

# “LET ME BE THAT I AM AND SEEK NOT TO ALTER ME”

GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN ADAPTATIONS OF  
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

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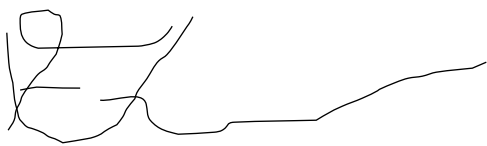
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## Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of gender and sexuality in two adaptations of Shakespeare's play *Much Ado About Nothing*: Kenneth Branagh's film *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993) and the Candle Wasters' web series *Nothing Much To Do* (2014). This thesis aims to answer the question of how the representation of gender and sexuality in the characters of Beatrice and Benedick changed through the two aforementioned adaptations. This thesis uses feminist theories on gender and sexuality to analyse how Benedick and Beatrice are represented in terms of gender, and how they are portrayed in terms of sexuality as a couple. This thesis argues that the film *Much Ado About Nothing* adheres stronger to traditional gender roles and traditional power relations in heterosexual couples than *Nothing Much To Do*. Both of these adaptations were made for a youthful demographic and it rapidly gained popularity among teenagers and young adults, but this thesis argues that the non-traditional way in which *Nothing Much To Do* represents their characters in terms of gender and sexuality is especially appealing to a young audience, as is evident from the age of the creators of the adaptation and the platform of YouTube on which it is housed.

Key words: William Shakespeare, Kenneth Branagh, the Candle Wasters, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Nothing Much To Do*, Judith Butler, Monique Wittig, Adaptations, Gender, Sexuality.

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## Introduction

“Let me be that I am, and do not seek to alter me.”<sup>1</sup> These are lines spoken by Don John, *Much Ado About Nothing*’s villain, and they illustrate how many people think how adaptations should be handled. This is, however, not how adaptations work: stories change through the years, especially stories as old as Shakespeare’s plays. Many of his plays have also been adapted to film. Some of his works have been adapted to web series on YouTube and therefore these adaptations and how they are interpreted have changed from the late sixteenth century. The representations of some characters have consequently changed as well. Because of these facts this thesis will focus on two adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*: *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993) and *Nothing Much To Do* (2014). The original play will not have a large role in the analysis in this thesis, since this thesis concentrates on modern interpretations of the play.

*Much Ado About Nothing* is one of Shakespeare’s comedies. Comedies of the Elizabethan era, and specifically Shakespearian comedies, are about getting “the right number of bodies in the right ratio of sexes”, and then trying to confine the women – who often do not conform to traditional patriarchal structures of the time.<sup>2</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter explains that in Shakespeare’s comedies the men have to try and manage female desire.<sup>3</sup> But Shakespearean comedies also have a more serious or tragic undertone, which in *Much Ado*

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1. William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing* (Ware, United Kingdom: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1995), I.iii.129.

2. Carol Chillington Rutter, “Looking at Shakespeare’s women on film” in *the Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on film*, ed. Russel Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 248.

3. Carol Chillington Rutter, “Looking at Shakespeare’s women on film” in *the Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on film*, ed. Russel Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 248.

*About Nothing* is Claudio's accusation and Hero's near-death experience.<sup>4</sup> Comedies are about managing gender and love while also handling a tragic event. A comedy ends with a resolution where the natural order is restored – usually with characters getting married – so a tragic event is needed to disrupt that natural order.<sup>5</sup>

This comedy conforms to that structure, but it also slightly deviates. *Much Ado About Nothing* is about two groups of people: one with Leonato as head and one with Don Pedro as head. Leonato's entourage consists, among others, of Beatrice and Hero, Don Pedro's crew exists, among others, of Don John, Benedick, and Claudio. The story seems to suggest that Beatrice and Benedick have loved each other a long time ago but that has passed now, and they mainly concern themselves with exchanging snide remarks. Claudio and Hero just fell in love and are much younger than Benedick and Beatrice. Don John is this story's main villain and tries to break up Claudio and Hero for fun. Hero and Claudio's wish to get married is cancelled for a moment when Don John's trick makes Claudio change his mind until he realises he has been tricked. Most characters, including Leonato and Don Pedro, engage in a plot to convince Benedick and Beatrice the other loves them unrequitedly and so making them fall in love.

The relationship between Claudio and Hero creates the main point of crisis in this play and it leads to Benedick and Beatrice working together. This thesis will nonetheless focus on Benedick and Beatrice's relationship because these characters express gender and sexuality in a more non-traditional way than Hero and Claudio. The relationship between Hero and Claudio will only be mentioned when it serves a function to the representation in gender and sexuality of Beatrice and Benedick. Benedick starts off as a masculine man, but Beatrice does not start

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4. Denton Jaques Snider, *System of Shakespeare's Dramas* (St. Louis: G. T. Jones and Company, 1877).

5. Denton Jaques Snider, *System of Shakespeare's Dramas* (St. Louis: G. T. Jones and Company, 1877).

off as traditionally feminine. She is more independent and outspoken than would be favourable in that time. Arthur F. Kinney described a good Elizabethan wife as someone who is “submissive to her husband” and “largely silent”, and a bad wife as “unruly” and “quarrelsome”, which is more in accordance with Beatrice’s personality.<sup>6</sup>

Only men could act on stage in Shakespeare’s time since there was a law prohibiting women from acting, and this meant that his plays often feature a small number of women: only sixteen percent of all characters in all of Shakespeare’s plays are female, and female characters have half the amount of lines that male characters have.<sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup> These male actors would often be under twenty-one years of age so that their voice would still be high enough to pass as feminine.<sup>9</sup> These boys would be cross-dressing to give the illusion of femininity. This comedy still has a number of women in it, but only two that feature as main characters. The modern audience often prefers to have a balance between male and female actors, and this is addressed in the 2014 adaptation by gender-swapping some of the characters. The main characters are not gender-swapped but many secondary characters have their gender changed, which does not affect the narrative significantly.

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6. Arthur F. Kinney, *Renaissance Drama an anthology of plays and entertainments*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 4.

7. Tim Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 304.

8. “Five astonishing facts of women in Shakespeare,” Oxford University Press’s Academic Insights for the Thinking World, published on 26 September 2015, accessed on 23 March 2019, <https://blog.oup.com/2015/09/shakespeare-women-facts/>

9. David Kathman, “How Old Were Shakespeare’s Boy Actors?,” in *Shakespeare Survey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 246.

Branagh's adaptation from 1993 is very faithful to the original text, using half of the original dialogue.<sup>10</sup> It is filmed in Italy, sticking to Shakespeare's original setting for the play. It does not gender-swap any of the characters from the play which all combined makes this adaptation very faithful to the source text. This adaptation is so close to the source text that doing a close reading of the play will not add any new narrative points to the discussion in this thesis. The film utilises a mixed cast of actors known for their parts in Shakespeare plays and actors famous in Hollywood, and a mix between American and English actors.<sup>11</sup> The film grossed \$36 million worldwide, which makes it one of the most financially lucrative and successful Shakespeare films ever. Many critics were positive about the adaptation, with one review saying "Kenneth Branagh's love for the material is contagious in this exuberant adaptation".<sup>12</sup> Some even go as far as to say that this particular adaptation triggered the popularity of Shakespeare adaptations and other classic adaptations in the 1990's.<sup>13</sup>

The 2014 web series adaptation is relatively popular, with the first video of the series having over 118 thousand views as of June 2019. It was created by the Candle Wasters, then a group of four women who met while studying in Auckland. The web series is set at a fictional New Zealand high school called Messina High and the story is told in vlog-style. The episodes are divided over three YouTube channels: one belonging to Hero and Beatrice, one belonging to Benedick, and one belonging to Ursula, Dogberry, and Verges. The episodes are vlogs, which often means the story is only shown from the perspective of the owner of the YouTube channel, though sometimes the camera is "observing" a scene and plainly displaying what

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10. Maurice Hindle, *Studying Shakespeare on Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 114.

