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Inside Out

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“The only true love is love at first sight; second sight dispels it.”
Israel Zangwill

Leonato, governor of Messina, Sicily, has a daughter, Hero, and a witty, acerbic niece, Beatrice, both of marriageable age. At the opening of the play, Leonato welcomes his guests who have just returned from quelling a rebellion. The guests include Don Pedro, Prince of Arragon; his bastard brother, Don John (who began the skirmish); Benedick of Padua and Claudio of Florence.

Claudio falls in love with Hero at first sight but is so inexperienced at courting that he accepts Don Pedro’s offer to woo her for him. Beatrice and Benedick have a history together, but they are too busy verbally sparring with each other to examine their deeper feelings. Meanwhile, Don Pedro successfully woos Hero for Claudio while the brooding Don John plans to make trouble for the entire company.

In the week before the wedding of Hero and Claudio, the company of friends devises a plot to bring Beatrice and Benedick together. In addition, Don John with his henchman, Borachio, crafts a deception that ruins Hero’s reputation. With each scene, a new chaos erupts and it takes the hilariously bumbling policemen (Dogberry, Verges and the members of the Watch) to stumble upon the evidence that restores balance and order to the world of the play. Thus, all the tribulations the characters undergo are really “much ado about nothing.”



Much Ado About Nothing

Photo by Gary Isaacs

*“Friendship is constant in all other things
Save in the office and affairs of love:
Therefore all hearts in love use
their own tongues;
Let every eye negotiate for itself
And trust no agent.”*
*William Shakespeare, Much Ado About
Nothing, II, i, 131-135.*

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SHAKESPEARE His Life and World

by Chris McCoy

There are many myths and legends surrounding the life of William Shakespeare. Relatively few provable facts exist about the man who created the most important canon in English literature. The little that is known is documented through the unreliable legal records of the time, many of which have been lost and remain only through secondary sources such as early biographies. The rest has been deduced through reasonable speculation.

Shakespeare was baptized on April 26, 1564 in the Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-Upon-Avon, England. The exact date of his birth is unknown but is commonly celebrated on April 23. His father, John Shakespeare, may have been a tanner and glover at the time of William's birth although records show that he became a successful citizen holding many high-ranking positions in Stratford including a seat on the city council. William's mother, Mary Arden Shakespeare, was a woman from a very prosperous lineage; it is believed that she was the daughter of John's landlord when they were married. John purchased many houses in Stratford including a sizable Tudor-style home on Henley Street that is speculated to be the birthplace of William.

Nicholas Rowe published the first biography of Shakespeare's life in 1709, 93 years after Shakespeare's death. He proposes that William attended the King's new school at Stratford-Upon-Avon, a "free" or public institution. There, Shakespeare was probably exposed to the works of Virgil, Plautus, Terrence, Ovid, Horace and Seneca, which provided the basis for his own dramatic writing.²⁴

On November 27, 1582, William was granted a bishop's license for marriage to "Anne Whately." The bond of sureties, however, refers to his wife as Anne Hathaway, daughter of Richard Hathaway of Shottery. Anne was 26 when she married 18-year-old William. Although the actual date of their marriage is unknown, it is presumed the ceremony occurred shortly after they were given a license. Anne gave birth to their first child, Susannah, on May 26, 1583. The couple also had twins, Judith and Hamnet, who were baptized on February 2, 1585.

Many have speculated upon the whereabouts of Shakespeare between the years 1585-1592 because little was documented during that time. The only known fact is that at some point in this seven-year period, Shakespeare made his way to London and into the theatre. In 1592, the dying dramatist Robert Greene makes the first of many literary references to Shakespeare in his vitriolic *Greene's Groats-worth of Wit Bought with a Million of Repentance*. His allusion to the young playwright attacks him for becoming the latest success, prized over his older, disappointed rival, Greene.

London, in the late 16th century, was a hub of industry. As the capitol city it was home to major courts of law, a prosperous port of trade and Parliament. In 1592, the city boasted a population of approximately 200,000 making it the largest city in Europe, which included people from all social classes. Under Elizabeth I's reign (1558-1603), England remained at peace until the attack and defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. This victory over one of the continent's most affluent Catholic powers (Elizabeth herself was Protestant) secured Elizabeth's power as a world leader and provided her the authority to exercise absolute monarchical control of England. London, however, was primarily ruled by city officials, courts of law and medieval guilds.

