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BATTLES, BEASTS, AND BANQUETS: PATTERN OF IMAGERY IN MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

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Abstract

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To date, the three most important works on Shakespearean imagery are Caroline Spurgeon's Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us, Edward Armstrong's Shakespeare's Imagination, and translated from the German, Wolfgang Clemen's The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery. Surprisingly, though, only Clemen attempts to relate image-clusters to the theme of each play—and has nothing to say about Much Ado about Nothing. My thesis traces three patterns of imagery through the play and attempts to relate changes in the use of these three images to the development of the characters and the theme of the play.

The image of battle pervades Much Ado on many levels, from the "skirmish of wit" between Beatrice and Benedick to the conflict over Hero's reputation and Beatrice's demand that Benedick "Kill Claudio." In Benedick and Claudio, Shakespeare gives us two variations of Miles Gloriosus; romantic and anti-romantic pride contrast in the two characters. Ultimately, Benedick's use of battle imagery confirms a change in his entire approach to life and love. His main concern is no longer to avoid humiliation, and Beatrice's "paper bullets of the brain" no longer deter him. The play finally comes full circle back to a comic use of battle imagery, with Benedick "dying" in Beatrice's lap by the end of the play.
Animal imagery serves to point up the changing patterns of predators within the play; characters are transformed from predators to prey very quickly. Also emphasized are the characters' efforts to bait or trap one another into love, anger, or deception. Animal imagery strengthens the undercurrent of sexuality between Beatrice and Benedick in particular, and ultimately highlights the changes these two characters undergo as Beatrice vows to "tame my wild heart" and Benedick shrugs off ridicule to assert that "the only reverent staff is one tipped with horn."

I have divided banquet imagery into two separate chapters, one dealing with images of food and eating, the other dealing with images of song and dance; the movement of the two sets of images in the play is parallel. Much Ado begins with a homecoming feast and masque, and these traditional symbols of community are disrupted with the plottings of various attending characters. As the play then moves into darkness, images of eating become expressions of aggression, while the light songs of the early play become a dirge for Hero's "death." As do the other two images, the banquet metaphor comes full circle; Much Ado ends with a wedding feast and dance, and our awareness in this final scene of community is heightened by the changes that these three sets of images have undergone.
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Characters in *Much Ado about Nothing* are regretably prone to saying odd things. "Prove that ever I lose more blood with love than I will get again with drinking," brags Benedick, "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" (I.i.250-254); Beatrice tells Benedick, "A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours" (I.i.139-140); Claudio calls Hero a "rotten orange" at their wedding (IV.i.32); Benedick fears that "love may transform me to an oyster" (II.iii.24); and in another fit of musing, Benedick wonders aloud, "Is it not strange that sheep's guts should hale souls out of men's bodies?" (II.iii.59-60).

These unusual utterances are, of course, given meaning by the patterns of the play's imagery; but in what ways do these patterns of imagery shape and change the play itself? This is the question that I will undertake to answer. But first we have other questions to consider: which characters are associated with which images? How do the images change during the play? What do the images tell us about the characters? about life in the world of the play?

Surprisingly, to date only three works have attempted to come to terms with Shakespearean imagery. Caroline F. E. Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* is the most obviously flawed in both its method and its intent.
Her method has been to go through Shakespeare's canon and classify what she considers to be images under headings like "Law," "Indoor Games," and "Facts from Books." Spurgeon's primary interest, though, is in deducing "facts" about Shakespeare the man from the imagery in the plays; her intent leads her to such lamentable conclusions as "he seems to dislike stale or dry tasteless things, dry biscuits, dried pears, stale dry cheese, musty or tainted meat. . .". In Much Ado, Spurgeon notes images of quick-moving things, an "atmosphere of outdoor sport," and includes a paragraph on "war imagery" as symbolic of "the war of wits in love." Spurgeon is not interested, though, in tying these images to each other or to the play, so her observations are of little use to us.

Edward A. Armstrong's Shakespeare's Imagination: A Study of the Psychology of Association and Inspiration is slightly more interesting, for he pursues the idea of linked images, or image-clusters, tracing some of the more unusual examples throughout the plays. Like Spurgeon, though, Armstrong attempts to work backward from Shakespeare's imagery to a psychological portrait of the artist as a young genius. He says nothing about Much Ado as a whole and, in fact, draws from it only six examples of imagery, all dealing with subjects that figure as lesser stars even in Spurgeon's firmament (Philosophers, Paint, etc.).

Wolfgang H. Clemen's The Development of Shakespeare's
translated from the German, is by far the best of the three works, since Clemen concerns himself with the relation of imagery to the plays themselves. He is especially interesting in the passages where he attempts to distinguish between Shakespeare’s use of imagery in the early, middle, and late plays. "The images of the early comedies elaborate, veil, and adorn, but they do not yet elucidate," whereas the images of the middle and late periods are more organic, more fused to the whole work:

When Shakespeare employed imagery in his early histories and comedies, he used it . . . to intensify the expression of the emotions, or to present thoughts of a general nature in epigrammatic form. The significance of the imagery was often restricted to the situation of the moment in which it was used; only rarely did it point beyond this situation to the coming events of the drama. These images still lacked a clear relationship to their place in the dramatic structure . . . . The more Shakespeare becomes a conscious dramatic artist, the more he employs them for dramatic purposes. The images gradually lose their purely 'poetic', often extraneous nature and become one of the dramatic elements.  

According to Clemen’s scheme, then, the imagery of Much Ado is highly characteristic of Shakespeare's middle plays, for it begins to elucidate action as well as ornament it. Unfortunately, Clemen has absolutely nothing to say about Much Ado.

Certainly images of conflict, of animals, and of food and music are not the only images in the play; among the
more interesting images that will go unexamined here are those of fashion and of disease. I have chosen to work with these three images simply because they strike me as both dynamic and unusual. I propose now to trace these three image-patterns through Much Ado and examine their changing context; for the sake of brevity and of clarity I will not list every single reference to a particular image, but only those that are representative of the meaning of the image at that particular point in the play.
Notes

Chapter I

2 Spurgeon, pp. 123-124.
3 Spurgeon, pp. 263-264.
4 Spurgeon, p. 273.
7 Clemen, pp. 38-39.
8 Clemen, p. 81.
Imagery of battles, of fighting, duelling, and sword-play, pervades Much Ado. As a city with men newly returned from the wars, Messina is full of a kind of nervous energy that manifests itself in figurative conflict as well as literal. Spurgeon, the only critic who makes note of battle imagery in the play, remarks upon a "slight touch" of imagery pertaining to the "war of wits in love," but she fails to acknowledge the very physical level on which combat occurs in Messina. From the play's beginning to its end, images of battle shape our perceptions of the action.

Much Ado begins with news of an "action" that is quickly scaled down to reflect the rather limited scale of life in Messina. A "good soldier" becomes "a good soldier to a lady" (I.i.53-54), and the real war becomes a "merry war" (I.i.62) that is scaled down even further to a "skirmish of wit" (I.i.63); although battles are now mostly verbal, they will not be without casualties, and this fact is crucial in a play about, among other things, the power of false and misguided words. The abstract ideas of love and battle meet, of course, in the figure of Cupid, who strikes his victims with love and an arrow simultaneously. As might be expected, Cupid is mentioned several times during the play: by Benedick (I.i.184), by Don Pedro (II.i.385 and III.ii.10), and most significantly, by Hero, who unwittingly
utters the tragi-comic theme of the play: "Of this matter /
Is little Cupid's crafty arrow made, / That only wounds by
hearsay" (III.1.21-23).

If we had not been told that most of the men in the
play had just returned from war, we would nevertheless garner that information from the martial imagery of their speech. Claudio's first speech of any length apprises us of the difference these men feel between the emotions of war and those of peace:

When you went onward in this ended action,
I look'd upon her with a soldier's eye,
That lik'd, 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
(I.1.296-305).