11. Maurice Hindle, *Studying Shakespeare on Film*, 52.

12. "Much Ado About Nothing (1993)". Rotten Tomatoes, accessed on 20 April 2019, [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1045992\\_much\\_ado\\_about\\_nothing](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1045992_much_ado_about_nothing)

13. Maurice Hindle, *Studying Shakespeare on Film*, 54.

happened in a certain event. Benedick and Beatrice's channels would primarily show the main plot while Verges' channel would show the subplot. The main plot is shown from Beatrice and Benedick's point of view which means that the focus of the story is changed to those two characters and their relationship more than the relationship between Claudio and Hero, which is a slight departure from Shakespeare's play. The original lines from the play are only used as references or "inside jokes", otherwise all original phrasing is abandoned in this adaptation. Beatrice, Hero, Ursula, and Pedro all had their own social media accounts where they express their character's views on the situations happening in the web series. The series consists of 76 vlogs in the narrative and three that serve no narrative function. The series won many awards, one of which was "Best Literary Inspired Webseries of 2015" from the Literary-Inspired Webseries Awards. It won nine Literary-Inspired Webseries Awards in total.

Shakespeare's plays are a popular subject in academic research, but *Much Ado About Nothing* is one of the lesser studied plays. It has been researched in terms of gender, since the play has a unique portrayal of a woman in Beatrice. This means that Beatrice has often been the subject of academic research, but Benedick has not been researched as often. The adaptations of Shakespeare's works in the 1990's have been studied, but more recent adaptations have not received a similar attention.<sup>14</sup> The web series *Nothing Much To Do* has been researched in terms of its transmedia nature, but not in terms of its content or compared to other adaptations. Kenneth Branagh's 1993 adaptation has been studied multiple times, just like all of Branagh's adaptations. His adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing* has not often been studied with regard to gender or sexuality, but it has been studied on a number of other aspects such as ethnic diversity and a change in representation of themes. This is relevant because the play is known for playing with gender roles, so the adaptation originating from the

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14. Samuel Crowl, "Flamboyant Realist: Kenneth Branagh" in *the Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on film*, ed. Russel Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

nineties can have significant effects on how gender is expressed in the film. Feminist analyses seem to be less popular in academic spheres than they were 30 years ago, now favouring a more intersectional way of analysing literature.<sup>15</sup> This does not mean that feminist analyses have become useless:

Reflecting the integration of feminist approaches into departments of English and the institutionalization of interdisciplinary women's/gender studies, the widespread inclusion of feminist research in Shakespeare course syllabi, as well as in 'companions' to Shakespeare, attests to general recognition that gender relations are fundamental to Shakespeare's characters, plot structures, genres, poetics, theatre audience, and readership.<sup>16</sup>

Many aspects of Shakespeare's works are still analysed using feminist theories that have previously not been studied because of how the application of feminist theory has broadened over the years. Aspects such as female heroism, consent, incest, domestic labour, masculine style, early modern pedagogy, and relationships between female family members and their women and their servants have all been studied since 2002, showing that feminist analyses are

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15. Valerie Taub, "Introduction – Feminist Shakespeare Studies: cross currents, border crossing, conflicts, and contradictions," *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.

16. Valerie Taub, "Introduction – Feminist Shakespeare Studies: cross currents, border crossing, conflicts, and contradictions," 8.

still valuable.<sup>17 18 19 20 21 22 23</sup> Many of these do only focus on the plays and not on adapted versions of those plays, meaning that this thesis will bring a unique perspective to the field of feminist analyses of Shakespeare.

*Much Ado About Nothing* is still a rather popular play since it is often performed and adapted. Another recent adaptation was made in 2012 as a sort of passion project, and the play sees performance in 2019 ranging from the Sydney Opera House to *Free Shakespeare in the Park*.<sup>24 25 26</sup> This leads me to the question: How has the representation of gender and sexuality

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17. Mary Beth Rose, *Gender and Heroism in Early Modern English Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

18. Kathryn Schwarz, *What You Will: Gender, Contract, and Shakespearean Social Space* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

19. Maureen Quilligan, *Incest and Agency in Elizabeth's England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

20. Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

21. Amanda Bailey, *Flaunting: Style and the Subversive Male Body in Renaissance England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

22. Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn R. McPherson, *Performing Pedagogy in Early Modern England* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011).

23. Susan Frye and Karen Robertson, *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens: Women's Alliances in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

24. Jennifer Vineyard, "Joss Whedon on Much Ado About Nothing, Shakespeare-Buffy Parallels, and Avengers 2," Vulture, published on 6 June 2013, accessed on 25 May 2019, <https://www.vulture.com/2013/06/joss-whedon-much-ado-about-nothing-interview.html>

25. "Much Ado About Nothing," Public Theatre, accessed on 1 June 2019, <https://www.publictheater.org/Tickets/Calendar/PlayDetailsCollection/SITP/Much-Ado-2019/>

26. "Much Ado About Nothing," Sydney Opera House, accessed on 1 June 2019, <https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/events/whats-on/bell-shakespeare/2019/much-ado-about-nothing.html>

in the characters of Beatrice and Benedick changed through the different adaptations of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, focussing on the 1993 film with the same name and the 2014 web series *Nothing Much To Do*?

The field of adaptation studies has only recently added transmedia studies since it is a relatively new medium, with the earliest examples by Henry Jenkins from the nineties.<sup>27</sup> Jenkins, principal theorist in the field of transmedia studies, sees transmedia storytelling as something that expands the existing work which Marie-Laure Ryan calls transfictionality in the Oxford Handbook of Transmedia Studies.<sup>28</sup> It should therefore add new information to the already established narrative: it is “content across multiple media platforms”.<sup>29</sup> This is often done by pretending that characters from the narrative have their own social media accounts and post as themselves, when in reality a team (or sometimes the actor) constructs those social media posts. These social media posts do not always contribute to the narrative, as Ryan explained:

In the majority of cases, transmedia storytelling satisfies the encyclopedist's passion for acquiring more and more knowledge about a world, or the collector's passion for acquiring more and more objects related to this world, or even the cult member's passion for sharing with others an object of worship, rather than the detective's passion for reconstructing a story out of disseminated facts.<sup>30</sup>

This is also the case for *Nothing Much To Do* since the transmedia elements do not provide additional parts of the narrative. Looking at how a transmedia adaptation changes gender expression and sexuality for a modern audience could add a new aspect to the field. Transmedia

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27. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: where old and new media collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 5.

28. Marie-Laure Ryan, “Transmedia Storytelling as Narrative Practice,” 2.

29. Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: where old and new media collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 2.

30. Marie-Laure Ryan, “Transmedia Storytelling as Narrative Practice,” 4.



studies are often engaged in research about the nature of the medium and less the effects of the medium.<sup>31</sup> Since the medium has not affected the narrative profoundly, there will be less focus on transmedia or transfictionality in the analysis.

I will analyse both adaptations by doing a close reading of the film and videos. Aspects of a character's dialogue, acts, and other expressions of gender and sexuality will be looked at to reach a conclusion on how traditionally they represent themselves. The theories that will be used to explore gender and sexuality in Benedick and Beatrice are by Monique Wittig and Judith Butler. *One is Not Born a Woman* by Wittig also discusses how gender and sexuality are intertwined, *Gender Trouble* by Butler additionally focuses on how language is part of performing gender, and "Gender is Burning" from *Bodies That Matter* by Butler is a case study of *Paris is Burning* which expands on concepts from *Gender Trouble*. Using theories on gender by Judith Butler and Monique Wittig, I will analyse how the characters of Beatrice and Benedick are represented on screen and on their social media accounts. Benedick and Beatrice will be discussed separately in terms of gender and sexuality, each getting their own chapter. The adaptations will be studied together in regard to their relationship which will be analysed using the same theories and compared to each other. This will lead to a conclusion on how the representation of gender and sexuality has changed in adaptations of *Much Ado About Nothing*. I expect a significant difference between how much the characters adhere to traditional roles between the 1993 and the 2014 adaptation. The expression of sexuality will most likely be more strongly traditional heterosexual in the 1993 film and less traditionally heterosexual in the 2014 web series. Seeing that both adaptations are popular with and aimed

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31. Christie Desmet, "The Economics of (In)Attention in YouTube Shakespeare," in *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare Appropriation*, ed. Maurizio Calbi and Stephen O'Neill, X, no. 1 (2016), <http://www.borrowers.uga.edu/783210/show>

at a young audience, this could suggest that young, modern audiences enjoy seeing characters that do not adhere to traditional gender roles and traditional expressions of sexuality.

