

Love and Friendship in William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*

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"It is love (*amor*) from which the word "friendship (*amicitia*) is derived."

—Cicero's *De amicitia*¹

Benedick is not in Beatrice's "books," and if he were, she would "burn" down her study. We understand the reason for her feelings several lines later when they meet:

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 . . .

(1.1.112-19)²

¹ *Much Ado About Nothing* represents influential teachings from Cicero's *De amicitia*, a dialogue that defined the ideal of *verae amicitiae* or "true friendship" and prescribed its precepts. At the time of *Much Ado*'s composition in 1598, Cicero's *De amicitia* was translated in grammar schools, and, by the end of the sixteenth-century, John Tiptoft's English translation was widely read in William Caxton's printed edition. On *De amicitia*'s basic teachings and their importance, see Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 1-8. Both here and throughout, I cite Cicero from the Loeb Classical Library series, *De senectute, De amicitia, De divinatione*, trans. William Armistead Falconer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923); hereafter, abbreviated as *De amicitia*. The quotation above is at 8.26, and I have adjusted its punctuation.

² All citations from Shakespeare are from *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, 5th ed., ed. David Bevington (New York: Longman, 2004). Hereafter cited internally.

To claim a person is not “in your books” means such a one isn’t in favor with you, and this encounter reveals why the play is famous as a battle of the sexes.

Yet disputes like the one above also illustrate how much these two must change in order to become friends with one another in time to rescue Beatrice’s cousin, Hero. Much later in the play, when Beatrice challenges Benedick to defend Hero from false accusations of promiscuity, Benedick responds by taking up “a man’s office” (4.1.266). He will protect Hero’s reputation and, with such a pledge, become Lady Disdain’s “friend” (264). In turn, Beatrice will transform her contempt not just into courtesy but also into love. What, though, did their conversation about friendship mean?³

Benedick begins this crucial exchange with Beatrice just after Hero has been publicly accused of sleeping with someone other than her betrothed. Both characters have different objectives or rhetorical purposes.⁴ Benedick desires to confess his love to Beatrice for the first time, but Beatrice, though already in love with Benedick herself, remains in shock over Claudio’s mistreatment of Hero. Their conversation begins with Beatrice in tears as Benedick seeks to console her:

BENEDICK Surely I do believe your fair cousin is wronged.

³ For an introduction to friendship in the early modern period, see Carolyn James and Bill Kent’s “Renaissance Friendship: Traditional Truths and Dissenting Voices” in *Friendship: A History*, ed. Barbara Caine (New York: Routledge, 2009), 111-164, and Laurens J. Mills, *One Soul in Bodies Twain: Friendship in Tudor and Stuart Literature* (Bloomington, Ind.: The Principia Press, 1937). On Shakespeare’s treatment of friendship, see Tom MacFaul, *Male Friendship in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴ In a theatrical sense, “objectives” refer to what a character wants or seeks to accomplish. For classically trained actors, objectives emerge from a close-reading of the script. See Bertram Joseph, *Acting Shakespeare* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1960), 110, who claims that an actor’s “preparation of a role” is a “matter of attaining intellectual knowledge of what the words mean and why the character has to use them; in this way we find out the emotion expressed in them and the character’s *objective*” (my emphasis). On rhetoric and performance, see Travis Curtright, *Shakespeare’s Dramatic Persons* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016).

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

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.

(4.1.259-266)

Shakespeare plays with two notions of the word “friend” in the exchange above. The first is unspoken and refers to “a person with whom one has developed a close and informal relationship of mutual trust and intimacy.”⁵ Benedick and Beatrice, in other words, freely and honestly exchange ideas and feelings with one another.⁶ This mutual trust marks a change from their previous battles of wits. As the conspiracy against Hero unfolds, both transition from comic banter to a serious and honest deliberation of how to handle calumny. With such honesty, the second notion of “friend” is clearly articulated by Beatrice as that of an ally or “a person who takes the same side as another in war, a political contest or debate.”⁷ Only an ally of Beatrice can take up a “man's office” and defend Hero in the political context of restoring Hero and her family's honor.

Thus, the term of “friend” as a “man's office” invokes the customs of allegiances and duels. In Baldesar Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, we learn

⁵ All definitions of the word “friend” are from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) under “friend, n. and adj.”; the definition above is the first listing of “friend” as a noun. Hereafter abbreviated as *OED*.