On December 6, 1574, an order by the Common Council of London placed heavy restrictions upon the public performance of plays. The doctrine cited theatre as an uncivil and immoral occasion causing "evil practices of incontineny in great inns, [i.e. public brawls] and uncomely and unshamefast speeches and doings of actors,"²⁵ diverting citizens from worship on Sundays and holidays, and even gave account for the spread of plague. In response to this action, James Burbage (father to the famed actor, Richard) moved his company of actors, of which Shakespeare was probably a member, to Shoreditch, a suburb of London. Here they built "The Theatre," the first identified commercial theatre venue in England. "The Theatre" was purportedly a circular structure with a central courtyard open to the sky. The stage was placed at one end and jutted out into the courtyard. The rest of the surrounding sides had enclosed galleries. The cheapest way to see the play was standing in the courtyard. The more affluent theatergoers were seated in the galleries. Behind the stage was erected a "tiring house," which served as both backdrop and backstage area for the actors. The tiring house was also used to change attire and probably for resting between scenes. This first structure became the model for subsequent theatres including "The Globe" in which many of Shakespeare's plays were first produced.

We know that Shakespeare was an established dramatist and actor by 1592 with at least six plays already produced: *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labours Lost*, *Two Gentleman of Verona*, the *Henry VI* plays, and *Titus Andronicus*. Payments made to the Lord Chamberlain's Company of actors cites Shakespeare as a payee for performances on December 26 and 28, 1594. This indicates that he was not only a member of the company, but one in high standing since managers, playwrights and lead actors were typically the only ones paid.

When Shakespeare first appeared in the London theatre

society, English theatre was already flourishing. Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Kyd, John Lyly, George Peele and Robert Greene were among the most famous playwrights of the day. Although Shakespeare is the most highly praised dramatist of his era, his contemporaries certainly helped to form his style. John Lyly introduced the idea of poetic language in dramatic writing; John Greene made significant contributions to the development of comedies including multiple plots, strong female characters and presenting serious issues through comedic expression. George Peele introduced history plays that combined elements of the contemporary world while Thomas Kyd wrote tragedies that focused on the topic of revenge. Christopher Marlowe, probably the best known of these playwrights, created protagonists who reflected principles of the Elizabethan era. The style of Shakespeare's writing also owes much to dramatic predecessors from ancient Greece and Rome such as Seneca, Terrence, Plautus, Ovid, Virgil and Horace.

Between the years 1594 and 1601 Shakespeare was probably the leading dramatist of the time given the fact that most of his earlier contemporaries were deceased and the next wave of dramatists was yet to appear. When James I succeeded Elizabeth I to the throne in 1603, a document titled "The Players' Privilege" renamed Shakespeare's acting troupe The King's Men and appointed them to the honorary rank of Grooms of the Royal Court.²⁶ Likewise, the rise of the Jacobean era (the reign of King James) brought about a turn in literary figures and genres. Playwrights such as George Chapman, John Marston and Ben Jonson, as well as Shakespeare, focused on writing fewer histories and more revenge tragedy and satiric comedy.²⁷ Shakespeare's work shows a shift in theme such as comedy dealing with dark plots of human degeneracy (*Measure for Measure*) and characters facing internal and psychological obstacles (*All's Well that Ends Well* and *Troilus and Cressida*). Likewise, Shakespeare's tragedies divided into two categories: great tragedies that posed characters with dilemmas of humanity questioning

its existence (*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*) and classical tragedies which affirmed the nobility in the human spirit (*Julius Caesar*, *Timon of Athens*, *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*).²⁸

In 1608, The King's Men signed a lease for the use of Blackfriar's playhouse – an indoor theatre in London proper. This begins the era historically referred to as Shakespeare's later years. The plays written during this period reflect a return to the pastoral romances popularized by Robert Greene and classified as "tragicomedy." For Shakespeare, these included *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, all of which may have been performed in the Blackfriar's playhouse as well as at The Globe.²⁹ It is presumed that during this time, possibly around 1611 or 1612, Shakespeare retired to Stratford. His last recorded acting job was in Ben Jonson's *Serjanus* in 1603.

The last documented record of Shakespeare's life is a shaky signature confirming a revision in his will on March 25, 1616. He died on April 23. The monument erected at the head of his grave in Trinity Church, Stratford was erected some time before 1623. It contained an inscription with the date of his death and a bust – one of only two likenesses created of Shakespeare during his time.³⁰

Of the 37 plays written by Shakespeare that have been preserved, only 18 were printed during his lifetime. Acting companies rarely published their repertoire due to the possibility of rival companies pirating the work. The first complete edition of Shakespeare's plays was collected and sponsored by two of his colleagues, John Heminges and Henry Condell, in 1623. This first edition, called the *First Folio*, was presumably printed from Shakespeare's own drafts although none of the originals survive.³¹

He has been called "the greatest playwright that ever lived" and his plays are produced more frequently than those by any other playwright. They continue to be presented throughout the world almost 400 years after his death. It is impossible to imagine the theatre without Shakespeare or that his influence will diminish in time.