That Benedick is newly home from the wars is evident in the violence of his language in the first scene. He so adamantly protests his unadmirning view of Hero that he adds an oath: "I will die in it at the stake" (I.1.232); his bawdy pun emphasizes his dislike for Hero, and also hints that his only interests in women, at the moment, are sexual and jocu-
lar. And only a few lines later, Benedick's diatribe against love fairly drips with the gore of battle:

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 (I.1.250-254).

Shakespeare's not-too-subtle suggestion here, of course, is
that Benedick is using the traditional concerns of the soldier—fighting, drinking, and whoring—to mask both his interest in Beatrice and his self-consciousness at the art of love from himself and from everyone else.

The art of love itself becomes a battle in the language of Don Pedro, with his reference to Cupid's archery (II.i.385) and to Cupid's bow-strings (III.ii.10), and with his promise to woo Hero for 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  
> (I.i.323-325).

Even Leonato, who is not a soldier, speaks in the metaphor of love as battle in the conversation that Benedick is intended to overhear: "wisdom and love combating in so tender a body, we have ten proofs to one that blood hath the victory" (II.iii.163-165). For Benedick, though, combat has been external as well as internal, as he jokes about his humiliation by Beatrice, who had been

> huddling jest upon jest with such impossible conveyance upon me that I stood like a man at a mark, with a whole army shooting at me. She speaks poniards, and every word stabs (II.i.244-248).

Interestingly, many of these references to love as war—both as a conventional battle of the sexes and as an internal conflict—center around Beatrice; this fact seems unusual when we consider that it was Claudio's brave exploits that were lauded at the play's beginning. While
Benedick, however, appears fairly modest about his performance in the "action," he is in the true tradition of the swaggering soldier—the bragadocio—when he loudly proclaims his invulnerability to love at the play's beginning. Leo Salingar, in *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy*, describes the figure of the bragart soldier as "valiant only in show," and boasting above all of his prowess in love.¹ Benedick, then, is an unusual variation on the convention, as Goddard notes in *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, when he speaks of *Much Ado* as a study of romantic egotism in Claudio, contrasted to anti-romantic egotism in Benedick.² Benedick's bragging over his supposed safety from Cupid's arrows is about all of the tradition that is left to him, though, for Beatrice has undercut his martial prowess before he ever appears on the stage. And she, too, participates in boasting about the joys of bachelorhood. The change that must come over Benedick, for the comedy with Beatrice to come to fruition, is very clearly marked for our notice. At the beginning of II.iii., Benedick rhapsodizes over the Claudio that used to be:

I have known him when there was no music in him but the drum and the fife, and now he had rather hear the tabor and the pipe; I have known when he would have walk'd ten mile afoot to see a good armor, and now will he lie ten nights awake carving the fashion of a new doublet; he was wont to speak plain and to the purpose (like an honest man and a soldier), and now is he turn'd orthography (II.iii.12-20).
When Benedick overhears the "news" that Beatrice loves him, though, he drops his combatant air with comic rapidity, and speaks as though he has firmly decided to put away childish things:

Shall quips and sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humor? No, the world must be peopled (II.iii.240-242).

When he is led to believe that Beatrice loves him, a great change is wrought in Benedick: he is now able to distinguish between real warfare and verbal banter. Beatrice's witty barbs, which he had previously perceived as full-scale assaults, are now reduced to mere "paper bullets of the brain." Her "quips and sentences" must not be allowed to interfere with his destiny, which seems to lie in the peopling of the world. And where formerly, verbal humiliation shook him, it is now a secondary concern:

I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me, because I have rail'd so long against marriage, but doth not the appetite alter? ((.iii.235-238).

He thus proves capable of putting away his "manly" pride for the sake of love, whereas the "noble" Claudio will be unable to do the same.

Much of the banter, of course, between Benedick and Beatrice and between Benedick and his fellow soldiers has been in the form of "flyting"--the medieval tradition of ritualized insult between friends. By viewing the hurled invective of the play's first half in this light, we may be-
gin to appreciate the importance of ritualized behavior in Messina. While elaborate patterns of courtship—and the characters' needs for those patterns—are discussed more completely in Chapter V, it is important to note here the degree to which battle imagery governs the behavior of Messina's citizens; people fight literally or figuratively to manifest love, friendship, and hatred. Small wonder that confusion results!

Benedick's reduction of his battle with Beatrice to "paper bullets of the brain" signals a turning point both for him and for the play. As though to prove that he can now differentiate between real war and mere repartee, he refers jokingly to battle only once more (V.ii.14ff)—perhaps because the play's action continues at a more literal level of the battle metaphor, with a seeming death, a hoped-for murder, and several other challenges and threats, all in the second half of the play. Shakespeare prepares us somewhat for the violence of the play's second half, though: the time of the play is immediately after a war; most of the major roles belong to soldiers; and most importantly, the unmotivated malignancy of Don John and the confederacy of Borachio prelude the viciousness to come.

Interestingly, the "underworld" plot relies for its success upon the problems that several characters have with words. Claudio would not be so affected by the plot against Hero were he not so literal-minded—he expects her literally
to be her name—and if he did not weigh her words so lightly against those of Don John (although a visual deception is practiced upon him as well). Similarly, Leonato's concern for the words that others will say (his reputation) blots out what love and trust he feels for his child. In fact, Hero really speaks so seldom that she is unable to defend herself: the only defense she offers that is not rhetorical is "I talk'd with no man at that hour" (IV.i.86); then she falls into a mute swoon. The words that slander Hero would be mere "paper bullets of the brain" if she and those around her were equipped to handle such an assault, but the fact that they are not transforms what ought to be, at most, a verbal battle into a very physical combat. Even Benedick is lured into the fray in order to prove his love for Beatrice.

The ferocity of the battle metaphor is still present in the play's second half, but now characters are entirely serious in their violent speech. In Hero's denunciation, which Evans calls "the most poignant scene in Shakespearean comedy,"4 she laments, "Refuse me, hate me, torture me to death" (IV.i.184) as most of the other characters do exactly that, including her father. "Hath no man's dagger here a point for me," he cries (IV.i.109), and later, "If they speak but truth of her, / These hands shall tear her" (IV.i.190-191). At the scene's end, Benedick swears his love by his sword and his hand—significantly, the sword and the hand are both
weapons that Beatrice wants him to use against Claudio. Beatrice herself proves second only to Don John in her aggression as she says coldly and calmly, "Kill Claudio" (IV.i.289), and then wishes that she could do him in herself with "O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the market-place" (IV.i.306-307).

The first scene of Act V then rings with the talk of fencing, fighting, death, and killing, as Leonato, Antonio, and Benedick all challenge Claudio, and then, as Leonato confronts Borachio at the "trial." As Benedick feels that he has kept his promise to challenge Claudio, he can once again make light of the apparatus of battle, as he shows in the exchange with Margaret that turns on words such as fencer's foils, bucklers, swords, and pikes (V.ii.13-22). Now, though, these are not verbal weapons with which to wound: "A most manly wit, Margaret, it will not hurt a woman. And so I pray thee call Beatrice" (V.ii.15-16). Benedick speaks once more of dying, but this time it carries the sexual implication, as he vows to Beatrice to "die in thy lap" (V.ii.102)—the first pun of this sort that he has made since I.i.232.