⁶ Cf., *De amicitia*, 6.22, which states that friends “may dare discuss anything.” For Cicero, friendship requires sincerity, straight talk, or conversation without fear or reserve.

⁷ See “friend” as noun, 2.b in the *OED*.

that “the principal and true profession of the Courtier must be that of arms,” which should be exercised “with vigor” and in “faithful” pledge to “whomever he serves.” The parallel to arms and service among women is “the name of purity.”⁸ A gentleman who sullies himself with cowardice, therefore, compares to a woman who loses her reputation for chastity. Put otherwise, the slander of Hero destroys her social status in Messina, and, as a result, there are martial demands for any courtier who claims to defend her honor.

Benedick’s bravery is not in question here, but his friendships are. Beatrice knows that Hero’s reputation may be restored only by a successful duel against the slanderer.⁹ Hence she will command Benedick to “kill Claudio” (288) at the very point when she and Benedick seem to be most intimate with one another. After Benedick declares to Beatrice, “I do love nothing in the world so well as you” (267), he invites her to test him:

BENEDICK Come, bid me do anything for thee.

BEATRICE Kill Claudio.

BENEDICK Ha! Not for the wide world.

BEATRICE You kill me to deny it. Farewell.

BENEDICK Beatrice.

BEATRICE In faith, I will go.

BENEDICK We’ll be friends first.

⁸ Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier: The Singleton Translation*, ed. Daniel Javitch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 24. On the *Book of the Courtier* as Shakespeare’s source, see Philip D. Collington, “‘Stuffed with all honourable virtues’: *Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Book of the Courtier*” *Studies in Philology* 103.3 (Summer, 2006): 281-312.

⁹ Leonato’s own challenge on Hero’s behalf is rejected because of his age. See *Much Ado*, 5.1.61-74.

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

BENEDICK Is Claudio thine enemy?

(287-299)

To duel on behalf of Beatrice's family, it turns out, is a "man's office" but not Benedick's because of his friendship with Claudio, who is Hero's accuser. By implication, Benedick is neither a true lover nor friend of Beatrice. When Beatrice alleges that Benedick would like to be "friends" without fighting her enemies, she means that he would like to be her lover without being her ally.¹⁰ To Beatrice's mind, to be a lover without a loyal alliance between them disqualifies Benedick as both lover and friend.

We can now see how the different objectives of both characters correspond to distinct though related ideas of friendship. Beatrice requires a champion with an official alliance to her family while Benedick wishes to become her "friend," a romantic partner.¹¹ Marriage to Beatrice would encompass both ally and lover, but Benedick must authenticate his love first. As a result, the exchanges above conflate Benedick's roles as a suitor with those of a "friend" who will offer Beatrice faithful service in expectation of becoming her spouse.

The combination of these senses of friendship need not reduce the characters to lovers alone. To be sure, Beatrice tests Benedick's love for her in asking him to

¹⁰ Cf., *De amicitia*, 22.84-5: "... those who slight virtue and yet think that they have friends, perceive their mistake at last when some grievous misfortune forces them to put their friends to the test. Therefore, I repeat the injunction, for it should be said again and again: you should love your friend after you have appraised him; you should not appraise him after you have begun to love him."

¹¹ See "friend" as a noun, 6: "romantic or sexual partner, a lover" (*OED*).

challenge Claudio, but her trial mandates a noteworthy transformation of Benedick's allegiances first. From lovers, they emerge as confederates in defense of Hero's honor, and from this form of friendship as an alliance they will advance towards marriage. I will return to the scene above at the end of this essay, but for now I want to emphasize how the friendship of Benedick and Beatrice is just as important as the fact that these two former adversaries become lovers.

I.

To grasp the significance of Benedick's transformation, let us turn to the dramatic circumstances of the play's opening scene. There, Shakespeare presents a particular form of male friendship that is fashioned by wartime exploits.¹² Don Pedro returns after successfully defeating his half-brother, the bastard Don John, and other unspecified enemies in battle. Pedro lost "few of any sort, and none of name," which means no gentlemen or landed aristocrats were killed in battle under his command. "A victory is twice itself," Leonato exclaims in reply, "when the achiever brings home full numbers" (1.1.7-9). Two of these gentlemen under Pedro's command are Signor Benedick of Padua and a "young Florentine called Claudio," (10-11), and both are distinguished for their honorable service.¹³ Claudio "hath indeed better bettered expectation," performing the "feats of a lion" on the battlefield despite his youthful age (15-16). Benedick, too, "hath done good service" in war (45) and returns "as pleasant as he ever was" (35-6). In fact, "from the crown of his head to the sole of

¹² On friendship and arms, see "Military Prowess" and "Honour and Reputation" in Keith Thomas, *The Ends of Life: Roads to Fulfilment in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 44-77, 147-186.