## Chapter 1: Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis consists of feminist theories on gender and theories on sexuality. These theories on gender discuss the performativity of gender, and how sexuality and gender are intertwined. This means that the analysis of sexuality and the relationship between the two characters is hinged in gender theory. Gender theory commenced with Simone de Beauvoir, and scholars have expanded on her ideas. Judith Butler coined the post-structuralist term “gender performativity” in 1990 in *Gender Troubles*, in which she argues that gender is constructing an identity based on performance. This can relate to characters in a way that characters in a narrative also exist of the acts they perform. Shady E. Cosgrove says, “The character is signified, written, through its construction in language. The character is built through a series of incidents that repeat and resignify who the character is, reminiscent of the gendered subject who repeats and resignifies the norms of gender.”<sup>32</sup> This means that the language, costume, and actions of the character determines the gender, not the sex of the actor.

Language is important in the construction of gender. Butler says it is like being called a name: “the occupation of the name is that by which one is, quite without choice, situated within discourse.”<sup>33</sup> Butler’s *Gender Trouble* draws inspiration from post-structuralism, and through this she claims “imitation” is at the heart of the *heterosexual* project and its gender binarisms.<sup>34</sup> Valerie Taub says that “Analysing gender thus involves analysing those identities, bodies, and practices that not only express or consolidate divisions between masculinity and

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32. Shady E. Cosgrove, “Radical Uncertainty: Judith Butler and a theory of character” (Wollongong, Australia: University of Wollongong, 2011), 4.

33. Judith Butler, “Gender is Burning” in *Bodies That Matter* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2010), 82.

34. Judith Butler, “Gender is Burning” in *Bodies That Matter* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2010), 85.

femininity, but also those that disrupt or deconstruct them.”<sup>35</sup> All of this means that the acts of imitating what a “woman” or a “man” does makes the performativity of gender. It also means that there is no absolute definition of each gender and how gender is interpreted depends on the social context. This makes gender hard to define for the use of this thesis, too. Gender will be looked at in context of the time period whenever possible. In other instances, I will be using norms of gender that seem pervasive in modern western society, focussing on how the characters challenge gender norms and heteronormative societies.<sup>36</sup> This is in accordance with politics of location which states that aspects to do with feminist theory can only be looked at from the writer’s own societal view point, because I am a member of a modern western society. Traits like vanity, showing emotions, desiring to have a family, and enjoying romance are seen as feminine traits, and traits like boasting, machoism, not showing emotions, and aggression are seen as masculine traits.

Gender theory does not only deal with norms of gender and performativity but also with power balances. Judith Butler says that “under conditions of normative heterosexuality, policing gender is sometimes used as a way of securing heterosexuality.”<sup>37</sup> Catharine MacKinnon, quoted by Butler, explains how gender and sexuality are strongly related: “Stopped as an attribute of a person, sex inequality takes the form of gender; moving as a relation between people, it takes the form of sexuality. Gender emerges as the congealed form

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35. Valerie Taub, “Introduction – Feminist Shakespeare Studies: cross currents, border crossing, conflicts, and contradictions,” *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 6.

36. Adrienne Rich, “Notes from Politics of Location,” in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994).

37. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 1999), xii.

of the sexualization of inequality between men and women.”<sup>38</sup> Monique Wittig takes this a step further, claiming that the only way to have a heterosexual relationship is when both parties adhere closely to the role of man and woman: “The refusal to become (or remain) heterosexual always meant to refuse to become a man or a woman, consciously or not.”<sup>39</sup> This means that sexuality is a construct springing from and linked to gender, a construct that is defined by power relations and the expression of gender. The construct of sexuality is therefore not only something that can be analysed by looking at expressions of sexual behaviour but also by looking at expressions of gender and how people behave towards each other in a relationship, whether that be a romantic or platonic relationship. Gender and sexuality can still be analysed separately even though these constructs are linked to each other. Sexuality will always primarily be about the relationship between characters when gender is firstly about one character and how they express themselves.

This thesis will use the theories on gender by analysing the characters of Benedick and Beatrice in the adaptations separately. They will be looked at as a couple when using theories on sexuality. The representations of the characters in the different adaptations will be compared and discussed in the conclusion.

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38. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 1999), xii.

39. Monique Wittig, “One is not born a woman,” *Amazons of Yesterday, Lesbians of Today*. 4, no. 1 (1982): 105.

## Chapter 2: Beatrice: “that I were a man!”

This chapter will look at how Beatrice is represented in the 1993 adaptation and the 2014 adaptation in terms of gender and how these representations differ from each other. The characters will be analysed in how they are represented before and after Beatrice falls in love with Benedick, since there is a shift in personality. Beatrice as a character has sparked interest in academic research for her defiance of traditional gender roles for a female character in the seventeenth century.<sup>40</sup> By presenting the character to a modern audience, the perception of her character in terms of gender roles have changed. The 1993 film introduces Beatrice while she is reciting the song “hey, nonny nonny” for a large group of people lounging in a garden where she reads “men were deceivers ever” and she sighs dramatically when reading “sounds of woe”. This establishes her as a sociable person with a distrust for men. She is later shown to be witty: Beatrice is skilful at twisting the words the messenger says into an insult directed towards Benedick, who is not there to defend himself. The messenger said Benedick is a man “stuffed with all honourable virtues”, which Beatrice twists into “he is no less than a stuffed man.”<sup>41</sup> Just after Benedick arrives he states he is glad Beatrice does not want a man to confess his love to her so “some gentleman or other shall ‘scape a predestinate scratched face”, which Beatrice counters with “Scratching could not make it worse, an 'twere such a face as yours were”.<sup>42</sup> She is, however, still presented as likeable: her words are often unkind but not as hurtful to truly be mean. Emma Thompson’s Beatrice is described by Maurice Hindle as someone who “speaks

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40. Thomas J. Scheff, “Gender Wars: Emotions in Much Ado About Nothing,” *Sociological Perspectives*, 36, no. 2 (1993): 149-166.

41. *Much Ado About Nothing*, directed by Kenneth Branagh (1993; Culver City, CA: The Samuel Goldwyn Company, 2011), Blu-ray, 0:04:20-0:04:26

42. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:11:00-0:11:11

her mind intelligently while addressing men in a defiant manner.”<sup>43</sup> She often presents her opinions with a smile even when the message is unsympathetic, making her seem kind despite her snide remarks. She also seems to be saddened by Benedick’s comments more than offended, which is often how Benedick reacts.<sup>44</sup> By showing this emotional side her femininity is highlighted which makes her look more feminine.

Even before Beatrice and Benedick meet it is established that they dislike each other. It is later suggested that Beatrice and Benedick have known each other well in the past, with Beatrice saying he lent her his heart for a while.<sup>45</sup> Leonato describes their current relationship as “There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signior Benedick and her. They never meet, but there’s a skirmish of wit between them.”<sup>46</sup> This remark shows that the unkind words Benedick and Beatrice exchange are meant and seen as playful. Beatrice is outspoken, but she does not boast nearly as much as Benedick does and therefore also does not appear vain. During the washing and dressing-up scene early in the film it is visible that Beatrice tries to make an effort to look good for these men she is about to meet but not as much as some of the other women. She is more understated and natural: only combing her hair between her fingers and not even looking in the mirror before going to meet Don Pedro’s men.<sup>47</sup> She also does not ask for assistance like some of the men do. This puts her into a feminine role because of her desire to look good but relatively less feminine than others in this scene: Leonato and his brother Antonio are viewed as more feminine than Beatrice in this moment as their excitement to see Don Pedro and his men has them stumbling over their boots trying to get dressed.

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43. Maurice Hindle, *Studying Shakespeare on Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 54.

44. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:30:00

45. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:30:20-0:30:22

46. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:04:29-0:04:39

47. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:08:22-0:08:27

Beatrice's opinion on love is clarified in her first conversation with Benedick but she elaborates on what would make a good man when she and her family enter the masked party.<sup>48</sup> She claims that a man right in between Don John and Benedick would be an excellent man for one talks too much and the other never speaks. She then has some additional demands like a good leg, a good foot, and enough money, and then he would be irresistible to all women. She also explains that a man with a beard is no good, and neither is a man without a beard. This could show she is particular about a possible partner or that she just looks for reasons to not marry at all. She claims she will not get married until "God make men of some other metal than earth."<sup>49</sup> An explanation for her desire to remain single is given when Beatrice recalls that she had Benedick's heart before but he "won it of [her] with false dice," suggesting that he mistreated her in some way.<sup>50</sup> This gives her a reason to not get married and fall into the traditional heterosexual pattern. Monique Wittig says that not conforming to heterosexual expectations also defies gender norms, but this explanation of her distaste for marriage makes her seem less defiant of gender roles and more like a woman scorned, though in her pain from her and Benedick's past she still defies gender norms in her actions.<sup>51</sup>

At one point she shows discontent with being a woman, saying "oh that I were a man!" when Benedick does not want to kill Claudio.<sup>52</sup> Here she means that she would like to have the same traits and rights as men are entitled to, and are even celebrated for, like being able to take revenge at a person who wronged you or someone you love. The play here "marks off a

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48. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:20:49-0:22:02

49. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:23:15-0:23:20

50. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:30:29-0:30:33

51. Monique Wittig, "One is not born a woman," *Amazons of Yesterday, Lesbians of Today*. 4, no. 1 (1982): 105.

52. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1:11:45-1:11:47



privileged space of masculine agency that seems to allow Benedick and Beatrice to assume conventional gender roles as the plot moves towards its marital conclusion.”<sup>53</sup>

Beatrice in the 2014 adaptation is substantially younger, but still has a similar history with Benedick. Beatrice is often referred to as “Bea” as part of the modernisation of the setting of the adaptation. She has a YouTube channel which she shares with her cousin Hero called “Nothing Much To Do”. This channel and Benedick’s channel make up the main narrative which revolves around Claudio, Hero, Benedick, and Bea. Bea also has her own twitter account as the character. Her tweets are mostly about the contents of the published YouTube videos and can be seen as promotional tweets. Some do show things about characters, but most do not add anything to the narrative but mostly repeat what has been said in the videos. This also means that using theories on transmedia would not add anything to the analysis.

Bea has strong opinions on relationships and romance, but they are suggested to have been affected by a history between Benedick and Bea. After Bea has been eavesdropping on the conversation between Hero, Meg, and Ursula who are trying to trick Bea into a romance with Benedick, she decides to make a vlog about her views on this matter. Her friends describe her as “too proud”, “too busy being in love with herself”, and that she would “take [Benedick] apart if he would admit his feelings for her.”<sup>54</sup> These are not desirable traits in a woman in the Elizabethan era: femininity was more associated with humility and thoughtfulness. This is not as true today, but vanity is still not seen as a positive trait in any gender, though it is more accepted in men disguised as machoism. When she is discussing what she overheard she

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53. Stephen Cohen, “No Assembly but Horn-Beast”: The Politics of Cuckoldry in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 2, no. 4 (2004): 18.

54. Nothing Much To Do, The Candle Wasters, “The Limits of Technology and the Art of Self-Representation in a Modern World,” YouTube video, 5:53, 1 July 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72ekTu30\\_-4&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72ekTu30_-4&feature=youtu.be)

explains that her and Benedick first met when they were fourteen years old and that they got along very well since they are very similar people.<sup>55</sup> This shows that she is aware that her behaviour and her performance of her identity is nearly identical to Benedick's. She also states that at the time Benedick wanted his freedom even though Beatrice thought their friendship might lead to a romantic relationship. This led her to the decision that she should hate him from then on. Beatrice expressed in another vlog that she does not like to be dependent on a partner which would mean she now shares Benedick's opinion on relationships. She claims she despises relationships and says she does not "need a boyfriend" saying she especially dislikes the peer pressure and the "weird" customs and anniversaries.<sup>56</sup> She mentions the "pressure to continue to like a guy after you get sick of him" which highlights her cynical nature at this point. She says that holding hands is "one step away from holding [a partner] on a leash", which emphasises that she views relationships as constraining. She also links this to a sexism issue where a man might feel ownership over a woman, which is something that was the reality in the Elizabethan era.<sup>57</sup> This shows her as an atypical female character, because a stereotypical and traditional view of women is that they desire to have a family.

All these previously mentioned situations show that Beatrice is someone who is not afraid to speak her mind. Her friends say that she always finds flaws in everyone no matter how good of a person they are.<sup>58</sup> She herself proclaims that she does not go out of her way to

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55. Nothing Much To Do, The Candle Wasters, "Help Me (Make Hero's Present Awesome)," YouTube video, 3:47, 8 July 2014, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72ekTu30\\_4&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72ekTu30_4&feature=youtu.be)

56. Nothing Much To Do, The Candle Wasters, "Single Pringle," YouTube video, 1:37, 13 May 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAIwi3uMVVY&feature=youtu.be>

57. Tim Stretton, "Women" in *The Elizabethan World*, ed. Susan Doran & Norman Jones (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2010), <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315736044.ch20>

58. "The Limits of Technology and the Art of Self-Representation in a Modern World"

find flaws but that some people just have very apparent flaws which are easy to point out.<sup>59</sup> In the same video she talks about Benedick and how other people view him: “Heaps of people think he’s this charming, nice... I can’t even finish the sentence that’s how much it doesn’t make sense to me.”<sup>60</sup> She always tells people her frank opinion even when that opinion is not asked for. One example is a conversation Pedro and Bea have: Pedro says Bea met him and Benedick the same year and she takes that opportunity to mention that Benedick “changes friends as often as he changes shirts”, insinuating that he changes friends so often because people get tired of him.<sup>61</sup> Her being frank without remorse is a negative trait for characters in general but especially for female characters. When a man would say something rude without regret that could mean he is unwavering, and a strong man. This would mean that if a woman displayed the exact same behaviour she would have the same power and traditionally a man is supposed to be the one in power.<sup>62</sup> This shows that Beatrice performs gender in an atypical way, more closely to masculine in this aspect.

There is a shift in Bea’s frank attitude after she hears Benedick is in love with her. In “Idiots” Benedick and Bea get together to discuss the accusation that Hero was disloyal to Claudio in their relationship.<sup>63</sup> This vlog is a while after Bea has known that Benedick is in love with her. This vlog is on the channel “Nothing Much To Do” but Benedick starts off the vlog as if it is his, saying “I’m sure you’ve heard a lot about me” to which Bea rolls her eyes.

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59. “Help Me (Make Hero’s Present Awesome)”

60. “Help Me (Make Hero’s Present Awesome)”

61. Nothing Much To Do, The Candle Wasters, “Football Antics: Part Two,” YouTube video, 3:56, 15 April 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjd2HHnBvxw&feature=youtu.be>

62. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 1999), xii.

63. Nothing Much To Do, The Candle Wasters, “Idiots,” YouTube video, 4:25, 26 August 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMbgjkQTzpM&feature=youtu.be>

This is a stark departure from before where she would not tolerate any of Benedick's boasting behaviour and would always immediately have a snide remark about it. This shows either that her falling in love or seeing Hero hurt has made her more mature in her behaviour. Wanting to restore Hero's honour does not appear to be the only reason Benedick and Bea are together more often around this time in the narrative. The vlog that immediately follows this one has Beatrice and Benedick spending time together in Benedick's bedroom without any pressing reason.<sup>64</sup> The intention was not to film a video as Bea is surprised the camera is rolling when she enters the room which shows that they are spending time together because they want to and not because they have to restore Hero's honour. She also laughs at Benedick's silly *Doctor Who* jokes when she says she wants to turn back time so her attitude against Benedick really has changed at this point, but this hostile attitude that she used to have towards Benedick seems to have changed direction towards Claudio. This vlog eventually turns into Bea addressing Claudio directly and chastising him. She tells him, "watch your back, fuck-face! We're coming for you!", with "we" referring to her and Benedick together. This illustrates that she is still rather aggressive, but she also found the will to work together with Benedick. She is showing her more feminine side to Benedick and her more antagonistic and masculine side to Claudio.

In the song she wrote for Benedick she expresses she is aware she has become cheesy and that she does not ever want to leave his side.<sup>65</sup> This song is her confession of love to Benedick, her friend group, and the whole internet. She has matured enough to admit publicly that she was wrong before and she changed her mind on love and relationships. This is not only a sign of maturity but also a sign of her coming into the role of woman, as a traditional

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64. Benaddicktion, The Candle Wasters, "WORDS," YouTube video, 3:30, 2 September 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyJnuFswq9A&feature=youtu.be>

65. Nothing Much To Do, The Candle Wasters, "Way To Tell You," YouTube video, 3:03, 25 October 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PM4vr83xEbg&feature=youtu.be>

expression of gender is linked to securing heterosexuality.<sup>66</sup> It is as if Beatrice has accepted heterosexual love where she used to reject it.

The vlog series does not end with Benedick and Beatrice committing to a lifelong partnership but with them deciding on a romantic relationship. This is important because as a result of this change Bea does not give up as much of herself to become Benedick's partner. In the source material Benedick says he will "stop her mouth with a kiss", and this kiss is the one that sealed their unity in marriage. Beatrice does not have any lines anymore after this, so the kiss is very effective. Because Benedick and Bea do not have a moment like that in the 2014 adaptation series there is no moment where Bea has to give up her rebellious and more masculine traits, but they remain as equals in their partnership.