The play, then, has come full circle, from jokes of combat to serious contemplation of it, and back again to humor; battle imagery unifies the play in both scenes of love and of hate. While the imagery is initially used as a metaphor for the violent wooing of Benedick and Beatrice,
Benedick virtually dismantles that usage of the image of combat as he realizes that "paper bullets of the brain" are essentially unimportant. We see him change, in this revelation, from a soldier to man: he is now willing to drop his false pride and his bragging oaths against love to try a new life, although he may at first incur humiliation. The battles in the play, too, echo Benedick's transformation; the figurative conflict between lovers becomes a literal one between deceivers and deceived, where the root problem is that too much credence is given to the "paper bullets" of Don John. Finally, the play returns to a jocular treatment of the battle metaphor, with Benedick joking once more in V.ii.; now, however, he "dies" in Beatrice's lap rather than as a victim of her wit or as a casualty of his challenge to Claudio.

What is not certain, though, is the actual degree to which Benedick has matured in the course of the play, for his sexual pun on "dying" recalls his earlier jest about "dying at the stake" for his low opinion of Hero. Certainly he has undergone a transformation by virtue of his ability to distinguish between combat and "flyting," but some questions regarding the marriages at the play's end remain open. Does Benedick completely metamorphose into "the married man," or does he retain insecurities about his new status? I believe that his transformation is not complete, and that the play's resolution is as ambiguous as the images which describe it.
Notes

Chapter II

1 Spurgeon, p. 273.


Chapter III
The Noble Beast in Love:
Patterns of Animal Imagery

Like the imagery of battle, animal imagery pervades Much Ado, and our careful attention to changes in the use of this imagery heightens our response to the play and illuminates some of the play's problems. Spurgeon has noted the frequency of references to what she calls the "outdoor sporting life," but she is, unfortunately, rather misled in her attribution of these images to the "lively outdoor" atmosphere of the play. In fact, the changing context of animal imagery renders it an ambiguous image—although Shakespeare, as we shall see, makes use of this ambiguity—that is not often complimentary to either Messina's atmosphere or its inhabitants. I have chosen to concentrate solely on animal imagery here, because these images are both more frequent and more striking than other references in the play to Nature. With few exceptions, references to fauna occur in tandem with animal imagery, and often simply provide a setting for the lions, lambs, bulls, horses, rabbits, foxes, bears, fish, dogs, cats, asses, and birds of the play.

Much Ado begins with an animal metaphor which casts Claudio in the complimentary role of hero; the messenger tells Leonato that Claudio has performed well in the war, "doing in the figure of a lamb the feats of a lion" (I.i.14-15). The messenger's praise of Claudio is one of only two favorable
references to animals in the entire play—the other will come at the play's end—and it is the only instance in which a character is compared to an animal for purposes of praise. Ironically, while the lion is conventionally a symbol of nobility by virtue of its position as "king of animals," Claudio will never again manage to come any closer to nobility of character or behavior than this second-hand account: the comparison of people to animals in Messina often slights the animals.

Characters in Much Ado frequently call one another animals, though, and this usage of the animal motif runs throughout the play. "I had rather," retorts Beatrice, "hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me (I.i.131-132)." As insults fly between her and Benedick, the following exchange is provoked:

Bene. Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.
Beat. A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours.
Bene. I would my horse had the speed of your tongue, and so good a continu-er. . . .
Beat. You always end with a jade's trick, I know you of old (I.i.138-145).

Later in the play, Conrade will infuriate Dogberry by calling him first a coxcomb (IV.ii.69) and then an ass (IV.ii.73), and Antonio will call Claudio and Don Pedro apes (V.i.91). Claudio, too, will thinly veil his taunts of Benedick in animal metaphor (V.i.154-157). By calling another an animal, one implies, of course, that the other is somewhat lower than
human in the natural hierarchy by virtue of his physical ugliness, stupidity, or both. The nature of the insult takes on a somewhat different shading in Messina, however, as the characters introduce the notion of animal sexuality into their references to animals.

By virtue of the cuckold jest, animals begin to be associated with sex and marriage early in the play. Benedick's boasts about his imperviousness to love's entanglements end with the invitation, should he ever succumb to love, to "hang me up in a bottle like a cat, and shoot at me (I.i.257-258). Don Pedro counters epigrammatically with "In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke (I.i.261)," and Benedick roars back at him:

The savage bull may, but if ever the sensible Benedick wear it, pluck off the bull's horns, and set them in my forehead, and let me be wildly 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' (I.i.262-268).

The bull is, in fact, an excellent image for Benedick, since the animal is emblematic of strength, anger (or ruffled masculine pride), and a fair amount of intelligence. And ironically, Benedick is correct in asserting that he will be metamorphosed if he ever "bears the yoke"; the change, however, will enable him to feel that the "yoke" of marriage is not a burden. Claudio, too, will later associate the bull image with that of Jove. For the time being, though,
Benedick's attitude is that women in general are a burden to be borne, and, in fact, his assessment of Hero sounds like a farmer advising against the purchase of an ox: "me-thinks she's too low for a high praise, too brown for a fair praise, and too little for a great praise" (I.i.171-173).

Beatrice, too, seems to have horned animals on the brain as she brags about her freedom from marriage in a scene that parallels Benedick's. Beatrice tells her uncle, "'God sends a curst cow short horns'--but to a cow too curst he sends none" (II.i.22-24), the implication being that any husband of hers would be a cuckold. She continues with more animal imagery, "...therefore I will even take sixpence in earnest of the berrord, and lead his apes into hell" (II.i.39-41). In her mention of the "proverbial fate of old maids,"¹ she echoes Kate's "I must dance barefoot on her wedding-day, / And for your love to her lead apes into hell" (The Taming of the Shrew, II.i.33-34). The sexual overtones of her repeated references to animals, however, undermine her vows never to become entangled romantically. The "flyting" of the battle imagery begins to combine with the sexuality of animal imagery, and the result resembles a ritual ruffling of feathers as part of a mating ritual.

The association of animality with sexuality is not always so comic, though. Don John is particularly threatening because of the violence in his references to animals; in fact, he describes himself in animal terms at the play's
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onset. In describing to Conrade why he is "out of measure sad," Don John explains, "There is no measure in the occasion that breeds, therefore the sadness is without limit" (I.iii.3-4); the vague animal imagery is continued in his comment that he must "claw no man in his humor" (I.iii.7-8). And finally, he frankly admits that his "sadness" is not merely a mood, but a part of his whole nature. In an oddly mixed metaphor, he elaborates:

. . .I am a plain-dealing villain. I am trusted with a muzzle, and enfranchis'd 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 (I.iii.32-35).

While Don John's sociopathic behavior throughout the play remains essentially enigmatic, we cannot help but be enticed with the psychological intimations that are almost unavoidable as he speaks of himself with such deprecation. Without suggesting a credible motive for Don John's "plain-dealing villainy," Shakespeare suggests that he feels trapped in Messina (or trapped in his role as Don Pedro's bastard brother), that he is rather defensive about his disposition, and that, at the same time, he indulges himself in his self-loathing. His comment that "there is no measure in the occasion that breeds" recalls Richard III's "But I, that am not shap'd for sportive tricks, / Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass. . ." (Richard III, (I.i.14-15), and his use of animal imagery in general is
reminiscent of Iago's sneers.

Whatever our feelings about Don John, he introduces to the play a notion of the animal as predator that illuminates several subsequent scenes. His self-description, as we have seen, seems to be that of a muzzled wolf, and this suggestion is strengthened as he snarls his opinion of Hero: "A very forward March-chick" (I.ii.56). As the various plots and deceptions are then unraveled, they all carry the weight of the animal imagery that Shakespeare has so carefully built up. When an animal is mentioned in conversation now, the image suggests to us (perhaps sub-consciously) all the attributes of animals that have been exposed thus far: their playfulness, energy, sexuality, violence, and their capacity for hunt and capture. With these images in mind, we can fully appreciate the scenes of deception which follow.

Benedick is deceived first, and Claudio regards him straightforwardly as prey to be trapped, referring to him as a "hid-fox" (II.iii.42) when Benedick is seen crouching in the bushes. Balthasar is urged to sing--no doubt to help put Benedick in the proper frame of mind--but first Benedick is allowed by Shakespeare to comment in an aside:

> Now, divine air! now is his soul ravish'd! Is it not strange that sheep's guts should hale souls out of men's bodies (II.iii.58-61).