The Sources of *Much Ado About Nothing*

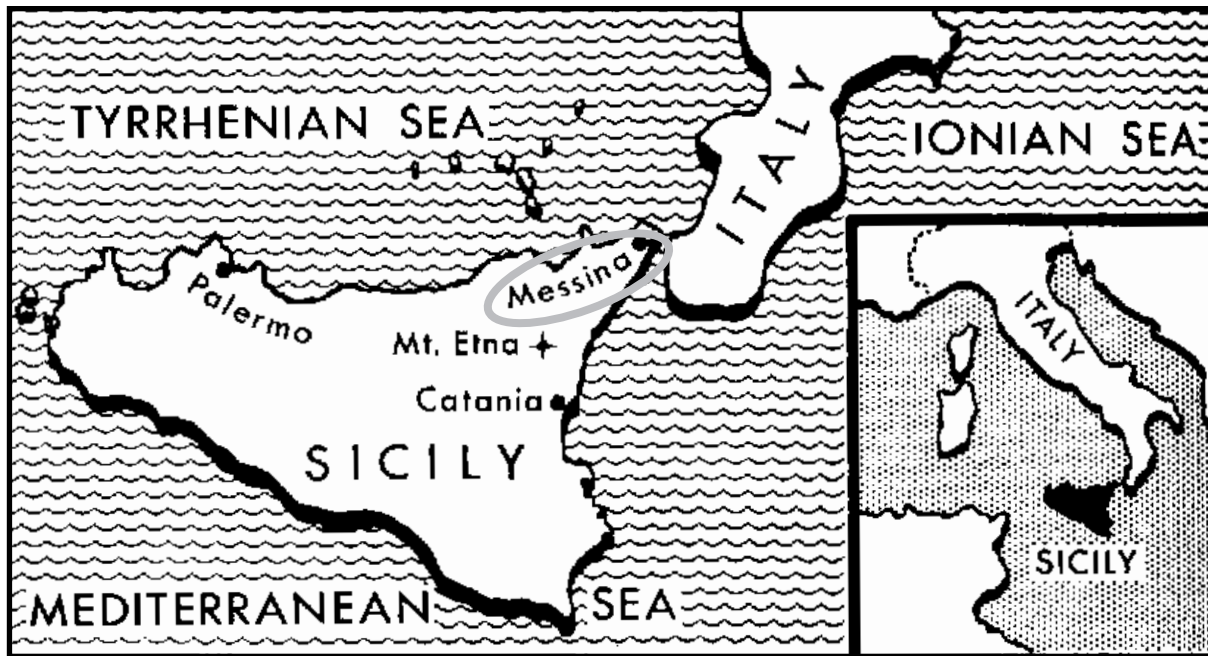
There are three major sources for the Claudio-Hero plot within Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. One source is Book 5 of the long narrative poem, "Orlando Furioso," by the Italian poet Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533). It was published in Italy in 1516 and translated into English in 1591, seven years before Shakespeare's play.

A second source is the story of Phedon and Philemon in Book 2 of *The Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser published in 1596. Another long narrative poem, it is extremely allegorical and served as the basis for Mercutio's Queen Mab speech in *Romeo and Juliet*, published in 1597.

The third major source is the 20th story from *Novelle* by Matteo Bandello (1480-1562), published in Italy in 1554 and translated into French in 1582 in Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*. The setting of the story is Messina and again there is lover Sir Timbreo, his bride-to-be Fenicia, and a jealous rival Sir Gironde who conjures up a "scene" of infidelity.

The Claudio-Hero plot in *Much Ado About Nothing* is balanced by the parallel plot of Beatrice and Benedick. These two characters, along with Dogberry, Verges and The Watch, are all thought to be original Shakespeare inventions.

MESSINA



MESSINA is the third largest city in Sicily. It lies on the northeastern coast of the island, on the strait of Messina, a body of water separating Sicily from Italy. Today it is noted for its exports of fruit, wine, fine silk and damask.

Historians believe that pirates founded Messina in the 700s BC.

About 500 BC, Greek colonists settled there and gave the city its name. The First Punic War was fought for control of Messina and, at the end of this war, the colony fell into Roman hands. Despite wars and earthquakes, the city has remained, rebuilding after each disaster.

DECEPTION: APPEARANCE VERSUS REALITY IN MESSINA

“Appearances are often deceiving.” Aesop, A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing.

Deception thrives in Shakespeare’s Messina because the characters cannot discern appearance from reality. In *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Much Ado About Nothing*, Walter R. Davis writes: “[The people of Messina] delight in deception - whether it be merely the polite indiscretions necessary to cover real feelings and exist in society tactfully; or a way of innocently amusing themselves... .” This Messina is a superficial world where its citizens must keep up appearances and marriage is no more than a socio-economic pact.

The first hint of such pretense occurs in the speeches between Leonato, Don Pedro and the messenger (I, i).

