipstaff’, a court officer; dipped (as at 5.4.43), with obvious sexual undertone

5.4.116 horn literally horn as a decoration for an old man’s walking stick (old men were typically depicted as cuckolds); cuckold’s horns; penis

5.4.117 ta’en taken (captured)

5.4.117 in flight attempting to flee

5.4.119 brave fine (worthy)