While Claudio and Don Pedro speak of him as an animal in the sense that he is quarry to be caught, Benedick reacts
to their maudlin posturing with a crude remark about sheep's guts that, in its grotesquerie, reminds us that he is still a bull in this figurative china shop; he is embarrassed enough by their overtly "mushy" talk of wooing to attempt to reassure himself with an image that is at the opposite extreme from delicacy. He settles down to hear the song, however, with a resignation that reveals much to the audience: "Well, a horn for my money when all's done" (II.iii. 60-61). With Benedick's unknowing jest, Shakespeare reas-
sures the audience that it will, indeed, be horns for Bene-
dick when all's done.

When the song is done, Benedick responds to its sentimentality in the same embarrassed manner, once more making use of animal imagery: "And if he had been a dog that should have howl'd thus, they would have hang'd him. . . . I had as live as heard the night-raven, come what plague could have come after it" (II.iii.79-83). Claudio and Don Pedro, though, still regard Benedick as their prey. "O ay," Claudio whispers, "stalk on, stalk on, the fowl sits" (II. iii.92-93), and, changing species, "Bait the hook well, this fish will bite" (II.iii.108-109). And when what Don Pedro calls their "sport" is done, Benedick indeed takes the bait. When Beatrice comes out to ask him into dinner, Benedick asks her if she takes pleasure in the message, and she "quirks" about choking a daw, thus confirming our sense that Benedick's days as a bachelor are few.
The scene which immediately follows deals with the parallel deception of Beatrice; it mirrors Benedick's scene except that there are even more references to Beatrice as the prey of Hero and Ursula. The following exchange between the two girls echoes the mixed animal imagery of the two men in the preceding scene:

Hero. For look where Beatrice like a lapwing runs Close by the ground, to hear our conference.
Urs. The pleasant'est 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 couched in the woodbine covering.
Hero. Then go we near, that her ear lose nothing Of the false sweet bait we lay for it. . . . I know her spirits are as coy and wild As haggards of the rock (III.i.24-30).

As they finally seem to settle on referring to her as a bird, Ursula concludes, "She's limed, I warrant you" (III.i.104), and Hero notes that some Cupids kill "with traps" (III.i.106). Interestingly, Beatrice has swallowed a picture of herself as a bird in addition to swallowing their bait: "And, Benedick, love on, I will requite thee, / Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand" (III.i.111-112). It is ironic, too, that the girls should choose to characterize Beatrice as a wild bird, for only a short time earlier Benedick was
shrugging off Claudio's supposed loss of Hero to Don Pedro as a matter of no more consequence than a stolen bird's nest (II.i.223). If Benedick's portrayal as a bull is oddly accurate, so is the image of Beatrice as a bird, for she always seems to move and speak quickly, as a bird pecking away at Benedick. The animal imagery, then, captures both the sexuality and the antagonism of courtship in Messina.

Dogberry, as might be expected, is associated with animals in a completely different sense. His name, especially since he heads up the Watch, conjures the image of a watchdog—which turns out to be a surprisingly apt characterization of Dogberry, since it captures his "dogged" determination, the rather slow quality of his wit, and his sincere desire to help and win approval. The suggestion of Dogberry as someone with almost less than human intelligence is borne out in his allusions to animals. He nisses intended epigram when he lectures to Verges and the Watch: "the ewe that will not hear her lamb when it baes will never answer a calf when he bleats" (III.iii.70-72). The same thing happens later when Dogberry ruminates, "Well, God's a good man, and two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind" (III.v.36-37). His association with animals, along with his examples of barnyard logic, render curiously poignant his confusion over being called a coxcomb and an ass by Conrade in IV.ii. Somehow, Conrade's use of animals in his invective strikes too close too the bone; while Dogberry is doglike at some
times and asinine at others, he is also an ass in the sense of being like a beast of burden, for it is his plodding determination that finally brings to light the villainy of Don John and Borachio.

The comic relief provided by Dogberry and the Watch is sorely needed in the darkness of Much Ado's second half; Dogberry's basic innocence contrasts refreshingly with the brutality of the treatment given Hero. The sexual implications inherent in animal imagery are now brought again to the fore in Claudio's accusations at the wedding. Rather than the natural, energetic sexuality of animals, the image is of animals rutting and "making love over the nasty sty" that predominates. Claudio charges Hero that "She knows the heat of a luxurious bed" (IV.i.41), and that she is more intemperate than "those pamper'd animals / That rage in savage sensuality" (IV.i.60-61). It is entirely appropriate that Claudio react to Hero in these terms, for his own behavior is that of an animal whose territorial rights have been violated. At any rate, his purpose is accomplished and the wedding is off; almost everyone has been preyed upon in some fashion by Don John.

The use of animal imagery in invective continues, now that so many characters in the play are at odds with one another; Benedick's challenge to Claudio and Don Pedro is particularly full of such imagery. As Don Pedro starts to take Benedick seriously, Claudio tries to remain unfrightened
with "What, courage, man! What though care kill'd a cat, thou hast mettle enough in thee to kill care" (V.i.132-133); it seems likely that "care killed a cat" is proverbial.

Claudio then likens a duel with Benedick to carving up animals at a feast (in a combination of animal and banquet imagery):

. . . he hath bid me to a calve's-head and a capon, the which if I do not carve most curiously, say my knife's naught. Shall I not find a woodcock too? (V.i.154-157).

Meanwhile, Don Pedro attempts to lighten the somber mood: "But when shall we set the savage bull's horns on the sensible Benedick's head?" (V.i.181-182). What Don Pedro does not realize is that Beatrice has already set horns—of aggression—on Benedick's head. Claudio concludes the animal imagery of the scene in his assertion that, when a man is without his good sense, "He is then a giant to an ape, but then is an ape a doctor to such a man" (V.i.201-202), meaning that, although a man who has "left off his wit" (Benedick) may outsize an ape physically, he is so stupid that the ape is as a scholar by comparison. Like the insults traded between Benedick and Beatrice at the play's beginning, these barbs between the three men are a form of "flyting"; the difference, though, is that here they are ruffling their feathers at one another to express their anger rather than their attraction. Both Claudio and Benedick are here acting as predators.
As Hero's dilemma is resolved, the characters' use of animal imagery becomes somewhat lighter in tone; for example, Benedick teases Margaret, "Thy wit is as quick as the greyhound's mouth, it catches" (V.ii.11-12). The following exchange, too, between Claudio and Benedick is not lacking in insult, but it is no longer an overture to violence:

Claud. 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.

Bene. 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 (V.iv.43-51).

Claudio has converted the image of the ridiculous, cuckolded bull to an image of Jove disguised as a bull; it is Benedick who is here the "noble beast in love." Furthermore, the association of the savage bull image with mythology recalls Benedick's earlier rationalization that ridicule must not be allowed to impede his destiny of peopling the world, just as Jove's lay in the begetting of "Glorious sons whose sceptres shall hold sway / Over all men on earth."³

That Benedick's transformation is complete is evidenced by the conclusion of his invocation of the dance: "There is no staff more reverent than one tipp'd with horn" (V.iv.123-124). While his statement is, in part, a good-natured
admission that he has abandoned his earlier vows of invulnerability to love, it also carries a disturbing ambiguity. The audience is here, of course, alive to the cuckold joke, but so is Benedick; and his mention of "horn" at the scene of his wedding seems to admit also the possibility that he will be cuckolded. If we choose to read Benedick's comment in this manner, we will read, also, a certain resignation in Benedick's words over that certain degree of animality which resides in all of us. He has, after all, justified his marriage to Beatrice in this final scene not with words of love to her, but with "man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion" (V.iv.108-109)—the resigned argument of Ecclesiastes. It seems that, in Messina, the best that man can do is to be "a noble beast in love"; certainly the courtships we have witnessed bear this out.
Notes

Chapter III

1 Spurgeon, p. 264.


Chapter IV

A Very Fantastical Banquet:

Images of Food

The images of food, music, and dance—which are grouped in the title under "banquet" imagery—together form the most complicated image-pattern of the play. I have decided to include them in the title as one image but to discuss them separately, because while their usage in the play is almost exactly parallel, an explanation which lumped all three together would soon grow almost too complicated to follow. The three images trace the movement of the play from comedy to darkness and back to a "qualified community," but the images themselves display unusual versatility in their range of expression. Food alone, for example, may denote hospitality, revelry, sexual appetite, and aggression; and food carries all of these meanings, at one time or another, in the course of the play.

