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English IV

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“Love and Murder”

The interaction between Benedict and Beatrice on page 117 is the first time they admit they love each other; it is also the moment the play seems to take a darker turn. Shakespeare combines these moments and juxtaposes the emotions of love and violence to remind us of their power and intersection.

Beatrices and Benedict’s confession of love is very sweet at first and starkly contrasts the betrayal of love that just took place between Claudio and Hero. It is in this respite of love that Shakespeare chooses to remind us that love is an irrational and intense emotion that will often cloud our judgment. Once the two admit their love, Beatrice asks Benidict to kill Claudio, avenging Hero, to prove his love. Benedict is initially hesitant but quickly changes his mind for Beatrice. Shakespeare makes it clear that it is his love for Beatrice that convinces him to kill his best friend, not any kind of change in feeling for Claudio. It is also not only romantic love that has this effect: Beatrice also very quickly decides Claudio needs to die because of her familial love for Hero. Whether or not Claudio deserves to die, Benedict and Beatrice quickly make the decision to kill him in a moment of love.

This scene also plays off the title “Much Ado About Nothing”. We usually don't give much value to love stories, at least in comparison to dramas and tragedies, but Shakespeare seems to be suggesting that the two are more closely connected than separate. In his story that is supposably about nothing, just love, quickly takes a turn toward utter violence during what should be the most love filled event: a wedding. He continues to play off this by rooting the violence in Benedict's love for Beatrice and Beatrice’s love for Hero. Love and violence may feel entirely separate, but they are both incredibly strong and consuming emotions that often intersect.