¹³ The play opens in Messina, a harbor city in the northeast of Sicily, which was under the control of Spain during Shakespeare's time. Don Pedro is Spanish, but his two main soldiers are Italian.

this foot," Don Pedro later claims of Benedick, "he is all mirth" (3.2.8-10).

Benedick's humor distinguishes him just as does Claudio's expertise in fencing.¹⁴

Despite the differences in rank, skill, or wit, these three share a camaraderie born upon the battlefield, a soldierly brotherhood. They achieve equality with one another because of bravery and shared risk; each craves and protects not only his honor but also that of his comrade.¹⁵ All three return as heroes and have already made peace with the vanquished Don John, who will enter the city with Don Pedro's blessing.

In the same scene, however, Beatrice quickly undermines the report of Benedick's valor and, more subtly, raises questions about the basis of his friendship with Pedro and Claudio. She begins by asking how many soldiers Benedick killed, as if she cannot believe he could be successful on the battlefield. The Messenger replies that Benedick is a paragon courtier, "a lord to a lord, a man to a man, stuffed with all honourable virtues" (53-4), rather like the embodiment of a true gentleman, both courageous and courteous.

Beatrice counters the latter by claiming that Benedick "wears his faith but as the fashion of his hat," and that "he hath every month a new sworn brother" (70-71, 67-68). In her estimation, Benedick is neither a soldier nor a true friend but a fraud or an opportunist. He is "pleasant" with other men and entertains others more than he ennobles them.¹⁶ So Beatrice seeks to rescue Claudio. "God help the noble

¹⁴ Leonato refers to Claudio's "nice fence, and active practice" (5.1.75), a testimony to Claudio's skill and training. See, too, Antonio's threat to Claudio at line 84.

¹⁵ Cf. *De amicitia*, 19.69: "But it is of the utmost importance in friendship that superior and inferior should stand on an equality."

¹⁶ Beatrice later discounts Benedick's services and re-describes his humor by calling him "the Prince's jester, a very dull fool" (2.1.131).

Claudio,” she cries, “if he have caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand pounds ere ’a be cured” (83-85). Leonato explains away Beatrice’s comment as “a kind of merry war” (58), which involves skirmishes of wit rather than arms, but her attack also undermines the basis of male friendship he exemplifies. If Benedick is all things to all lords and all men, he might also be unfaithful, a “brother” only in name, who merely plays the role of a loyal friend.¹⁷

We learn that Benedick is better than Beatrice imagines, but her suggestion of contrived associations—friendships based upon the pretense of honesty and trust—permeates the play. In an early instance, Claudio easily believes Don John’s report that Pedro betrayed him. Though Pedro had actually wooed Hero on Claudio’s behalf, Claudio reflects in soliloquy:

’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.

(2.1.168-171)

Here friendship among men in war becomes an individual competition for love during peacetime. As a result, friendship devolves into Claudio’s notion of every man for his own eyes. “Let every eye negotiate for itself,” he concludes, “and trust no agent” because “beauty is a witch” that destroys the “faith” or trust upon which friendship should be built (172-74).

¹⁷ Benedick’s alleged lack of faithfulness stems from Beatrice’s report that she once gave her heart to Benedick. She confesses: “once before he won it of me with false dice” (2.1.267).

Later, Don John strikes again by feigning friendship with both Claudio and Pedro in order to convince them that Hero is sexually active. It would “better fit your honour,” Don John advises Claudio, to refuse Hero at the altar (3.2.109). Don Pedro immediately associates his honor with that of Claudio, and pledges to him: “And as I wooed for thee to obtain her, I will join with thee, to disgrace her” (120-21). What emerges in both Claudio and Don Pedro is a superficial apprehension of events and persons triggered by misplaced assumptions about whose words are trustworthy, a distillation of Beatrice’s original critique of male friendship.

II.