Like the imagery of battle and of animals, food imagery is used at the play's beginning as a vehicle for wit; in the first few lines of the play, it is just one more thing on which to display a virtuosity with language. Beatrice inquires of the messenger, "I pray you, how many hath Benedick kill'd and eaten in these wars? . . . for indeed I promis'd to eat all of his killing" (I.i.42-45); her play on the word "eat" here is of the "I'll eat my hat" tradition. She goes on, in the image that she has initiated, to undermine praise
of Benedick by shrugging it off as merely a tribute to his appetite: "You had musty victual, and he hath holp to eat it. He is a very valiant trencherman, he hath an excellent stomach" (I.i.50-52). While certainly Beatrice is here speaking of food in a literal sense, her reference to his "excellent stomach" may carry the meaning of sexual appetite as well, especially since the conversation immediately turns to a discussion of the fact that Benedick is "a good soldier to a lady" (I.i.55); the close association of the two kinds of appetites will be intensified later in the play. Beatrice continues with food imagery as, only a few lines later, she asks of Benedick, "Is it possible disdain should die while she hath such meet food to feed it as Signior Benedick?" (I.i.120-121). And Don John will later echo her usage of "feed" when he speaks of fueling the displeasure of others.

In keeping with the wit on the subject of food that Beatrice displays at the play's beginning, food is most often used during the play's first half as a symbol of hospitality and revelry. Hospitality, in fact, is the defining quality of Leonato's character early in the play; he seems always to be fearing the hunger of his guests. Always the vigilant host, Leonato asks, "Was not Count John here at supper?" (II.i.1); Antonio was not as alert and did not see him. And after deceiving Benedick in the garden, Leonato signals the end of the performance by simply announcing, "Dinner is
ready" (II.iii.210). Don Pedro even seems to take on Leonato's concern for food: early on, he intones, "I will not fail him at supper, for indeed he hath made great preparations" (I.i.277-278). Later he plots, "Let us send her to call him into dinner" (II.iii.218-219).

The large feast and accompanying masque which Leonato hosts early in *Much Ado* provide a needed opportunity for several characters to further their plots; the gathering also, of course, enables Shakespeare to quickly manipulate his characters into his increasingly complex plot. The characters planning their own manipulations during the home-coming feast are thus sharing Shakespeare's role: both playwright and players use Leonato's hospitality to "plot" the outcome of the play. Thinking along these lines, Francis Fergusson writes that "it is the festive ensemble scenes which most clearly adumbrate the basic vision" of a play; the basic vision of *Much Ado*, then, is one of disguise and deception, both innocent and malicious. Fergusson continues:

> A dramatist may use the festive occasion . . . to shift his audience's attention from the detail of the literal intrigue to some general plight which all more or less unwittingly share. . . . When people assemble for a ceremonious occasion (whether it be the festival of Dionysos or one of James' thorny tea parties) they must abate, or conceal, their purely individual purposes and recognize the common concern which brings them together.  

The common concern at Leonato's banquet, though, is the furthering of individual interests.
Whatever his motives, Don Pedro's plan actually involves playing out his role of courtier to Hero (the audience) so that he may resolve Claudio's sudden fall into love as he, Don Pedro, sees fit. The Prince of Aragon tells Claudio:

And I will fit thee with the remedy.
I know we shall have reveling to-night;
I will assume thy part in some disguise,
And tell fair Hero I am Claudio (I.i.319-322).

Unfortunately, the assembly also aids those whose intentions are not quite so selfless as Don Pedro's seem to be. Leonato's hospitality includes the "underworld" of Messina as well as the nobility, and the obvious opportunities are not lost on Don John and his confederates. Borachio wastes no time leaving the banquet to give the latest "news" to Don John: "I came yonder from a great supper. The Prince your brother is royally entertain'd by Leonato, and I can give you intelligence of an intended marriage" (II.i.42-45). And Don John answers in kind, "Let us to the great supper, their cheer is greater that I am subdu'd. Would the cook were a' my mind!" (I.i.71-73). Although banquets are traditionally associated with celebrations of community and shared good will, the malevolence of Don John contrasts so violently with the good will of Leonato's hospitality that the later move of the play into darkness is very obviously foreshadowed.

Before the play completely turns its attentions to the darkness of human nature, however, Beatrice plays more with food imagery and thereby exposes more of the complexity in
her characterization. Beatrice mentions food and eating more than any other character in the play. In referring to Don John, she complains, "How tartly that gentleman looks! I can never see him but I am heart-burn'd an hour after" (II.i.3-4). Although she is at least partly joking here, it would be typical of Beatrice to react negatively to Don John with a case of indigestion, for she is a tremendously oral character. Beatrice loves to command center stage by talking, as in II.i., where she shuts Hero entirely out of a conversation with Leonato, to great comic effect. (The interesting implication of this scene, in which marriage is the subject under discussion, is that, as well as enjoying the limelight, Beatrice is self-conscious of what appears to be the unlikelihood of a husband for her; and that she is perhaps compensating for her "inadequacy" by drawing attention to her manifest mastery of language.) A Freudian approach to Beatrice would certainly endorse a view of her oral predisposition as a subjugation of her sexual frustration and, possibly, of anger over her "position" in Leonato's home.

Whether or not we choose to take such an extreme view of Beatrice's love of repartee and her frequent references to food and eating, the fact remains that these references are a part of the play. In fact, she grows increasingly aggressive in her mention of food as her fortunes dip. Beatrice "breaks a comparison" on Benedick when, immediately
prior to the dancing and revelry, he speaks to her in a
disguise which fails to shield him from her tongue:

he'll but break a comparison on me, which
peradventure, not mark'd, or not laugh'd
at, strikes him into melancholy, and then
there's a partridge wing sav'd, for the
fool will eat no supper that night
(II.i.146-150).

Continuing in the same vein, she pronounces Count Claudio
"civil as an orange" (II.i.294); Claudio will later retali¬
ate by terming Hero a "rotten orange" (IV.i.32), although,
as Goddard remarks, this is considerably truer of Claudio
than of Hero. Beatrice manifests a great deal of aggres¬
sion in her verbal facility and in her readiness to bandy
invective; her frustrated rage over Claudio's treatment of
Hero finds a perfect expression (for Beatrice) in IV.i.:

O that I were a man! What, bear her in
hand until they come to take hands, and
then with public accusation, uncover'd
slander, unmitigated rancor—0 God that
I were a man! I would eat his heart in
the market-place (IV.i.303-307).

That Beatrice is unable even to finish her sentence—very
unusual for her—is a measure of her anger. More interest¬
ing, though, is the fact that she somehow associates power
with ingestion, as though, to her mind, the ultimate act of
superiority/revenge is the engulfing of something or some¬
one else. Shakespeare, then, has added considerable depth
to his characterization of Beatrice through her references
to food and eating. While she seems, on the one hand, to
be vulnerable by virtue of her association with the stage of
childhood wherein pleasure is entirely oral, that same association is turned upside-down to bear witness to sexual frustration and rage, in which she resembles Shylock in wanting to get "at the heart" of her enemy. Although Beatrice seems to be constantly on the offensive, her compulsion to talk constantly and her continued allusion to the act of eating call into question the motives for her behavior, and she is saved from being simply shallow and bitchy.