Each of these characters strives to outdo the other in elegantly phrased compliments and observations using language as a mask. Don John, the outsider, also masks his inner malice with outward politeness. On the other hand, Beatrice, who stands outside the circle of men, mocks their formality and deliberately twists the messenger’s words into jokes. Later, when she and Benedick converse, they use words in a kind of “merry war”(I, i, 107-134); their witty repartee is a shield against their true feelings. Moreover, they continue their verbal sparring because others come to expect it of them.

The theme of appearance versus reality is carried on by

NOTHING AND NOTING

*CLAUDIO: Didst thou note the
daughter of Signor Leonato?*

*BENEDICK: I noted her not,
but I looked on her.*

*Much Ado About Nothing, I, i,
119-120.*

The play's title has a double meaning. In Shakespeare's time, "nothing" and "noting" sounded alike. According to John Drakakis in his *Notes on Much Ado About Nothing*, "characters are made to 'note' or observe others, and are also made to misunderstand the significance of what they see and hear." Drakakis also says the "'nothing' of the title could refer to chastity." In Christopher Marlowe's poem "Hero and Leander," Leander tries to persuade Hero that her virginity is, in effect, nothing. Some think that Shakespeare may have taken the name of Hero from this poem.

"This idol which you term virginity
Is neither essence subject to the eye.
No, nor to any one exterior sense.
Nor hath it any place of residence.—
Things that are not at all are never lost." II, 269-276.

If these lines did inform Shakespeare, then the title's "much ado" is the question of Hero's chastity, and thus about the larger issue of marriage itself.

Carol Cook takes a different view in her essay "The Sign and Semblance of Her Honor: Reading Gender Differences in *Much Ado About Nothing*."¹ Noting can mean to observe or make note of. Claudio "notes" Hero in the opening scene, but she has only one line of seven words and these are in reference to a remark made by Beatrice. Her effect comes from only standing and looking beautiful. Claudio falls in love with her, but deception fouls his love. In Act IV, Scene 1 he says, "She's but a sign and semblance of her honor," meaning she has no honor, so he unceremoniously dumps her. Thus, some critics dismiss Hero "as an obedient and silent [non-character] who exemplifies subordinate feminine principles . . . wearing the disguise society demands of her."² To such critics, Hero is a kind of cipher or space, the "nothing" that generates so much ado.

the play's emphasis on ceremony. The masked ball is a "ceremony deliberately devoted to an enjoyable hiding of the truth where each of the characters—can operate behind a mask."³ Thus, the disguised Don Pedro woos Hero. Such hiding knows no class boundaries and servants Balthasar and Margaret indulge in word play as easily as Beatrice and Benedick.

Besides talking well, Shakespeare's characters place a great deal of importance on dressing well. We hear about "cloth of gold—down sleeves, side sleeves, and skirt" (III, iv); about Benedick's change into "strange disguises" (III, ii) and about doublets, rubatos, gloves and vizards. Fashion is the enemy of truth, or so Borachio intimates (III, iii) when he tells Conrade that fashion is a "deformed thief [turning] men between the ages of 14 and 35 into Pharaoh's soldiers or Bel's priests or Hercules."⁴ It is with Claudio's "fashions" that Don John's henchman, Borachio, carries out his master's plan of treachery on the unsuspecting Hero.

Claudio is more style than substance. At first glance, Claudio seems sweet and insecure, overwhelmed by Hero's beauty. As the play progresses, he places more importance on seeking information about Hero's financial worth and gaining Benedick's approval of the lady than he does on her. Once satisfied, Claudio then leaves the courting to Don Pedro. Claudio is an example of the "purely social man: polite, little more than a polished surface himself, he shows tender concern for appearance and views marriage as a financial and social arrangement."⁵ Claudio's ego and status are at stake, so by Act IV, he shows the importance he places on appearance versus the "love" he feels for Hero. He punishes Hero and her father with sadistic exuberance, representing the "worst aspects of society: shallowness, complacency, and inhumanity."⁶

The conflict of appearance and reality is a theme Shakespeare developed in tragedies such as, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello* and *The Tempest* but in *Much Ado About Nothing*, like *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, such conflict is a source of comic irony. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, the conflict between reality and appearance is to "resolve the difficulties which characters face, and to expose and contain those forces harmful to the establishment and preservation of social harmony."⁷

WOMEN IN ELIZABETHAN SOCIETY

BEATRICE: O what men dare do! what men may do! what men daily do, not knowing what they do! Much Ado About Nothing, (IV, i, 19).

Elizabethan men drew on a variety of stereotyped views about women as they attempted to explain, justify and control the place of women in society. These views included:

1. Women had two functions: they were either prostitutes to be bought or wives to be owned.
2. A woman could be placed on a pedestal to be worshipped by her courtly lover. Such idolatry could stifle her individualism and silence her.
3. Virginity was a virtue and adultery an unforgivable sin for women. The fear of an illegitimate child intruding on the succession of paternal property demanded the chastity of the bride and the fidelity of the wife.
4. Women were favorite targets of satirists, who blamed them for the defects of the world. Any woman who spoke up for herself was branded as a shrew who needed taming.