Beatrice from the 1993 film adaptation also changes her mind on romantic relationships after Hero was accused of infidelity. Monique Wittig said: "The refusal to become (or remain) heterosexual always meant to refuse to become a man or a woman, consciously or not."<sup>67</sup> Now Beatrice is accepting her heterosexual bond with Benedick, the opposite of Wittig's statement could be true: Bea is also accepting to become a woman by agreeing to follow the heterosexual norm. She has to embrace traditionally feminine roles in order to fit in the heterosexual relationship she desires.

Just after Benedick confesses his love to her and he confirms she loves him too she gets very upset that Benedick does not want to kill Claudio for her.<sup>68</sup> She throws a kneeler chair while in the little chapel which is the first time she really shows how events and words negatively affect her. This scene in the chapel shows her emotional side for the first time, a

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66. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 1999), xii

67. Monique Wittig, "One is not born a woman," *Amazons of Yesterday, Lesbians of Today*. 4, no. 1 (1982): 105.

68. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1:11:57

side that is associated with femininity. This side only becomes visible after she falls in love. She is still able to suppress her emotional side, for when Benedick tries to kiss her she does not allow it until he tells her the exact information she wants to hear, saying she will “depart unkissed” (see image 1).<sup>69</sup> She also is not quick to admit she loves Benedick when he confronts her in front of everyone in Messina, though the whole conversation could also be an act to fool or amuse the people who tricked them into falling in love.<sup>70</sup>



Image 1: Beatrice stopping Benedick from kissing her.<sup>71</sup>

The film ends with everyone joining in for song and dance, which is reminiscent of the start of the film. The song they sing is the same song Beatrice recited during the opening shots: “hey nonny nonny”. This joyful and worry-free ending only portrays Beatrice as sociable rather than someone who dislikes men. The 2014 adaptation ends with Benedick and Bea saying

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69. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1:33:50-1:33:59

70. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1:41:06

71. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1:33:50

goodbye to the audience on his own, but in their last video together they reflect on their journey and Bea highlights how communication is important in a relationship. Bea admitting she can fall in love shows significant growth, whereas in the 1993 film this is not the case. Beatrice has no lines after the kiss and she ends in a very similar position in which she started only now with a partner. This suggests that her feminine side had been there all along and that 2014's Bea was the only one that needed some help on that side.

### Chapter 3: Benedick: “loved of all ladies”

In this chapter I will be discussing Benedick from the 1993 adaptation and the 2014 adaptation, as well as at the shift in behaviour after he falls in love with Beatrice. Benedick is introduced in the 1993 film by Kenneth Branagh as a man who thinks highly of himself and uses his wit to insult other people, sometimes in a playful manner and sometimes in a more serious way. Benedick likes to voice his opinion and he does not seem to mind hurting people in the process. When Claudio asks him what he thinks of Hero, the woman Claudio is madly in love with, he replies with “methinks she's too low for a high praise, too brown for a fair praise, and too little for a great praise. Were she other than she is, she were unhandsome, being no other but as she is, I do not like her.”<sup>72</sup> This is a very insensitive way of describing a woman to the man that loves her. He has similarly unflattering and rude descriptions of Beatrice, but in this case Beatrice herself was there to hear the insult: “if her breath were as terrible as her terminations, she would infect to the north star”.<sup>73</sup> It is visible in this moment that this comment hurt her and that she does not take it as playful wit, but Benedick does not seem to notice. This rude comment is likely to have been caused by Beatrice’s teasing when Benedick asked her what she knew of him just moments before. Benedick was pretending to be a stranger which was facilitated by the fact that he could wear a mask at the party they are at. His actions nevertheless come across as if he is a person who does not consider the feelings of the people around him. Benedick’s crass remarks on marriage and love have caused Don Pedro to ask him why he has such strong negative feeling towards marriage and romance. Benedick does not explain fully why he wants to remain a bachelor for his whole life, but he does say that he will not hang his “bugle in an invisible baldric.”<sup>74</sup> This line has been interpreted to mean that he does not want

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72. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:12:53-0:13:03

73. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:29:19-0:29:24

74. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:14:49-0:14:54



to hide his sexuality and his masculinity by getting married. Another interpretation is that he wants to avoid marriage because he equates it to cuckoldry.<sup>75</sup> Stephen Cohen says that in *Much Ado About Nothing* “cuckoldry is presented less as a particular than a universal condition, an inevitable consequence of marriage itself.”<sup>76</sup> Benedick fears emasculation from Beatrice because she is associated with female agency, which sounds inevitable if he decides to marry her or any other woman.<sup>77</sup> Judith Haber says that “the male fear of cuckoldry is bound up with a fear of sexual relations with one’s own beloved (or wife). This is a fear, at base, of female sexuality itself,” which is linked to Benedick’s fear of emasculation. Therefore, he promises he will never fall in love.<sup>78</sup> This idea that commitment means “loss of masculinity” seems prominent in modern western societies, too. His fear of losing his masculinity is also visible in his criticism on Claudio’s recent behaviour. Claudio has been acting like a man in love, which Claudio himself describes as displaying “soft and delicate desires”.<sup>79</sup> Soft and delicate are terms associated with femininity which could explain why Benedick is apprehensive to fall in love himself, seeing that he is eager to protect his masculinity.

Benedick might not desire a love interest, but he is nonetheless very confident in his own popularity: “it is certain I am loved of all ladies, only [Beatrice] excepted. I would that I had not a hard heart, for I love none.”<sup>80</sup> The film does not provide any proof that Benedick is

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75. Stephen Cohen, “No Assembly but Horn-Beast”: The Politics of Cuckoldry in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 2, no. 4 (2004): 17.

76 Stephen Cohen, “No Assembly but Horn-Beast”: The Politics of Cuckoldry in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies,” 15.

77 Stephen Cohen, “No Assembly but Horn-Beast”: The Politics of Cuckoldry in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies,” 17.

78. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:15:02-0:15:07

79. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:16:18-0:16:21

80. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:10:38-0:10:45

well-loved since he is never shown with another lady fawning over him. This could also be because of his fear of commitment which would inevitably emasculate him. His boastful behaviour, or maybe his lack of self-knowledge, is something he is known for and he does not seem to grow out of this. When Beatrice asks Benedick about how his confrontation with Claudio went Benedick thinks that after a short answer Beatrice will want to kiss him.<sup>81</sup> This is not the case because Beatrice wanted to have a serious conversation on how they would confront Claudio in the future and Benedick does not take the matter as seriously. He overestimates his own irresistibility and therefore remains unkissed in this scene, which is another sign of his masculine machoism.

Even though some of his more negative characteristics remains, some also change: for example his ability to express positive emotions. He had always been vocal on his negative feelings towards people, especially towards Beatrice, but he is now also able to share feelings of love with people, especially with Beatrice. He is the one that confesses his love first and even he seems to be surprised that he does this when he says, “I do love nothing in the world so well as you. Is not that strange?”<sup>82</sup> He then changes into someone who appreciates the more traditional parts of a romantic relationship such as writing love poetry. Benedick attempts to write a sonnet for Beatrice but he quickly recognises he is not very good at being a poet because he “was not born under a rhyming planet”.<sup>83</sup> He shows his sensitive side when he gives Beatrice advice just before they hear Hero’s honour has been restored: “Serve God, love me... and mend.”<sup>84</sup> This quote shows he stopped disregarding other’s feelings and actually cares for Beatrice, where he only cared about himself before. This is also visible when Benedick tries to

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81. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1:33:49-1:33:53

82. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1:10:02-1:10:10

83. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1:33:11-1:33:14

84. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1:35:16-1:35:24

cheer up Beatrice. She asks him if he will come with her to hear the truth about the plot that made Hero seem disloyal and he replies: “I will live in thy heart, die in thy lap, and be buried in thy eyes, and moreover, I will go with thee to thy uncle's”.<sup>85</sup> This is a sweet and funny response compared to how he used to talk to Beatrice but it also shows he has not lost his wit. His reaction to Claudio’s accusation also shows he considers the feelings of others more than he used to: he is the only man in Claudio’s party that is shocked by Claudio’s accusation and does not immediately believe that Hero was disloyal.<sup>86</sup> He is the only one of his party who does not join the group of men when they march off after Claudio humiliated Hero but he stays with the group that is protecting Hero, a group that includes Beatrice. This protective behaviour is seen as very masculine as it is going towards aggression, while showing a softer, more caring side is seen as more feminine. With this he situates himself right in between the two extremes. He also seems to be “in between” in the situation just after Hero has been accused: he did not join the men, but he also does not become a part of the group of women. This is also visible in some of the shots used in the film (see image 2).