As might be expected, Benedick shares with Beatrice a number of allusions to food and eating; however, he makes none of these references until the second act and, therefore, almost seems to be unconsciously imitating Beatrice. In II.i., he baits Claudio over his peevishness when Hero is mentioned: "Ho, now you strike like the blind man. 'Twas the boy that stole your meat, and you'll beat the post" (II.i.198-200). Although Benedick seems to be alluding to some story known by Shakespeare's audience, it is significant that he is here associating love and food. Almost immediately afterward, he makes an explicit connection between Beatrice and food, as he exits hastily: "O God, sir, here's a dish I love not, I cannot endure my Lady Tongue" (II.i.274-275). Shakespeare also suggests, through Benedick's comment, that Benedick understands Beatrice rather better than we might expect after witnessing his concern over his own humiliation, for in calling her "Lady Tongue," he associates her with both talking and eating--the oral activities which, as
we saw, define the complexity of Beatrice's motives and feelings. If he understands Beatrice, though, Benedick remains critical of the change that love has wrought in Claudio:

he was wont to speak plain and to the purpose (like an honest man and a soldier), and now is he turn'd orthography—his words are a very fantastical banquèt, just so many strange dishes. . . . 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 (II.iii.18-26).

But once Benedick has heard of Beatrice's lovesickness over him, he ceases to regard love as a suspicious dish that may have been poisoned, and in fact, rationalizes his own change of heart by comparing it to a natural change in tastes: "...I have rail'd 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" (II.iii.237-240). Now that he has readily accepted his new "appetite," there follows one of the most comic—and meaningful—exchanges of the play. When Beatrice tersely announces that against her will she has been sent to call him into dinner, Benedick continues his rationalization: "Ha! 'Against my will I am sent to bid you come into dinner'—there's a double meaning in that" (II.iii.257-259). And he is precisely right, there is a double meaning: in the sense that, for Leonato and Don Pedro, a shared meal symbolizes good will and
community, she has been sent to bid him partake of the ultimate act of community—love and marriage. Although Beatrice, of course, does not know it, she has virtually been sent to invite him to their wedding feast (and the end of the comedy). While we laugh at Benedick's sudden transformation into the Optimistic Lover, the joke is at least partially on us; if Benedick's folly lies in narrowing Beatrice's words to fit his own meaning, so does ours, for we narrow his words to fit our conception of him as deluded, and we are inclined not to realize that he is essentially correct. Likewise, Margaret deceives Beatrice by telling her what is, in fact, the truth in Benedick's own words: "Benedick swore he would never marry, and yet now in despite of his heart he eats his meat without grudging" (III. iv.88-90).

Soon after Margaret's comment to Beatrice, the play's tone darkens and our attention is drawn to the effects that Messina's "underworld" has had on Hero's wedding. Surely one of the most curious problems which flaws this unhappy second half of the play is the sudden change in Leonato, from loving father to deceived slanderer. Leonato's metamorphosis is not quite so startling, though, if we recall his characterization early in the comedy as a man whose concerns revolve mainly around his guests. Leonato's hospitality extends even to Dogberry, who pesters him only a short time before Hero's wedding. The last thing Leonato calls
to Dogberry is "Drink some wine ere you go; fare you well" (III.iv.53)—a remarkably gracious exit for a man who has just had all of Dogberry's tediousness "bestowed" upon him. Then, at the wedding, Leonato's quick recovery after Claudio's blunt "No" completes the portrait of him as not only a hospitable man, but one who is anxious to "grease the skids" socially: Leonato infers that Claudio means, instead of "no," "To be married to her. Friar, you come to marry her" (IV.i.7-8). And when the marriage of his daughter to a Count goes awry, Leonato's faith in Hero collapses as quickly and as surely as does his own reputation. It is Leonato, and not Hero, who is first attacked by Claudio; after baiting Leonato with talk of a "rich and precious gift" (IV.i.28), Claudio turns on him with "There, Leonato, take her back again. / Give not this rotten orange to your friend" (IV.i.31-32). Although Leonato's lack of faith in Hero is certainly not morally laudable, it can at least be explained when we consider Leonato's feeling that he has lost honor—and his upward social mobility as well. To paraphrase Sir Toby, Leonato evidently fears that because Hero is not virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale. In fact, Leonato begins to think of Hero as rotten meat:

...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 (IV.i.140-143).

Even when Leonato laments his own "devoured" social position,
he recalls earlier days of food and wine: now he mourns that age has "eat up my invention" (IV.i.194), and he will not "make misfortune drunk / With candle-wasters" (V.i.17-18). Leonato's concern over food, then, helps us to understand him as a shallow person rather than a shallow characterization; his seemingly hospitable references to food and drink mask an appetite for much more.

The pall of death in Much Ado's latter half cannot last, of course, because the death itself is only figurative, but first Claudio must be brought round. Curiously, Claudio also manages one time to express his antagonism for Benedick in terms of food though, as a soldier, he predictably thinks of butchery (we have seen this passage before, in its association to animal imagery): to Don Pedro's "What, a feast, a feast?" Claudio answers, "....he hath bid me to a calve's-head and a capon, the which if I do not carve most curiously, say my knife's naught" (V.i.153-156). Claudio proves to be properly chagrined at the news of Hero's wrongful death, though he adds a comment that links him to Leonato by its insensitivity. Upon hearing the truth from Borachio, Claudio tells Don Pedro, "I have drunk poison whiles he utter'd it" (V.i.246); he completely overlooks the fact that is was he who administered the "poison" to Hero at the wedding. The trouble is resolved, however, and the play ends with echoes of the revelry with which it began: surely a wedding feast will accompany the dancing which celebrates
the double wedding. Appropriately, though, Benedick's merriment prevails over Leonato's protocol: a new order has replaced the old, and Leonato hosts the gathering no longer.

The meaning that food carries has undergone a remarkable series of metamorphoses since the play's opening. Like the images of battle and of animals, food has a double set of meanings: on one hand, it evokes wit, hospitality, revelry, community, appetite, and sexual energy; on the other hand, it also represents greed, lust, poison, rottenness, aggression and outright rage. It takes on this ambiguity from the references of the characters themselves, who are in turn defined in greater depth by their changing use of the image. Allusions to food and eating are particularly valuable in getting at the basic contradictions in Beatrice's nature. Additionally, they help provide us with a motivation for Leonato's behavior, and they round out the characterizations of Benedick and, secondarily, Claudio.

The banquet image includes not only food, however, but music and dance as well; the numerous songs and dances in Much Ado work along with references to food as they deepen character portrayal and, ultimately, expand the themes treated by the play.
Notes

Chapter IV


2 Fergusson, p. 21.

Music, or songs, and dancing occur so often together in *Much Ado* that they are best dealt with together. References to music and dancing, along with those to food and eating, enhance distinctions of character, further mechanisms of plot, and highlight the movement of the play from light comedy to near tragedy and back again. Shakespeare's use of music and dance, though, focuses our attention on life in Messina to better effect than references to food. Even tragic heroes eat, but the simple fact that music and dance exist in Messina tells us a good deal about life there. For all the robustness implied by the continued mention of conflict, of animals, and of food, the world of Messina is not so serious or so graceless that it lacks the lightness and gaiety that music endows—and this applies to the Messina that appears to us on the stage as well as the Messina which emerges from this study of image-patterns. Music, as it manifests itself in the songs of the play, furthers our understanding of just what love means in Messina.