Yet *Much Ado* presents a typology of friendship. In contrast to Don John’s feigned good will and actual malice is the authentic benevolence of Don Pedro for Benedick and Beatrice herself. Don Pedro believes Benedick is not “the unhopefullest husband” he knows of (2.1.359-60) and that Beatrice “were an excellent wife for Benedick” (335). Don Pedro knows what the end of the play reveals; that Benedick and Beatrice are in love with one another, despite themselves.¹⁸ To trick these two into admitting their feelings for one another, Don Pedro employs a simple deception. He, Claudio, and Leonato will speak of Beatrice’s love of Benedick when Benedick is in earshot, and Beatrice will overhear a similarly contrived conversation about Benedick’s love for her. In this way, the friends of Benedick and Beatrice will play as “love gods” to them, replacing Cupid’s arrows with their own scheme (366-68).

¹⁸ Though Benedick and Beatrice publicly fight, they write love sonnets about one another in secret. See 5.4.83-96.

Don Pedro's ruse not only succeeds but also reveals something important about the character of the people he dupes. When Don Pedro speaks of Beatrice's love, he adds that Benedick's habit of insulting women represents a "contemptible spirit" (2.3.182).¹⁹ In lines meant for Benedick to overhear, Don Pedro tells Claudio: "I love Benedick well / and I could wish he would modestly examine himself, / to see how much he is unworthy so good a lady" (205-7). Self-examination takes immediate effect. "I hear how I am censured," Benedick speaks in soliloquy after his friends' departure, "they say / I will bear myself proudly if I perceive the love come / from her" (221-3). He concludes: "I must not seem proud; happy are they that hear their detract- / tions and can put them to the mending" (224-26). Benedick wishes not to "seem" proud to his friends and, therefore, he will accept in humility Beatrice's love. His profession of love, though, follows from amending his "contemptible spirit." Such alacrity re-defines him as noble and therefore a good match for Beatrice.

Likewise, Beatrice responds to the criticism leveled against her with repentance. In a second overhearing scene, Hero calls Beatrice "self-endearèd," or full of self-love, and exclaims, "Nature never framed a woman's heart / Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice" (3.1.56, 49-50). In reply, Beatrice asks, "What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true? / Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?" (107-8). Like Benedick, she resolves to change and declares in soliloquy:

Contempt, farewell, and maiden pride, adieu!

No glory lives behind the back of such.

¹⁹ Bevington glosses "contemptible" as "contemptuous" in his note for 2.3.182.

And Benedick, love on; I will requite thee,
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand.

(109-12)

As Beatrice is made to see how she appears to her friends, she is able to become a better, less cynical person. The influence of friends upon her, like with Benedick, serves in an advisory role; friends point out faults in need of correction, but the purpose of amendment must come from within the one corrected. In contrast to Katherine from Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, Beatrice will tame her own "wild heart," and that change will allow her to admit her feelings for Benedick.

What finally emerges, then, in Don John and Don Pedro's schemes are moral contrasts about and within the context of friendship. Don John's friendships, like his advice, camouflage a stratagem of revenge, a use of deceit to harm others.²⁰ Where Don John's malice sows discord and shames an innocent lady, Don Pedro's good intentions towards Benedick and Beatrice make gentle corrections of them.²¹ Otherwise put, if Claudio is quick to believe the worst of others, Benedick and Beatrice are willing to consider the worst about themselves.²² Claudio's self-

²⁰ Cicero establishes honesty as essential to friendship: "As, therefore, it is characteristic of true friendship both to give and to receive advice and, on the one hand, to give it with all freedom of speech, but without harshness, and on the other hand, to receive it patiently, but without resentment, so nothing is to be considered a greater bane of friendship than . . . false-hearted men who say . . . *nothing with a view to truth [nihil ad veritatem]*" (*De amicitia*, 24.90, my emphasis). Don John represents such a one, a "false-hearted" man who feigns good will and affection. "Hypocrisy," Cicero emphasizes, is "wicked under all circumstances, because it pollutes truth and takes away the power to discern it, but it is also especially inimical to friendship, since it utterly destroys sincerity, without which the word friendship can have no meaning" (*Ibid.*, 24.92).

²¹ *Benevolentia* and *caritas* are essential to friendship, what Falconer translates as "mutual good will and affection" at *Ibid.*, 6.20; and see 6.21-22.