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85. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1:35:53-1:36:03

86. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1:03:44-1:04:49



Image 2: Benedick being in between Hero's accusers on the left  
and the people who believe her on the right.<sup>87</sup>

In the 2014 adaptation there is no big divide between Pedro's and Leonato's people: they all go to the same high school and the closest they come to a divide is smaller friend groups within their big friend group. This means Benedick in the web adaptation does not get an "in between" status like Benedick in the 1993 film but he is just one of the group, even though he is the only one not from New Zealand. His friends often refer to him as "Ben" instead of his full name. He has his own YouTube channel called "benaddicktion" and here he posts vlogs from his perspective, sometimes including his friends. Two tweets from the 21<sup>st</sup> of October show Benedick's character well (see image 3). These tweets show that he can force his own ideas and desires on people.

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87. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1:06:44



Image 3: tweets about the video “Way To Tell You”.<sup>88</sup>

The second video he ever uploads to his channel features one of his friends: Claudio.<sup>89</sup> The video was to introduce the audience to his friend, but it turns into a video of Benedick trying to convince Claudio that being a bachelor is better than being in a relationship. One of his arguments is “Relationships are bad” and he says he wants to be “free and single” for the rest of his life. This shows that Benedick sometimes forces his ideas on others. When Claudio disagrees on this Benedick gets upset. This could suggest that he wanted to be single together with Claudio and that the fact that Claudio does not want this threatens his relationship with him which makes Benedick look rather vulnerable. Benedick quickly changes the topic of the vlog to celebrity crushes, which shows that he is heterosexual and therefore masculine according to Butler’s theory that gender maintains heterosexuality.<sup>90</sup> He is quite critical of women, as visible in “THE BEN SHOW”, where Claudio, Benedick, and Pedro discuss the

88. The Candle Wasters, “Beatrice Duke,” Twitter, accessed on 19 April 2019, <https://twitter.com/beatricetheduke?lang=en>.

89. Benaddicktion, The Candle Wasters, “CLAUDIO,” YouTube video, 3:56, 28 April 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1yRls2vUIs&feature=youtu.be>

90. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 1999), xii

pros and cons of Claudio's crush who is later revealed to be Hero.<sup>91</sup> He only has cons to contribute, one of which is the fact that she is short. This shows he can be superficial in what makes a suitable romantic partner or that he wants to avoid having a romantic partner in general. He dislikes romance so much that he stopped watching Bea and Hero's vlogs after Hero made a video where Claudio did her makeup.<sup>92</sup> He named the video "DISGUSTED", but another factor why he stops watching Bea and Hero's videos also seems to be the fact that Bea stopped watching his videos, too. He is very disappointed in their channel and in Claudio, claiming he "tried his hardest to save Claudio from relationships" but he failed.

Ben sees himself as a hero more often than in the case where he tried to keep Claudio from dating Hero. He describes himself as "a knight in shining armour handing out flowers to the poor" in the video "REBUTTAL" where he describes Beatrice as "a mean-spirited old dragon who destroys peace and prosperity in her wake as she flies throughout the land, burning insult flying from her mouth".<sup>93</sup> This description is supposed to show how Beatrice is evil and Benedick is good even though they display the same behaviour, which in this case is being very particular about what a partner should be like and preferring a single status over a relationship. They both dedicated a full vlog on explaining why relationships are bad and Benedick even has multiple vlogs on this topic, so him seeing himself as a knight is him boasting or a symptom of delusion. This also shows how the same behaviour can be interpreted very differently whether it is done by a man or a woman.

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91. Benaddicktion, The Candle Wasters, "THE BEN SHOW," YouTube video, 4:29, 1 May 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgUWzLnJTyU&feature=youtu.be>

92. Benaddicktion, The Candle Wasters, "DISGUSTED," YouTube video, 1:28, 11 June 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37WKd-63Lkc&feature=youtu.be>

93. Benaddicktion, The Candle Wasters, "REBUTTAL," YouTube video, 1:27, 7 May 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMtFkZYsiW0&feature=youtu.be>

Ben does come around to liking Hero: he goes from finding Hero sickly sweet to finding her “the sweetest person anyone would ever know”.<sup>94</sup> This is the first step in him getting over his dislike for romance as he shares this opinion in the first vlog where Ben and Bea appear together without arguing. He really is over his aversion to romance when he writes a song for Bea, calling her things like “lovely”, “my baby”, and “vivacious”.<sup>95</sup> When Bea joins him in a bath for a vlog he seems not to mind anymore that being in love was not masculine, even though he was the only one of that opinion in this adaptation.<sup>96</sup> Except for this change Ben’s personality stays largely the same: he does not lose his feeling of superiority or his need to give his opinion on everything.

In both adaptations Benedick does not have to change drastically to start a relationship with Beatrice: he mainly has to get over his own opinions on love and romance, but he does not have to change any of his characteristics. He sees himself as a popular, masculine man and he still does so at the end of both adaptations. The fact that he now shows a more sensitive and emotional side of him does not emasculate him that much, which could again hint at double standards between men and women.<sup>97</sup>

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94. Nothing Much To Do, The Candle Wasters, “Idiots,” YouTube video, 4:25, 26 August 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMbgjkQTzpM&feature=youtu.be>

95. The Candle Wasters, “Beatrice, You’re Vivacious,” Bandcamp, accessed on 1 May 2019, <https://thecandlewasters.bandcamp.com/track/beatrice-youre-vivacious>

96. Benaddicktion, The Candle Wasters, “BLEURGH,” YouTube video, 5:42, 28 October 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6dIbVGUX2k&feature=youtu.be>

97. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 1999), xii.

#### Chapter 4: Sexuality, Benedick, and Beatrice.

Benedick and Beatrice seem to enter a romantic relationship soon after Hero is accused of infidelity. The way this relationship portrays sexuality is interesting as in the narrative their relationship is used as an example for Hero and Claudio. In this chapter I will be discussing the representation of Benedick and Beatrice as a couple in both the 1993 film adaptation and the 2014 web series adaptation.

The arrival of Don Pedro's entourage in the 1993 adaptation sets off the lusty, hormonal part of the film. His group which consists of only men, arrives on horseback and this scene is immediately followed by a scene where both groups run to the bath house and strip themselves of all clothes.<sup>98</sup> The film quickly abandons this overt display of sexual desire and the only time the film references sexual desires after this is when discussing or showing sexual infidelity, with a focus on a woman being unfaithful. The sexual energies between Benedick and Beatrice are virtually non-existent when they finally get together and they rarely show public or private affection.<sup>99</sup> According to Deborah Cartmell, "this is the blatantly heterosexual version of Shakespeare, in line with popular and, perhaps, wishful expectations of Shakespeare's representation of sexuality."<sup>100</sup> Emma Thompson who plays Beatrice in the 1993 film described in an interview with Catherine Bennett in the *Guardian* of August 7 1993, quoted by Cartmell, that the relationship between Benedick and Beatrice as an "archetypally perfect relationship."<sup>101</sup> This statement by Thompson was not contested in the media, suggesting at

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98. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:05:20-0:08:25

99. Deborah Cartmell, *Interpreting Shakespeare on Screen* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 53.

100. Deborah Cartmell, *Interpreting Shakespeare on Screen* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 53.

101. Deborah Cartmell, *Interpreting Shakespeare on Screen* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 48.



least some part of society might agree with her. All this together shows that a relationship between a man and a woman is ideal, and it is improved when both parties are mature and do not display affection or passion.

The main crisis of the narrative – the accusation of infidelity by Claudio – is rooted in the sexism of the society portrayed in the story. Don John's villainy is "not in his sully[ing] Hero's honour but in his unveiling the properly hidden obscene underside of ideology."<sup>102</sup> This issue is linked to sexuality because Hero's presumed sexual promiscuity is what caused Claudio's outrage.

The relationship between Hero and Beatrice has sometimes been interpreted as mildly homoerotic because Beatrice says she was Hero's bedfellow: "there is evidence from the period that (equally homoerotic) female bed-sharing was a site of secret-sharing, counsel-giving, and knowledge-transacting."<sup>103</sup> There is, however, not much reference to Beatrice and Hero's relationship being homoerotic after this in the film.