In addition to the evidently sumptuous fare that Leonato is anxious to provide for his guests, he appears to trouble himself equally over the problem of music at the fetes he hosts. Leonato makes the first direct reference
to music in the play, sounding characteristically flustered as he accosts Antonio with, "How now, brother, where is my cousin, your son? Hath he provided this music?" (I.ii.1-2). Antonio, though, is much more interested in the news that he has overheard, which he imparts to Leonato: "The Prince discover'd to Claudio that he lov'd my niece your daughter, and meant to acknowledge it this night in a dance" (I.ii.11-13). Antonio is so vague about exactly how one makes one's love known that "acknowledge it in a dance" is apt to strike us as some bizarre mating ritual performed by bees; and in fact, this is very nearly the exact nature of the courtship ritual in Messina. If a good deal of intrigue goes on at the supper given by Leonato, it is only a prelude to the plotting that is accomplished by the masked dancers.

Before the masque ever begins, Beatrice has specifically associated dancing and courtship:

The fault will be in the music, cousin, if you be not woo'd in good time. If the Prince be too important, tell him there is a measure in every thing, and so dance out the answer. For hear me, Hero: wooing, wedding, 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 ancentry; and then comes repentence, and with his bad legs falls into the cinquepace faster and faster, till he sink into his grave (II.i.69-80).

Beatrice's boast that she knows exactly what will happen, however, does not seem to lessen her interest in the ritual
or detract at all from the effect of the dance upon the dancers. Shakespeare gives us four small vignettes as the dancers glide by in II.i., which are in fact four different approaches to the ritual of courtship. The first exchange, between Hero and Don Pedro, is the most stylized and formal of the four; their dialogue seems almost formulaic. In fact, they hardly seem to be speaking to each other. Don Pedro, for example, abruptly switches to a metaphoric mode of speech, rendering his intent a bit cryptic: "My visor is Philomon's roof, within the house is Jove" (II.i.96-97). When Hero responds with a feeble attempt at wit with a comment about a "thatched visor," Don Pedro seems satisfied and adds, "Speak low if you speak love" (II.i.99). We are left with the feeling that an understanding has been reached that, somehow, we missed.

In contrast, Borachio and Margaret are refreshingly direct. "Well," says Borachio, "I would you did like me" (II.i.100). Margaret protests that she has many ill qualities, and they go on in a sort of miniature revival meeting as she energetically prays aloud, "God match me with a good dancer!" (II.i.107). Ursula and Antonio, the next set of dancers, are rather mildly flirtatious, as Antonio protests that he is not himself, and Ursula kindly responds by flattering him.

Benedick and Beatrice are the final couple, of course, and their conversation is an odd combination of the three
vignettes that have preceded them. They speak straightforwardly to one another, but both pretend—or believe—that the man with whom Beatrice is dancing is not Benedick. Furthermore, Beatrice both flatters and damns him: he makes people laugh but he is also "a very dull fool" (II. i.137-138). From this snatch of their dialogue, we realize that, although they are outspoken, Beatrice and Benedick are not without a need for the props of convention. The process that Beatrice scorned earlier as simply a dance (a "Scotch jig") has shown her to be in need of those prescribed rituals according to which love in Messina proceeds. The dance, with its changing partners, is a perfect image for the uncertainties of courtship which occur within traditional patterns; just as the dance is energy within form, so the sexual energy and high spirits of lovers in Messina is given expression in set patterns, which even the most "unconventional" lovers—Beatrice and Benedick—employ. Their elaborate dance of courtship will proceed throughout the entire play along the lines of their first dance: their pattern consists of constantly protesting that they are not what they really are—in love with one another. Although in the setting of Messina, they are unconventional lovers insofar as they constantly deny the attractiveness of love and of each other, their basic attraction is transparent even to the cloddish Claudio; we, as audience, recognized their particular pattern (and Shakespeare's) instantly, for it is a
comedic convention that the hero and the heroine cannot remain impervious to love. While Hero's plot later in the play proves that participation in even the most stylized courtship ritual is not without risk, still lovers here take minimal gambles; they become further acquainted by trading witticisms from behind masks that are literal as well as figurative.

In addition to describing the ways of love in Messina, the brief snatches of dialogue just quoted provide an interesting insight into the personality of a confusing minor character. Margaret is crucial to the plot for her cooperation with Borachio at "my lady's chamber window," but the possibility that she may have been knowingly disloyal to Hero, along with her absence from the wedding, renders her an essentially enigmatic character. Virtually the only clue to her real nature that we have is her brief exchange with Borachio at the dance, but even that is enough to tell us that she is vivacious, that she seems to enjoy the sort of verbal parry which characterizes Beatrice, and that she seems to regard Borachio with affection. We may conjecture, then, that she probably does not intend the harm which comes to Hero as a result of her scene with Borachio, especially since she never soliloquizes about any sort of moral dilemma. The hints given about her during the dance scene in II. i. certainly do not explain her absence from Hero's wedding, but the fact that Benedick jokes with her later in the play
(V.ii.) seems to indicate that Hero's family does not hold Margaret responsible. At any rate, the flirtation between Margaret and Borachio at the dance provides an interesting foil to the exchange between Benedick and Beatrice: both men attempt to keep their feelings from being stomped upon, while both women evade any commitment of their feelings. That any similarity exists at all in the conversation of such disparate couples suggests that their exchanges—or more correctly, their postures—conform to a preconceived model.

A. P. Rossiter writes

Without striving to make too much of it, the dance in II.i. is beautifully apposite. The couples walk their round, two by two, all masked; and all are using words to back the disguises of false faces with trivial deceit. ... The bal masque is only a game of seeming; yet it is a most apt symbol of the whole. The vizor is half deceit, half no deceit: you can never be sure. And in the social order and shared delight of the dance—all moving to the controlling rhythm, in their appointed patterns—there is too the emblem of the harmony in which all will conclude: as the play does, with another dance, all the vizors laid aside.2

While I am not certain that all of the players' vizors, figuratively speaking, are laid aside at the play's end, Rossiter is quite right in noting that the pattern of courtship in Messina involves some measure of deceit; perhaps Beatrice has something like this in mind when she tells Hero "there is measure in every thing" (II.i.71-72).
The first mention of song in *Much Ado* is Beatrice's complaint to Don Pedro that "I may sit in a corner and cry 'Heigh-ho for a husband!'" (II.i.319-320), and for the remainder of the play, songs provide an interesting commentary on the play's action. The first full song is sung by Balthasar in II.iii., and we have already seen that Benedick reacts to the staged romanticism with talk that is full of animal imagery. The argument of that song is a strange one:

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 (II.iii.62-69).

"Men were deceivers ever" applies to several characters in the play in various senses: Don John and Borachio in their deception of Claudio; Leonato, Benedick, Antonio, and the Friar in their ruse over the "death" of Hero; and even Benedick's deception of himself about his real feelings for Beatrice. In fact, "to one thing constant never" prefigures Benedick's final conclusion that "man is a giddy thing" (V. iv.108); while the application of inconstancy to Benedick is heartening because it implies that he cannot be constant to his vow never to love or marry, it also implies that he can never be constant to Beatrice. At any rate, the argument of the song is essentially the argument of comedy, as it urges us to forget, even if momentarily, our "sounds of woe" by
converting them to "hey nonny nonny"; similarly, through our participation as audience in the artifice of the theatre, we may forget our own troubles for at least the duration of the play. Don Pedro concludes the musical interlude by trying to bring the abstract notion of romantic love a bit closer to the situation at hand: "I pray thee get us some excellent music; for tomorrow night we would have it at the Lady Hero's chamber window" (II.iii.85-87).

