

Much Ado about Nothing: A Complex Comedy

Dr. Meeta Mathur

Associate Professor
Department of English
University of Delhi, Delhi, India

Abstract: *Much Ado about Nothing* is a play that has a setting in a place called 'Messina' Sicily. At this time Sicily is being ruled by Aragon. Infidelity, deception, mistaken identity and nothing are the themes which are beautifully delineated in the play. The mutual hate of the characters for each other and turning of the hate into true romance is quite magical and noteworthy. Separation is definitely followed by reconciliation in Shakespearean comedy. His comedies end on a happy note, often with marriage bells, dancing and singing. Characters impersonating the other, masquerade and mistaken identity provide comic relief and also allows the characters to express their views on others freely. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, there are a few soldiers who have returned from the war. Benedick and Claudio find themselves in their known world again; reacquaint themselves with Beatrice and Hero respectively. They fall in love towards the end while at loggerheads throughout the play. 'Nothing' is more important as it was a synonym of 'noting' at the Shakespearean time.

Index Terms: comedy, love, hate, noting, nothing, misunderstanding, mistaken identity, masquerading, infidelity, deception, separation, reconciliation

The title of the play has pun in it. It has been pointed out by the critics that the Elizabethans sounded the word 'noting' the same way as 'nothing' and the play is a sort of dramatized pun on the theme of misnoting. The scene at the church, which is the high point of the main action, turns wholly on the idea that seeming or hearing is believing. Much of the effect of action depends upon the contrast between truth and all the misnoting by the main characters. The term for the perception in the play is 'noting' and its approximation to 'nothing' in Elizabethan pronunciation is exploited in the following dialogue between Don Pedro and Bathazar, the singer.

Act II, scene III lines 50 to 53

The whole passage becomes a pun on the musical term "note" and the other idea, denoted by the word of observing or nothing. To note is to observe, to judge and act sensibly. Noting then becomes a special kind of perspective.

Eavesdropping, deception and misapprehension have a major role in the action of the play. Love is induced in Benedick and Beatrice for each other by the practices of their well-meaning friends like Don Pedro, Claudio and Leonato. The practice of a more sinister kind, engineered by Don John and his accomplices leads to a serious misnoting and misjudgment on the part of Claudio. Each action in the major practices of the play is noting of a sort. In each instance Borachio's first false report about the Don Pedro's wooing of the Hero. The same Borachio, John Don's accomplice plays again on his susceptibility to appearances which causes much mischief in this gay comedy.

In the crucial church scene, Claudio thinks that he has apprehended reality and repudiated appearances and seemings. It is not surprising that he should harp on the opposition between "seeming" and "being" in his long tirade against Hero. He carried the same kind of emphasis further with a violent denunciation of Hero's seeming chastity.

It is tragic that Claudio's love should be transformed into hate by a set of false appearances mistaken for real ones. Claudio's propensity to mistrust brings about near tragedy and disaster in this comedy. In this scene Claudio behaves like an 'outfaced fashion mongering' to the extent that his love judgments are based on external testimony of eye and ear rather than the sounder perceptions of an intuitive faith. They are taken up with the idea of love as a 'play', a fashionable game rather than a meaningful relationship based on implicit faith.

Claudio does not finally remain a person who has reached a dead end but grows in social and moral wisdom as the events develop later. The perception of Friar for bringing about the desired change in Claudio's love for Hero is stated in platonic terms; to the effect that Claudio's brooding upon Hero's reported death will aid his advance along the scale of love. This is aimed at amending the functions of imagination, the faculty responsible for receiving phantasms of things and interpreting their significance for understanding or reason.

In due course of time, Claudio turns into a more perfect lover than before and his advance from reliance on the outward modes to a higher stage of perception proceeds through repentance, penance and faith. The condition that he should marry a veiled lady whose face he may not see becomes "symbolic" test of his advance from outward perceptions to the inward perceptions of intuitions. Claudio's acceptance of the test as well as the gesture of faith involved in accepting the veiled lady is a measure of his progress on

the scale of love. This gesture helps him attain the reward for his chastening experience, when the veiled lady finally stands revealed as Hero herself.

If the case of Claudio is an example of false love and judgment are made when the lovers rely on the senses and the baser reason. The love of the other pair in the play, Beatrice and Benedick provide strong proof of the necessity of faith and intuitive reason for perfect love.

Beatrice and Benedick start as anti-lovers at the beginning of the play. Beatrice might seem absolute in demanding less than a godlike semblance from man, but the witty tone in her statement makes it plain that it is an amazing view of man and marriage. Her sophisticated amusement at conventional romantic postures implies that she is conscious of her own uniqueness and that her feelings are under restraint. For her wooing, wedding and repentance are like three dance steps.

If Beatrice is bent on being a maid in heaven, the resolution of Benedick is no less. He wishes to remain an inveterate bachelor. If wedding for Beatrice is a mannerly measure full of 'state and ancience', it is something of a 'yoke' for Benedick who considers it his privilege to trust no woman and continue to live a bachelor's life forever.