²² Cicero writes that true friends will accept criticism because "it is absurd that men who are admonished do not feel vexation at what ought to vex them, but do feel it at what ought not; for they are annoyed, not at the sin, but at the reproof." Instead, a virtuous person should "grieve for the

concern and distrust cause him to hate the same Hero he had just professed to love.²³ Benedick and Beatrice's honest self-examination, however, frees them to reconsider marriage, the very institution that both previously had decried.²⁴ In turns of the play's logic, Claudio's disdain for Hero is the result of lie, but Benedick and Beatrice's love emerges from their ability to recognize difficult truths about themselves. Though Don Pedro's helps Benedick and Beatrice recognize these truths, his method lacks the candor perfect friendships should include.²⁵ To find an example of good will, sincere speech, and mutual love of justice in friendship, we must return to the scene with which this essay begins.

III.

In 4.1, Benedick confesses to Beatrice, "I do believe your fair cousin is wronged," yet he still acts as if Claudio isn't responsible. "Is Claudio thine enemy?" he asks her (259-60, 299). Such a position strikes Beatrice as absurd. Benedick believes Hero is wronged but will not accept the fact that Claudio wronged her. In response, Beatrice recounts how Claudio raised Hero's hopes only to shame her on the day of her wedding with "public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancour" (303-4). Hero was "wronged," "slandered"; "she is undone" (311-12). In fact, Beatrice would

offence and rejoice at its correction" (Ibid., 24. 90). Beatrice and Benedick respond to correction with the characteristics of *verae amicitiae*.

²³ Claudio's shaming of Hero makes Don John his friend but turns Leonato and Benedick into enemies. Thus, Claudio's decision illustrates Cicero's teaching about those with "ears closed" to the truth: "Now we must despair of the safety of the man whose ears are so closed to truth that he cannot hear what is true from a friend. For there is shrewdness in that well-known saying of Cato . . . 'Some men are better served by their bitter-tongued enemies than by their sweet-smiling friends; because the former often tell the truth, the latter, never'" (Ibid., 24.89-91). See Leonato and Benedick's rebukes of Claudio in *Much Ado* at 5.1.58-71 and at lines 145-49.

²⁴ For examples of Beatrice and Benedick's thoughts on marriage before they acknowledge their love of one another, see 2.1.54-60 and 1.1.228-235.

²⁵ "Yet in friendship," Cicero writes, "there is nothing false, nothing pretended;" everything "is genuine and comes of its own accord" (*De amicitia*, 8.26-7).

like to duel Claudio herself or find a friend to do so on her behalf. “Oh that I were a man for his sake!” she exclaims, “Or that I had any friend would be a man for my sake!” But Benedick’s refusal means that “manhood is melted into curtsies,” and if she “cannot be a man” herself, she will die a woman in grief (316-18, 321-22).

Benedick’s refusal is curious because of what he had promised to Leonato just before. After Hero is accused, Leonato threatens that if Claudio and Don Pedro are proven wrong, even the “proudest of them shall well hear of it,” for Leonato is not without “friends.” Leonato thunders that Hero’s accusers

. . . 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 thoroughly. (192-99)

To “quite me of them” means that Leonato will avenge himself on them, though Leonato, like Beatrice, knows his family will require a champion, a friend. Benedick, too, recognizes precisely what Leonato means. So he replies to Leonato:

. . . though you know my inwardness and love
Is very much unto the prince and Claudio,
Yet, by mine honour, I will deal in this,
As secretly and justly as your soul
Should with your body (245-9).

Benedick’s “inwardness and love” recalls the first definition of friendship, a “relationship of mutual trust and intimacy,” which Benedick now contrasts with “honour,” or a just course of action. The male friendships fashioned on the

battlefield, it turns out, are now detached from chivalry. In context, Benedick is willing to abandon his former “friends” in order to become Leonato’s ally in defense of Hero. Alternatively put, Benedick’s friends have betrayed him with their unethical conduct. In either formulation, Benedick emerges as the play’s most noble courtier.

Why, then, did Benedick initially refuse Beatrice’s plea? According to him, Don Pedro and Claudio “have the very bent of honour,” and so Benedick believes “If their wisdoms be misled in this, / The practice of it lives in John the bastard, / Whose spirits toil in frame of villainies” (186-90). Here is the reason why Benedick initially refuses Beatrice’s request to challenge Claudio. Benedick believes Hero is wronged but doubts that Claudio is responsible for wronging her.