Shakespeare associates music with romantic love throughout Much Ado, and immediately prior to the conversation that Benedick "overhears," the playwright uses music as a vehicle for illustrating the comic inconsistency that is already present in Benedick's thinking as he contemplates love. In his long soliloquy at the beginning of II.iii., Benedick complains of Claudio's behavior in speech that is laced with battle imagery, as we have seen, but he also speaks of the fact that Claudio is now literally marching to a different drummer: "I have known when there was no music in him but the drum and the fife, and now he had rather hear the tabor and the pipe" (II.iii.12-15). Benedick goes on to vow that "one woman shall not come into my grace" (II.iii.29-30), but he immediately follows this with the assumption that there will be one woman: "Rich she shall be, that's certain" (II.iii.30). As he goes on to list the attributes of the ideal woman, he includes the fact that she should be an "excellent musician" (II.iii.34), although
he has just sneered at the "tabor and the pipe." Clearly, then, Benedick is ripe for the deception that Don Pedro and Claudio practice upon him. In fact, Claudio will later judge the success of their deception in a musical jest about Benedick's "jesting spirit, which is now crept into a lute-string, and now govern'd by stops" (III.ii.59-60).

Although Hero and Margaret employ musical imagery in their goading of Beatrice, she is not quite so willing to go along with the metaphor, as the following scene shows:

   Hero. Why, how now? Do you speak in the sick tune?
   Beat. I am out of all other tune, methinks.
   Marg. Clap's into 'Light a' love'; that goes without a burden. Do you sing it, and I'll dance it.
   Beat. Ye light a' love with your heels! then if your husband have stables enough, you'll see he shall lack no barns (III.iv.41-49).

Beatrice's defensiveness is an indication that she, too, associates music with romance—and that the latter is not far from her mind. She continues, "By my troth, I am exceeding ill. Heigh-ho!" (III.iv.53-54); here we recall her earlier reference to the song "heigh-ho for a Husband" at II.i.320. Margaret realizes the connections to the earlier song as she jests, "For a hawk, a horse, or a husband?" (III.iv.55). When we remember Benedick's unknowing readiness to reverse his position on love, the implication of this scene with Beatrice would seem to be that she is not so ready as Benedick to own up to her affection for him.
The next song in the play does not grace so happy an occasion; in fact, it is a dirge for Hero. Leonato has charged Claudio, "Hang her an epitaph upon her tomb, / And sing it to her bones, sing it tonight" (V.i.284-285). Claudio dutifully responds with the following 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's dirge serves two purposes in the scene. First, as a sort of ritual, magical incantation, it restores to Hero her lost reputation, since it is performed in public (albeit at midnight). Secondly, it almost literally conjures her back from the "dead," as Claudio's willingness to perform the penance signals to Leonato that he is, after all, worthy of Hero. Claudio has accomplished what the first song urged--the conversion of woe to song--although here, the song will have the therapeutic effect of restoring Hero to him rather than simply helping him to momentarily forget his troubles.

The tone of the play finally begins to lighten up a bit, and we find Benedick singing his own love song:

'The god of love,
That sits above,
And knows me, and knows me,
How pitiful I deserve'--(V.ii.26-41).
Benedick's apologies about his rhyming recall those of Balthasar about his singing. Benedick, too, has converted his sighs to "hey nonny nonny" in yet another sense: he has accomplished a transformation in his attitude to love that has enabled him to convert his sighs over ridicule from Beatrice and isolation from Claudio into a love song of his own. And like Claudio's dirge, Benedick's small song conjures his lover, for Beatrice enters the orchard at that moment. In the sense that singing a song and participating, as an audience, in a play are similar, Shakespeare signals to us that now our woes, too, have undergone a change.

At any rate, a change of mood is certainly evident at the play's end; Much Ado is given a vaguely symmetrical structure by the dancing (and, presumably, feasting) which ends the play and echoes the feast and masque at the play's beginning. This rather formal structure is in keeping, too, with the ritualized patterns of courtship in Messina; the elaborate system of vows, eavesdroppings, deceptions, and songs is drawn to an appropriate close with Benedick's "Strike up, pipers" (V.iv.128-129). The return to merriment remains ambiguous, though: Don John must still be dealt with tomorrow, and there exists a real question as to the future success of the marriage of Claudio and Hero. Even Beatrice and Benedick retain the elaborate posturings right up to the end:

Bene. They swore that you were almost sick for me.
Beat. They swore that you were well-nigh dead for me.

Bene. 'Tis no matter. Then you do not love me?

Beat. No, truly, but in friendly recom-pense (V.iv.79-83).

And only a few lines later,

Bene. . . .Come, I will have thee, but by this light, I take thee for pity.

Beat. I would not deny you, but by this good day, I yield upon great persua-sion, and partly to save your life, for I was told you were in a con-sumption (V.iv.92-97).

Whatever the degree of optimism we choose to enjoy about the futures of the two sets of lovers, the music and dance of the final scene carry a heightened meaning as a result of the changes that these images have undergone in the course of the play: music has symbolized, at various times, revelry, ritual courtship, romantic love and marriage, the conquering of painful realities by their conversion to art, the restoration of a damaged reputation, and the qualified acceptance of the necessity of love. We are left, then, with a more subtle appreciation of the psychology of the play's action.
Credit goes to Dr. J. Dennis Huston, who pointed out to me Margaret's absence from Hero's wedding.

Chapter VI
In Conclusion

What, then, has been accomplished in Much Ado by Shakespeare's use of these three patterns of imagery? Above all, an ambiguity in the resolution of the comedy, which results from the dual nature of these images. Battle, for example, is a horror that some of Much Ado's characters have undergone very recently, but it is also a figurative image for the way in which lovers in Messina try to hide their vulnerability. Similarly, animal imagery conjures up simultaneous visions of natural, spontaneous energy, and sub-human lust. Banquet imagery, too, has a dual nature: food symbolizes both community and appetite, while the image of the masque recalls both community and deception in the context of the play. Thus it is entirely appropriate that, in a play about the deception which pervades all levels of social and private life in Messina, the central images used by the characters should remain ambiguous because of the constantly changing meanings that these images carry.

That such an unconventional concern for ambivalence occurs in comedies where, according to Frye, the "drama of the green world" is the simple, clearcut "triumph of life over the waste land" has not gone unnoted.¹ In Dualities in Shakespeare,² for example, Marion Smith addresses this "double view of life" in a discussion of the Sonnets in which he mentions the ambivalence of many of the images.
And Charles R. Lyons, in Shakespeare and the Ambiguity of Love's Triumph, treats several comedies in which "love's triumph" is far from complete; unfortunately, Much Ado is not among them, although it certainly could be.

The triumph of love in Messina is surely ambiguous. All of her citizens are preoccupied with love and marriage, but no one is married at the time of the play. The most dazzling couple, Beatrice and Benedick, have been brought together through deception and retain their elaborately-posed indifference for one another up to the play's end, and Benedick rationalizes his love and marriage with the dispassionate conclusion that "man is a giddy thing." The other couple to be married, Hero and Claudio, have been separated and then reunited in a complicated series of deceptions in which they have barely spoken to one another. War has been an image for love, animals have been images of lovers, and banquets have symbolized both deception and appetite. Even the structure of Much Ado preserves this ambiguity: the dance at the end reflects the masque at the beginning, and thereby suggests that the deceptions have not ended.

The images and the action of Much Ado remain in a kind of dynamic suspension. Love's triumph is ambivalent because of the strange imagery used to portray it: the images and the action of the play shape each other so that we cannot
precisely know when characters use the imagery to describe their ambiguous feelings, or when their feelings are ambiguous because, in Messina, language itself is ambiguous. Thus, it is not enough to say, paraphrasing Clemen, that *Much Ado* is characteristic of the middle-to-late comedies because the imagery is an organic part of the whole. In *Much Ado*, the imagery is the whole: language in Messina (and in our world) is a slippery enterprise, and it constructs the necessarily false world in which we live.
Notes

Chapter VI


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