Benedick is the very antithesis of a conventional lover who can undertake a romantic quest in the service of his beloved. He proposes to Don Pedro that he may be commanded any service, any quest of the impossible just to avoid conference with 'this happy' the lady Beatrice. This is a witty reversal of the familiar romantic quest and Benedick's hyperbole reveals that he is aware of the romantic modes of love. With the amusement of the sceptic, he reflects on the antics of metamorphosis that love has brought on Claudio. He finds it a matter of laughter on the change that love has brought on Claudio.

Masquerading as intellectual alertness or wit, it is nothing but self-love or pride at the bottom. Hero and Ursula in the place acting scene hit upon the basic shortcoming of Beatrice, which in a way applies to Benedick also. Hero's analysis of her cousin's shortcoming emphasizes it as a kind of 'misprizing' of not giving to truth and virtue.

The folly of this pair of lovers has been the folly of not acknowledging the bents in human nature. Both of them are conscious of their being unlike in the matters of love. This is one ridiculous assurance which is a matter of pride to both of them. Their wit is a result of this attitude and it springs from their refusal to come out of their self-centeredness. It is this attitude which prevents them from discerning the rich reality of love. Their initial folly of failing to perceive the value of love springs from the relation itself, when both the sexes participate in it without their sense of any self-regard.

It is a measure of wisdom that they are open to social maturation in the due course of the play. From being the devout mockers of love, they eventually ripen into wise lovers. Their ripened mature outlook towards love provides a norm to them for judging the love of the other pair- the love of Hero and Claudio.

Deception in the Claudio only reveals his lack of inner certitude when confronted with altered appearances. On the contrary, deception of Benedick and Beatrice reveals the truth to each one of them. They become aware that despite appearances of scorn and pride, the other person indeed is full of love. The interest of Beatrice in Benedick is something more than casual. Once after realizing that he is in love, he renounces his false pride and wit and decides to give his natural instincts its full play and due recognition.

The development of the character of Beatrice in social maturation follows somewhat the same line. She too is accused by her friends of 'scorn', 'disdain' and 'self-love'. These are the traits that have prevented her from perceiving the real graces of so fine a gentleman as Benedick. The most important thing that is noticeable is that the deception compels Beatrice to come out of her sheltered self and yield to the graces of love, the same way as Benedick.

In the play acting scenes the two anti-lovers undergo an important inner change which is a shift from their self-reliance on false pride and wit to the ways of intuitive faith. Their judgment on each other proves sound as they both have been mocking and have never set themselves wholly against love as such.

The crisis of Hero's slander brings out the best in this wise couple. The crucial difference between their love with its basis in intuitive apprehension of each other's inner worth, and Claudio's love for Hero resting chiefly on the sense of physical beauty is the point made by the action in the scene. Beatrice and Benedick display their innate ability to steer clear of the entangling confusion of seeming and the actual truth. Beatrice is the first one to affirm the innocence of Hero and it is only after she has spoken, Friar comes in defence of Hero Beatrice is actually sensible and displays a different level of intuitive understanding.

Dogberry and Watch ultimately become the 'guardians of reality' by unraveling the key sequence of mis-appearances in the play with their own misnoted sense of truth. In the final movement of the play, when all the misapprehensions pivoting around the plot of Claudio and Hero are finally cleared away. As Claudio moves towards the goal of marriage on the terms laid down by Leonato, Benedick likewise moves towards the same goal by convincing Beatrice's uncle that she has been viewing him lately with the eye of 'favour' which he has been compelled to reciprocate. Both Beatrice and Benedick appear as the wise lovers by displaying their liveliness in the early part of the play. Benedick asserts that love is the final something that gives value to life whereas false wit

undermines the centrality of the 'humour' in human life. This comedy has a befitting ending. It ends on a festive note with a call for music and dance by Benedick.

Beatrice and Benedick are appreciated for being foremost among Shakespeare's gallery of lovers. They form an interesting couple. In the end they emerge fully aware characters. They have had a glimpse of the potential of the wealth of life, its rich design, harmony and order. It's love's higher reason impels these lovers, initially they were the mockers of love, were halfhearted votaries to move upward on the neoplatonic scale of awareness to some perception of love's mysteries and truth. Love has its own compulsions which accord with those of reason is the recognition that Beatrice and Benedick finally arrive at.

Much Ado About Nothing is a comedy written by William Shakespeare. It is about intelligent love, deception and misunderstanding. The blossoming of love between Beatrice and Benedick after much ado about nothing and the misunderstanding between Claudio and Hero and how it gets cleared up is the main theme of the play. The relationship between these two couples undergoes a tremendous change. From total disregard for the institution of marriage to intelligently falling in love is a journey of mirth and wit woven in a magical drama.

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