Why were Elizabethan men so harsh in their judgments of women? According to Harry Berger, Jr. in his essay "Sexual and Family Politics in *Much Ado About Nothing*," the reason is "that women are responsible for their sins, but men are not. Male deception and inconstancy are gifts that God gives, and their proper name is Manhood." Since a woman carries her father's fame and fortune into the future, and since by marrying she assumes the management of her husband's household as well as his reputation, she was expected to conquer illicit desires with wisdom. Thus, if women are so virtuous and wise, does that not affirm their moral superiority over men? Perhaps that

is why Claudio seems so bitterly satisfied at his victimization. Claudio judges Hero's behavior as intemperate, thereby reaffirming his moral goodness: "As a brother to a sister I showed/Bashful sincerity and comely love," (IV, i) while his intended bride seemingly allowed sensuality to overcome her.

Berger continues by analyzing the words of the song in Act II. Scene iii. In his opinion, these lyrics suggest: "Men are born deceivers whose nature it is to be inconstant, untrustworthy, lustful, contentious and obsessed with honor, status and fortune."⁸ Because men are so endowed with these qualities, they can't be blamed for what they do, because they cannot help themselves. Their inadequacy at self-control proves their virility and manliness. Using this argument "enables [men] to think better of themselves and worse of women."⁹

A different viewpoint comes from Carol Cook in her essay, "The Sign and Semblance of Her Honor: Reading Gender Differences in *Much Ado About Nothing*." Cook looks at a dominant theme in the discourse of the male characters - the betrayed (or cuckold) husband jokes. She argues that these jokes reveal men's anxieties about women's potential power. "In the act of cuckolding, which dominates the imaginations of Messina's men, it is the husband who is the silent and absent butt of the joke, while the woman takes the active and powerful role, at least, sexually."¹⁰ In this reading, as well as other scholars' interpretations, *Much Ado About Nothing* is a struggle in gender differences.

"Nature has given woman so much power that the law cannot afford to give her more." Samuel Johnson

LEONATO: FATHER FIGURE?

*“It is impossible to please all the world and one’s father.”
Jean de la Fontaine, Fables, Book III, (1668), Fable 1.*

Men (particularly fathers) dominated Elizabethan society. Leonato is Hero’s father, but he is also the governor of Messina. As such, he is responsible for law and order and the dispensing of justice within his home and his office. Leonato is “the conventional father figure in that he is concerned for his daughter’s future, and he seeks to make careful provision for her happiness.”¹¹ Therefore, the early impressions Leonato gives is of a benign, generous, but careful father, who loves his only child.

However, he, too, becomes a victim of the deception and, at this point, his whole demeanor changes. Leonato is totally unprepared for Claudio’s allegations about Hero’s promiscuity and unquestioningly believes them. He could have listened to the words of Dogberry and Verges (III, v) and averted his daughter’s downfall by the power of his position but fails to do so. While Hero lies prostrate and untended at her father’s feet, he becomes the aggrieved and dishonored father. He cries: “Could she here deny/The story that is printed in her blood?/Do not live, Hero, do not ope thine eyes” (IV, i).

Claire McEachern in her essay “Fathering Herself: a Source Study of Shakespeare’s Feminism” says that Shakespeare has created a father whose authority is in question. As a father, Leonato is “caught in the inconsistency at the heart of patriarchy; - he is unjust, disloyal, and too ready to sacrifice his love for his daughter to the ideal of male alliance.”¹² His male authority, in the role of father, has been damaged and to regain his social power among men in Messina, he must renounce his daughter and wish her dead.

Leonato’s verbal actions are not unlike the physical “honor killings” which go on today in such countries as Jordan, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Morocco, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey and some South American nations. Women within some societies of these countries are not free, but are the property of their male relatives. Men dictate what women may and may not do, and the men are free to do with the women as they wish. “More often than every two hours a woman is killed by a male relative for any reason - even if the reason is illusionary - and this practice is supported by the views of the nations and religions in which they live.”¹³ The justification for these killings is to preserve the family’s honor from the horrible deed the woman is supposed to have committed or fallen victim to because her so-called behavior means there is bad blood in the family. Echoing Elizabethan society, some women within these contemporary societies are considered responsible for all the ills of the world. A man can accuse a woman of anything and the accusation means her family’s honor is ruined. Thus, the only way to save face, and the family’s reputation, is to kill her. As often is the case, Shakespeare’s seemingly light comedies of entertainment have a darker side to contemplate. Fortunately, for the play is a comedy, Leonato learns the truth of Don John’s treachery and regains his composure. He then implements a plan that manipulates Claudio and Hero back together again. Leonato never acknowledges his error but is prepared to correct matters so both domestic and social harmony are restored.