The 1993 film stresses the need for maturity and traditional family values.<sup>104</sup> This can be seen in the juxtaposition between Claudio and Hero as a couple and Benedick and Beatrice as a couple. Not only are Claudio and Hero younger, they also fall in and out of love quickly, which is not a sign of a mature relationship. Something that highlights maturity in the female characters of this adaptation is the opening sequence where Leonato's entourage, mostly

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102. David L. Orvis, "Queer Comedy", *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 308.

103. Julie Crawford, 'Women's Secretaries', *Queer Renaissance Historiography: Backward Gaze* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 118.

104. Deborah Cartmell, *Interpreting Shakespeare on Screen* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 49.

scantly clad women, lie around eating grapes.<sup>105</sup> The first half of the film often shows Beatrice with fruits, suggesting her fecundity.<sup>106 107</sup>



Image 4: Beatrice carrying grapes while claiming Benedick is “no less than a stuffed man”.<sup>108</sup>

Beatrice and Benedick as a mature, heterosexual couple is also used to show a contrast to not only Claudio’s immaturity but also Don John’s evil homoeroticism.<sup>109</sup> Michael Hattaway agrees, stating that Don John being portrayed by Keanu Reeves, who was seen as a sex-symbol

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105. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:01:44-0:02:52

106. Deborah Cartmell, *Interpreting Shakespeare on Screen* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 50.

107. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:25:56

108. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:04:24

109. Deborah Cartmell, *Interpreting Shakespeare on Screen* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 49.

in the 1990's, creates a situation in which the role is demonised in inverse proportions to the actor's supposed attractiveness.<sup>110</sup> Don John gets one of his henchmen to massage his naked chest and back with oils, and their talk is also intimately staged (see image 5).<sup>111</sup> This is interpreted as a homoerotic action where two men share skin-to-skin contact in a private situation. A scene like this can get a film into the dangerous territory of queer-coding villains: the phenomenon where evil characters have characteristics associated with LGBT-individuals.<sup>112</sup> It is rather striking that only the villain gets a homoerotic scene, and this scene is arguable more sexually explicit than the scenes between the people in the established couples.



Image 5: Don John speaking to his friend who just massaged him.<sup>113</sup>

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110. Michael Hattaway, "The comedies on film," *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on film*, ed. Russel Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 92.

111. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:17:23-0:19:01

112. Koeun Kim, "Queer-coded Villains (And Why You Should Care)," in *Dialogues@RU* (2007): 156-165.

113. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 0:18:59

One of the few public displays of affection between Beatrice and Benedick is the kiss after Claudio and Hero have reconciled.<sup>114</sup> Just before this kiss Benedick says “Peace, I will stop your mouth” and then kisses her. The intention could be to silence Beatrice as a character, to make her more of a traditional woman suitable to marry someone like Benedick. Carol Chillington Rutter says the men in Shakespeare’s comix have to try and manage female desire, which means that in this film Benedick has to try and contain Beatrice so that in the end they can get married, which he does not do successfully here.<sup>115</sup> According to Judith Butler, “policing gender is sometimes used as a way of securing heterosexuality”.<sup>116</sup> Beatrice is seen as someone who falls outside the regular mould of a woman, but she changes through the film and leaves her petty wit behind to help Hero and unite with Benedick. Beatrice is not nearly as feisty at the end of the film as she was at the start of it. She starts to adhere more to traditional gender roles, which could secure her harmonious heterosexual relationship with Benedick. This is similar to Hero’s journey where she has to “die” to become suitable to marry Claudio: not only changing herself to become a new woman but also faking her own death. Benedick does not have to change as drastically, perhaps because he is less non-traditional in his behaviour than Beatrice.

The 2014 adaptation has both characters change even less for their relationship to function properly. Neither one of them loses their feisty side, and both characters equally start to enjoy the romantic aspects of their romantic relationship. In “SONG” and “Way To Tell You”, Ben and Bea respectively sing each other a love song, which is something they thought

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114. *Much Ado About Nothing*, 1:42:22-1:42:34

115. Carol Chillington Rutter, “Looking at Shakespeare’s women on film” in *the Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on film*, ed. Russel Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 248.

116. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 1999), xii

too “sickly sweet” before.<sup>117</sup> The song Benedick writes and performs in collaboration with Balthazar, called “Beatrice, You’re Vivacious”, is similar in style and uses some of the same phrases as the poetry Benedick tries to write in the source text.<sup>118</sup> All the words Benedick is struggling over in the source text like “lady” and “baby”, “scorn” and “horn”, and “school” and “fool” are included in this song. The song has more references to lines in the source text, for example “And I know I said I’d rather be hung like a cat” is in reference to “If I do [fall in love], hang me in a bottle like a cat and shoot at me.”<sup>119</sup> This song can be seen as an overt expression of desire, especially when Ben says “maybe you are horny for me too”.<sup>120</sup> The reference to horny is a reference to cuckoldry because cuckoldry is related to “sexual relations with one’s own beloved”.<sup>121</sup>

Ben and Bea do not frequently show physical affection in public. Just before holding a meeting for Hero they hold hands, but this seems to be the first and final time.<sup>122</sup> This is a somewhat chaste way of showing affection. This meeting is supposed to be about telling Hero they miss her, to apologize, and to say she must get well soon, so perhaps a more overt display

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117. Nothing Much To Do, The Candle Wasters, “Single Pringle,” YouTube video, 1:37, 13 May 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAIwi3uMVVY&feature=youtu.be>

118. William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing* (Ware, United Kingdom: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1995), V.ii.126-141.

119. William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, I.i.202.

120. The Candle Wasters, “Beatrice, You’re Vivacious,” Bandcamp, accessed on 1 May 2019, <https://thecandlewasters.bandcamp.com/track/beatrice-youre-vivacious>

<sup>121</sup> Judith Haber, “Comedy and Eros: Sexualities on Shakespeare’s Stage,” *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Comedy*, eds. Heather Hirschfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 288.

122. Nothing Much To Do, The Candle Wasters, “PROJECT V - FOR HERO,” YouTube video, 6:20, 30 September 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JpQaLZ1U6os&feature=youtu.be>

of affection from Ben and Bea might have been inappropriate in the situation. The fact that Ben and Bea often refrain from showing affection in public could also stem from the medium in which the adaptation is presented. Since many of the videos are vlog-style from a bedroom or bathroom and involve one to four characters, with only 5 out of 53 vlogs from the main narrative not adhering to this set up, it leaves very little opportunity for the characters to display affection in a public setting. In some of those more private videos they do show more affection, for example in BLEURGH where they lie in a bath. They lie very closely together, they themselves saying it is uncomfortably tight and they share a kiss near the end of the video. This kiss was also in the source text: it was the kiss where Benedick wanted to make Beatrice stop talking. This “silencing kiss” that was also present in the adaptation by Branagh has been reversed for this web series. Instead of Bea being silenced it is Ben: Beatrice says, “shut up, you dork!” to which Ben replies “make me” which leads to a kiss. This kiss does silence both of them, unlike in the 1993 adaptation, which shows that they are more equal in terms of power in the relationship in the 2014 adaptation than the 1993 film.