Thus, we return to the contrary objectives or motivations with which these characters began their dialogue. Benedick wishes to offer his “hand” in love to Beatrice, but she believes he must extend his “hand” in defense of Hero first:

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.

BENEDICK 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. (323-34)

Ultimately, Benedick and Beatrice are friends and lovers because they share the same idea and pursuit of justice.²⁶ “I will kiss your hand, and so I leave you” is an embedded stage direction for Benedick to kiss Beatrice’s hand, but what he does after that kiss is less clear. “By this hand, Claudio shall render me a dear account” Benedick says. If “this hand” refers to the one that holds a sword, Benedick might hold his hand in the air before placing it on his sword’s hilt. Alternatively, he may hold Beatrice’s hand after kissing it, swearing by *her* hand and their love to fulfill his charge. In either case, when Benedick becomes “engaged,” his betrothal to Beatrice and his pledge to defend Hero stem from the same oath.²⁷

With such a promise, Benedick and Beatrice may be understood as lovers *and* friends.²⁸ Instead of reading *Much Ado* as Benedick’s choice of love over friendship or of Beatrice over Claudio, we can see Beatrice as Benedick’s lover and true friend. Benedick asks the question of his conscience—“Think you in your soul the Count Claudio / hath wronged Hero?”—to the person he most trusts, Beatrice. When Beatrice wishes that she were a man so that she could defend her cousin herself, she offers Benedick the opportunity to change his alliances. More than that, Benedick

²⁶ Beatrice casts aside the social constraints of her gender not only in her outspoken ways but also because of her concerns for honor.

²⁷ The pun is mine. Shakespeare uses the term “engaged” not in the contemporary sense of an engagement to marriage but as an adjective to signify one who is bound or sworn. Even so, Benedick means he is bound both to Beatrice and to Hero.

²⁸ Cicero distinguishes ordinary associations from true friendships on the basis of virtue. Friendship is given by “nature” as “the handmaid of virtue, not as a comrade of vice.” United by good will, friends are defined by the following characteristics: both parties subdue base desires for gain; delight in what is “equitable and accords with law”; demand only “honourable and just” things from one another; and cherish and love each other (*De amicitia*, 22.82-83). In 4.1, Shakespeare shows that Beatrice’s request of Benedick to challenge Claudio is “honourable and just” while being a manifestation of love; both are signs of virtuous friendship.

may become her “other self,” a friend who shares with her a single purpose, the restoration of Hero’s reputation.²⁹ Though these two lovers are “too wise to woo peaceably,” they are wise enough to recognize in one another a soul mate.³⁰

Indeed, the play ends in a celebration of love and friendship. Don John’s plot is discovered, the duel avoided, and Don Pedro, Benedick, and Claudio are all reconciled. This original trio, though, will become friends again on new terms. Benedick and Claudio will be kinsman through marriage; both will wed their respective brides on the same day. Benedick tells Claudio to “live unbruised, and love my cousin,” Hero (5.4.109). And when Don Pedro mocks Benedick as “the married man,” the latter rejoins, “Get thee a wife, get thee a wife” (97-8, 120). Benedick will rejoin his Prince and Claudio, but as a “married man,” the friend and lover of Beatrice.

²⁹ Cf., *Ibid.*, 22.82: “the fair thing is, first of all, to be a good man yourself and then to seek another like yourself.” Cicero’s precepts—like a true friend is “another self,” or that friends share a single soul (21.80, 6.23, 25.92) — were proverbial to Elizabethans already. If 4.1 is read in light of Cicero’s teaching, Benedick becomes a “good man” by accepting a “man’s office,” and, in doing so, he becomes like Beatrice, her other self, a friend.

³⁰ Though Cicero considered perfect friendship as a relationship exclusive to men, Shakespeare didn’t hesitate to apply *De amicitia*’s teaching to women. In *As You Like It*, for example, Celia rebukes Rosalind in what amounts to a reformulation of a friend as another self. When Rosalind tries to distinguish her banishment from Celia’s own fate, Celia tells her friend, “Rosalind lacks then the love / Which teacheth thee that thou and I am one” (1.3.88-89). In *Much Ado*, Benedick and Beatrice become “one” through friendship before they share a union in marriage. In other words, the play shows how women can be friends with men like men *should be* friends with other men.