“Honor is but an empty bubble.” John Dryden, Alexander’s Feast

BEATRICE AND BENEDICK: THE MODERN COUPLE?

Beatrice is a fascinating character with her intelligence, wit and independence of mind. She intends to please herself in marriage and, to that extent, she is less a victim of circumstance than her cousin, Hero. She has her feet planted firmly on the ground and seems to be very realistic.

However, some critics question her realistic attitude and her character. John Drakakis wonders if she is in love with Benedick at the outset, for she questions the Messenger about Benedick's exploits. "The attitude she adopts is one of contempt - and she displays an indiscriminate use of words."¹⁴ Beatrice's insistence that she will not marry is a sign of arrogance and her dogmatic stance will have comic impact when she finally has a change of heart. Then she will reveal her true feelings over which she had complete control earlier in the play and exhibit weeping and distress (IV, i). Likewise, Harold Bloom in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* admires Beatrice for her blend of merriment and bitterness, but finds her biggest flaw is "making her own opinion into the general judgment."¹⁵ As Benedick says: "It is the base, though bitter, disposition of Beatrice that puts the world into her person, and so she gives me out" (II, i).

Carol Cook writes that Beatrice accepts "her culture's devaluation of feminine characteristics - of weakness, dependence, vulnerability - and sees conventionally masculine behavior as the only defense against them."¹⁶ Her outrageous speech does not offend the male characters' code of gender conduct, for they consider her just one of the boys. And like one of the boys, "she is aggressive and as guarded as the men in the play [for] she fears emotional exposure and vulnerability to the opposite sex."¹⁷ However, she seems to vacillate between self-revelation and affected indifference toward men. For example, when Hero is betrothed she speaks in a different tone: "Good Lord for alliance! There goes everyone in the world but I..." (II-i).

Beatrice is caught off-balance when she is gulled into believing Benedick loves her. She becomes ill and, when Claudio renounces Hero at the ceremony, her pent-up emotions erupt in Act IV, scene 1. She and Benedick declare their love, but she has one request: "Kill Claudio!" Her explosion of moral outrage shows her a "champion of feminine principles needed to correct the evils of Messina's predominantly male ethos," says John Crick.¹⁸

Benedick is a good-looking, intelligent soldier who is hostile toward women at the beginning of the play. He mistrusts their loyalty and fidelity and feels that marriage brings discredit upon the man. His encounters with

Beatrice display his wit, which is less self-effacing than hers, but seems more shallow and destructive. As a guest in Messina society, he accepts the male code, but by Act II, scene 3, he shows that he is capable of changing. "I have railed so long against marriage; but doth not the appetite alter?" "From this point onwards, Benedick shows some private awareness of the contradictions in his own character, and he endears himself to us by devaluing, slightly, his own qualities."¹⁹ When he commits himself to Beatrice, he asks her "bid me do anything" (IV, i, 284). Her answer to kill Claudio forces him to think seriously about Beatrice's words; his decision to trust her instincts in a way that he has never trusted any woman before indicates a change in his character. When he publicly announces his love for Beatrice, he rejects wit and cynicism, and his conclusion that "man is a giddy thing" (V, iv, 106) "constitutes a commitment to live in the fullness of knowledge - and to resolve to distinguish between positive and negative attitudes."²⁰

In Beatrice and Benedick, Shakespeare has conceived the battle of the sexes as a "merry war." "Thou and I are too wise to woo peaceably," says Benedick (V, ii). His words are a prediction of some 20th-century couples in movies and television. For example, Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn carried on the tradition of intelligent, witty, sparring partners in movies such as *Adam's Rib*, *The Desk Set*, *Pat and Mike* and *Woman of the Year*. The battle of the sexes continued with Jackie Gleason as Ralph Cramden and Audrey Meadows as his wife, Alice in *The Honeymooners*. Alice gave as good as she got and her acerbic remarks kept Ralph on his toes. Currently, on TV audiences can watch *Will and Grace*. Though not a conventional couple, they castigate and comfort each other in this fond, funny relationship.

Shakespeare suggested that "the union of Beatrice and Benedick may not be a bower of bliss."²¹ If Beatrice is seeking equal status in marriage, she may not find it. The concept of equality in marriage, even in the 21st century, is far from universal. In many countries, the husband is still considered the legal head of the household with complete authority over wife and children. Indeed, the idea of equality in marriage is a very recent legal concept. "In Italy wives did not attain legal equality with their husbands until 1975, and in France, it was not until 1985 that women were officially given autonomy in fiscal matters..."²²

However, Bloom has hope. "Two of the most intelligent and energetic of Shakespeare's characters, neither of them likely to be outraged or defeated, will take their chances together."²³

THE YEAR 1810

The director has chosen to set the play in Italy in 1810. This year marked the height of the Napoleonic Empire with French control extending in a great arc from the Baltic Sea to the Italian coast south of Rome, from the southeast coast of Spain to the city of Warsaw in Poland.