It could be said that maturity is also one of the themes in Ben and Bea’s relationship in the 2014 web series. “Idiots” (vlog 53) is the first video in which Ben and Bea appear together voluntarily without arguing the entire video.<sup>123</sup> This is because the video is about the incident at Hero’s party where Claudio accused her of cheating on him. Bea has stated before in a video that Ben had to “get over himself” for her to like him again, and this seems to be what has happened: both Ben and Bea have set aside their arguments to support Hero and to get to the bottom of the infidelity scandal.<sup>124</sup> This shows some maturity, as was also one of the themes in the 1993 Branagh adaptation. Beatrice even emphasises the need for maturity from Benedick

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123. Nothing Much To Do, The Candle Wasters, “Idiots,” YouTube video, 4:25, 26 August 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cMbgjkQTzpM&feature=youtu.be>

124. “Help Me (Make Hero’s Present Awesome)”

in an earlier vlog: “Ben likes me? [...] He has a really weird way of showing that! [...] So immature!”<sup>125</sup> The first vlog Ben and Bea make together for *benaddicktion*, which is the 73<sup>rd</sup> vlog in the narrative.<sup>126</sup> They lie together in a bath, a place where Ben has recorded more vlogs, to discuss how communication is key in a relationship. This is a sign of maturity: discussing issues over endlessly arguing or merely dropping hints. They do immediately continue by saying that the plan to set them up was “rubbish”, and that their relationship was “down to [them] being brilliant”, showing that they have not lost their love for boasting and witty remarks.<sup>127</sup>

Benedick and Beatrice have to mature in the 1993 adaptation to be able to be joined together in marriage, but Beatrice crucially has to suppress or get rid of her loud personality. It is noteworthy that from the moment Benedick and Beatrice have become a couple publically Benedick does all the talking. Beatrice did not have a father, so she did not have anyone who was her guardian before her union with Benedick. She now has a man who immediately takes on the role and speaks for her, as the man in a relationship usually did in Elizabethan times because every man was “king in his own house”.<sup>128</sup> Bea and Ben do not change as much in the 2014 adaptation in order for them to start dating. Their personalities do not change as much, they mainly mature and realise that communication was their issue, not that one of them was feistier than the other. If a heterosexual relationship is to be interpreted as a bond between two people where the man gets ownership over the woman, as Beatrice herself describes it in the

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125. “Help Me (Make Hero’s Present Awesome)”

126. *Benaddicktion*, *The Candle Wasters*, “BLEURGH,” YouTube video, 5:42, 28 October 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t6dIbVGUX2k&feature=youtu.be>

127. *Benaddicktion*, “BLEURGH”

128. Arthur F. Kinney, *Renaissance Drama an anthology of plays and entertainments*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 4.

2014 web adaptation, then it is clear that the web adaptation does not adhere as much to the roles assigned in a heterosexual relationship as the 1993 film adaptation.



## Conclusion

In order to answer the research question, which is how the representation of gender and sexuality have changed in Beatrice and Benedick through different adaptations of *Much Ado About Nothing*, I examined a film adaptation by Kenneth Branagh from 1993 and a web series adaptation by the Candle Wasters from 2014. Gender was mainly represented through language and sexuality was mainly represented through language and acts of affection in these adaptations. The analysis of the components has shown that there is not as substantial a difference between the two adaptations as expected.

The hypothesis that there would be a significant difference between how much the characters adhere to traditional roles between the 1993 and the 2014 adaptation has been proven wrong to some extent. Beatrice from the 1993 adaptation ends up in a similar position she started in, with her even reprising her opening words to end the film. She started off as someone who did not adhere to traditional gender roles for a woman, but she ended up adhering more strongly which is visible in the fact that she does not speak anymore after she publicly declares love for Benedick and they kiss. The fact that Beatrice changes so much as a character in the narrative could also explain why she has been the topic of academic research significantly more than Benedick. Bea from the 2014 adaptation also adheres more strongly to gender roles for women at the end of the web series in comparison to the start of the series, but she is not nearly as traditional as her counterpart in the 1993 film. Neither of the adaptations have Benedick change drastically. He does show his emotional and sensitive side more, but it does not seem to compromise his masculinity. Cohen said the result of Benedick's actions which lead to cuckoldry are "not enmity but fraternity, with cuckoldry serving as a badge of honor - albeit a heavily ironized one - marking membership in an exclusive realm of male solidarity."<sup>129</sup> This

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129. Stephen Cohen, "No Assembly but Horn-Beast": The Politics of Cuckoldry in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies," 15.

could be a critique on the fact that showing emotions is not emasculating, even though Benedick seems to start off believing this. It could also be a critique on double standards: when Benedick shows his emotions, he remains as masculine but when Beatrice shows her emotions she becomes more feminine. It could even be a critique on cuckoldry: that it is not something to be feared but to be embraced.

It is possible that the 1993 adaptation by Branagh influenced the way the Candle Wasters represented Beatrice and Benedick on screen, that perchance they made Beatrice have more of a character arch because they had seen the 1993 adaptation and used it as inspiration. There is no clear evidence for this in the 2014 web adaptation. They do reference Branagh's performances in other web adaptations, but no clear evidence that the 1993 adaptation was an influence can be found in *Nothing Much To Do*. Benedick does claim he prefers Catherine Tate over Billie Piper when discussing crushes with Claudio, which alludes to Tate's performance as Beatrice on stage across from David Tennant.<sup>130</sup>

The hypothesis that the 1993 adaptation by Kenneth Branagh would adhere stronger to traditional roles in a heterosexual relationship than the 2014 adaptation by the Candle Wasters has been proven correct, but not to as large an extent as expected. For most of Benedick and Beatrice's relationship they do not change the way they act towards each other, except for changing their hostile tone to a loving one, but their funny witticisms and playful banter remains. From the moment they step into the public light with their relationship this changes because Beatrice does not say anything anymore but only sings and dances. This makes it look like Benedick now has control over her, that he is the boss in the relationship, and therefore only his opinion is important, which confirms traditional beliefs of a heterosexual relationship. This is in stark contrast with Ben and Bea's relationship in the 2014 adaptation. Here there is

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130. Benaddickton, The Candle Wasters, "CLAUDIO," YouTube video, 3:56, 28 April 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1yRls2vUIs&feature=youtu.be>

a power balance in their relationship, even after everyone around the couple knows they are dating. Not one person seems to be more in charge than the other, and they articulate their thoughts an equal amount. This is less in line with Wittig's definition of heterosexuality.<sup>131</sup>

Hindle suggests that the witty banter exchanged between Benedick and Beatrice and the defiant way Emma Thompson's Beatrice speaks to men was appealing to a young audience in 1993, seeing similar relationships in media such as the sitcom "Friends".<sup>132</sup> The fact that Benedick and Beatrice end up in a restrictive heterosexual relationship might not have stood out to a young audience, since Kenneth Branagh did say he aimed to reach a large popular audience of mainly teens.<sup>133</sup>

In the 1993 adaptation Benedick seems to be the protagonist, since he has the most lines and he is the one that gives his thoughts on the narrative at the end of the film, but the 2014 adaptation seems to have Beatrice as the protagonist since she has the most videos on her channel. This could also be because *Nothing Much To Do* was written by four women who are known for playing with gender in their works: their adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* featured non-binary and genderqueer characters and actors. Also, the mere fact that Benedick and Beatrice are popular characters among people who watched the adaptations or stage performances of *Much Ado About Nothing* can show that the defiant way in which both characters behave appeals to a modern audience, and especially a young audience. Particularly Beatrice from the 2014 adaptation seems to appeal to a young audience, visible in the choice of presenting her as a high schooler.

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131. Monique Wittig, "One is not born a woman," *Amazons of Yesterday, Lesbians of Today*. 4, no. 1 (1982): 105.

132. Maurice Hindle, *Studying Shakespeare on Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 54.

133. Samuel Crawl, "Flamboyant Realist: Kenneth Branagh" in *the Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on film*, ed. Russel Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 223.

*Nothing Much To Do* was the Candle Wasters' first project and they used a Kickstarter to obtain funding for the project. YouTube also does not allow creators to earn money from videos if there are insufficient subscribers to the channel they were posted on. This means that the web adaptation does not need to be created in a way that it will be lucrative, unlike the film adaptation *Much Ado About Nothing*. Branagh has a reputation as a film maker and as a Shakespeare performer and he is attached to a studio. All of this combined means that he has to create a lucrative film and cannot afford to take too many risks that could prove to be unpopular. Therefore, he could not stray too far from the source text – which he did not – and he must represent the characters in an appealing way for his teenage audience, which includes representing gender and sexuality in an appealing manner. The Candle Wasters did not have this same issue: they did not yet have plans to create more literary web adaptations and this project would have been their only. Because of this the Candle Wasters could take more risks in straying from the source text and changing the way in which Benedick and Beatrice are represented in terms of sexuality and gender, and they could portray gender and sexuality in the way they desired to see them portrayed. It is also important here that the production of this adaptation was done by young people, as most cast- and crew members were either in high school or in college.

The representation of Beatrice and Benedick has changed over the two adaptations in terms of gender and sexuality, with the newer one being less traditional in its representation of gender and sexuality than the older one. Both adaptations portray non-traditional ways of expressing gender and sexuality, but *Nothing Much To Do* portrays them as more defiant of gender roles than *Much Ado About Nothing*. This could be because of the nature of the production and medium of the 2014 adaptation, but it could also be because a non-traditional representation resonates more with a young audience. Visible from the age of the producers

and the popularity of this adaptation, it can be said that modern audiences find a more non-traditional expression of gender and sexuality appealing.

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