The period of 1810-1812 was relatively peaceful in the Empire. Napoleon's victories on the Italian peninsula were won because he had transformed the army of Italy from a bedraggled group into a strong, patriotic force. The soldiers (like those in the play) were very adept at putting down peasant revolts in Mantua, Rovigo, Modena and Bologna. Napoleon's biggest problem in 1810 was divorcing his wife, Josephine, to marry Princess Marie Louise of Austria.

The Civil Code or Napoleonic Code was put in practice in France and conquered countries. The Code dealt at length with family, the institution upon which French society was built. The authority of the father was re-established (not unlike Elizabethan times), and the sta-

tus of women was lowered. The wife was under the authority of the husband - a situation not changed until after World War II. There was nothing written about the possibility of women working, receiving a salary, or engaging in commerce. Divorce was possible but the rules favored the husband. Though the Code proclaimed equality before the law, this fact was ignored in the lower position given to women. However, the Code was adopted and formed the basis of reformed national codes in a large part of Europe and the Americas.

The Neoclassic style was favored during the early 19th century. Architects preferred the simple Greek column, pediment and slightly tilting roof, while painters like Jacques Louis David painted portraits in a simple style. The beginnings of Romanticism dated back to the French Revolution of 1789 and flourished mostly in literature. Authors often chose themes from the middle ages and wrote about knighthood and chivalry - when bravery, courtesy and honor were in vogue.

NOTES

1. Drakakis, p. 69.
2. Cook, p. 85.
3. Davis, p. 5.
4. Shakespeare, p. 85.
5. Davis, p. 4.
6. Crick, p. 36.
7. Drakakis, p. 70.
8. Berger, p. 29.
9. Ibid, p. 30.
10. Cook, p. 80.
11. Drakakis, p. 95.
12. McEachern, pp. 133-34.
13. www.vibrani.com.
14. Drakakis, p. 89.
15. Bloom, p. 195.
16. Cook, p. 83.
17. Ibid, p. 83.
18. Crick, p. 36.
19. Drakakis, p. 86.
20. Ibid, p. 88.
21. Bloom, p. 201.
22. Neft and Levin, p. 87.
23. Bloom, p. 201.
24. Bevington, p. iv.
25. Ibid, p. xlv.
26. Ibid, p. lxix.
27. Ibid, p. lxxi.
28. Ibid, p. lxxii.
29. Ibid, p. lxxiii.
30. Ibid, p. lxxvi.

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ACTIVITIES

Students read to locate, select and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference and technological sources.
Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #5

1. We live in a very visual era. Images that convey information and ideas seem to pass faster and faster across the movie, television and video screens. When Shakespeare was writing, visual images were not as important as verbal images. Nearly every character in Shakespeare's plays use words and language to surprise, amuse and sometimes offend.

Find examples of the following verbal techniques in *Much Ado About Nothing*:

- Metaphor: a comparison of two unlike objects
- Simile: a comparison of two words using "like" or "as"
- Repartee: witty retorts
- Puns: playing with the meaning of words
- Innuendo: suggestive language usually sexual
- Personification: giving human qualities to non-human objects
- Anastrophe: An unusual word order in a sentence
- Oxymoron: a combination of words that contradict each other
- Soliloquy: A monologue delivered by a character expressing his/her inner thoughts

Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing.
Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #4

2. Dogberry attempts to use refined speech but only succeeds in looking like a fool. His speech is full of "malapropisms" or misusing words and mistaking meaning. Read Dogberry's introductory scene (Act III, scene iii) and list examples where he misuses words. Then, rewrite the scene inserting the words you believe Dogberry intended to say. Afterward, read the scene aloud to your class. Why do you think Shakespeare wrote mala-

propisms in Dogberry's speech? What does it tell you about the character? Given the ending, how is Dogberry's ignorance in speech ironic to his purpose in the play?

Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences.
Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #2

3. Shakespeare is very creative in writing insults for his characters. His words create vivid pictures in our minds. For example, look at Beatrice's description of Benedick in Act II, scene i:

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

Find other examples of picturesque insults in the play. Specifically look in scenes between Beatrice and Benedick, the marriage scene of Claudio and Hero and the language of Don John. Put together your list of insults to create an original scene. Then, with a partner, rehearse this scene and translate it into modern language. Perform each of the scenes (Shakespeare's language and your own version) for your class.

Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.
Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #6

4. The Dating Game: Pretend that Benedick and Beatrice are contestants on The Dating Game. Improvise a scene, with a game show host as intermediary, when they first meet. The characters should reflect how Beatrice and Benedick feel about each other at the start of the play. Then, have the host interview the contestants after they have had their

date, i.e. after the two begin to like each other. Discuss how and why their feelings toward each other changed. Does the trick that the other characters in the play plot against Beatrice and Benedick sound believable to you? Have you ever seen people's feelings change when they believe someone feels differently about them? What do you think Shakespeare was telling us about human nature?

Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.
Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #6

Students understand and apply the creative process to fundamental skills of acting, playwriting, and directing.
Colorado Model Content Standard: Theatre #2

5. The director of *Much Ado About Nothing* chose to set the play in the 1800s rather than its original time. This is a common practice in the production of Shakespeare because the language and stories are universal to any time period. For example, look at these film adaptations of other Shakespeare plays:

- *Men of Respect* (adapted from *Macbeth*)
 - *West Side Story* (a musical adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*)
 - *10 Things I Hate About You* (adapted from *Taming of the Shrew*)
 - *Kiss Me Kate* (a musical adaptation of *Taming of the Shrew*)
 - *A Thousand Acres* (adapted from *King Lear*)
 - *My Own Private Idaho* (adapted from *Henry IV Part 1*)
 - *Looking for Richard* (a documentary about Richard III)
 - *Shakespeare in Love* (a fictional account of Shakespeare's life)
 - *Richard III* (set in the 1930s Germany)
 - *Romeo and Juliet* (set in Modern-day America)
 - *Hamlet* (set in 1800s Denmark)
- Do you think *Much Ado About Nothing* would translate into a modern setting? Try setting the characters in

Messina High School, a modern high school in America. What type of teenager would each character be? Who would be a cheerleader? A football player? A computer wizard? Class president? Etc. Where would you set each scene? A locker room? The lunch room? Science class? Create a “*dramatis personae*” (list and description of each character) and breakdown of scenes and their settings to share with your class.

Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.
Colorado Model Content Standard: Reading and Writing #6

6. One interesting theme in *Much Ado About Nothing* is the inter-generational theme. All of the characters, no matter how old or young, work together to trick Beatrice and Benedick. Can you relate this situation to anything in your life? Can you think of an activity or a place where young and old work together? Why do you think the generations do not collaborate or work together very often? Do you think age was a consideration in casting this production? How did the director and actors show the wide range of ages in the play?

Another aspect of the varied generations in the play is that of ageism. “Ageism” is defined as discrimination against any person because of his/her age, particularly discrimination against the old. An example of reverse ageism is when Benedick believes the trick against him because “I should think this a gull but that the white-bearded fellow speaks it. Knavery cannot, sure, hide himself in such reverence” (II, iii). Benedick is assuming that because Leonato is old (white-bearded), he is honest or reverent. Do you think this

is true? Make a list of stereotypes that you have about elderly people. Then, make a list of stereotypes you believe older people have about your generation. Analyze each stereotype and consider where it came from. Is it based in fact, personal experience or observation? Do you think it is a fair generalization about that generation? Why or why not? How do stereotypes about ages affect our culture and society?

Students understand and apply the creative process to skills of design and technical production.
Colorado Model Content Standard: Theatre #3
Students understand and relate the role of theatre arts to culture and history.
Colorado Model Content Standard: Theatre #4

7. Masks have been used in theatre since the first formal theatre presentations in ancient Greece. They are used to disguise actors, describe character, represent change, affect a mood or emotion, or transform the human face into something magical. The masks used for this production of *Much Ado About Nothing* are representative of designs from ancient Roman theatre. Make a drawing of one of the masks that you remember from the production. What specific details do you remember: color, overall shape, design, size and shape of features, mood of expression, etc. Next, select one of the characters from the play and design a mask for him/her. Challenge yourself to make the mask symbolic of the character’s personality.

Students know how to use maps, globes and

other geographic tools to locate and derive information about people, places and environments.

Colorado Model Content Standard: Geography #1

Students know how various forms of expression reflect religious beliefs and philosophical ideas.

Colorado Model Content Standard: History #6.3

8. At the beginning of the play, Don Pedro is returning to Messina after being at war and we find out where each character comes from. After locating each of the following places on a map, try to identify who Don Pedro’s army was fighting against. (You may want to research the historical period for further clues.)

- Arragon, home of Don Pedro
- Florence, home of Claudio
- Padua, home of Benedick
- Messina, setting of play

It is interesting that Shakespeare should choose to set this play in Italy because of the negative view toward Italian people and culture during the 1500s. England was a protestant nation as a result of Queen Elizabeth I’s beliefs and Italy, being the home of the Catholic Church, was viewed as a rival. Why do you think Shakespeare would have set this play in Italy? Can you find any offensive references to the setting or Italian culture? What about prejudicial remarks about other cultures or nations? Why do you think these were included in the play? Do you think Shakespeare included these remarks for the humor of his audience or because he had a prejudiced view? Engage in a debate either defending or accusing Shakespeare; be sure to include a historical perspective in your argument.



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