

Spotlight on Learning

a Pioneer Theatre Company
Classroom Companion

Much Ado About Nothing



Pioneer Theatre Company's Student Matinee Program is made possible through the support of Salt Lake County's Zoo, Arts and Parks Program, Salt Lake City Arts Council/Arts Learning Program, The Simmons Family Foundation, The Meldrum Foundation Endowment Fund and R. Harold Burton Foundation.

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Approx. running time:
2 hours and 40 minutes, including one fifteen-minute intermission.

Student Talk-Back:

There will be a Student Talk-Back directly after the performance.



*T. Ryder Smith
(Benedick) and
Rebecca Wat-
son (Beatrice)*

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

by
*William
Shakespeare*

directed by
Matt August

*February 21 -
March 8, 2014*

"I've had a most unexpected journey working on this production of *Much Ado About Nothing*...The themes of the play are vast: chivalry, honor, chastity, rumor. But mostly, the play addresses the costs and gains of love. At its heart lies a love story borrowed from Italian romance—the Hero/Claudio story line—and a love story invented by Shakespeare—the Benedick/Beatrice story. The former is a story of the extremes of emotion and the latter is a story of the control and denial of emotion. Stories of young, impulsive, passionate love affairs are territories well charted in Shakespeare's plays and they provide as much caution as they do comedy and emotion. Stories of older characters falling in love, especially when it means giving up their independence, isolation and—or so they think—their power, are also prevalent, and for me, a fascinating angle on the characters in *Much Ado*.

At the beginning of the play Beatrice and Benedick both fear losing their strength, identity and honor by falling in love with another person. They would rather remain in their respective "roles" than grow into fully realized human beings capable of all emotions. The canon is full of great female characters who, in some version, pretend to be other than what they are in order to have any power or independence in patriarchal power structures... I hope that the joy we've had in creating our world for *Much Ado* leaps off the stage and into your imaginations."

~ *Matt August, Director*

This is an abridged version of Matt August's director's note. To see the full version, visit www.pioneertheatre.org/2013-2014-season/much-ado-about-nothing/directors-notes/

“Dually Noted”

by Heather Nowlin

The title *Much Ado About Nothing* could easily sum up Shakespeare’s tragic-comedy all by itself. However, in late 16th century England, audiences would have also recognized a double meaning—a pun—in the title: “Noting” was a word used to mean spying, watching, or eavesdropping. Without this double meaning, the title still works: there was much hubbub over Beatrice and Benedick’s relationship by their friends—that turned out to be entirely made up, and therefore actually nothing. There was also the matter of Claudio reacting so dramatically on his and Hero’s wedding day; his accusations of betrayal and adultery were based on a prank his “friends” played on him—so, really, the basis of the conflict turned out to be nothing. And then there’s Hero’s and Leonato’s reaction to the horrific acts of that day—without any spoilers, let’s just say that a huge plot point actually turned out to be nothing.

However, when you add the pun of “noting” to the title—members of Shakespeare’s audience would have pronounced “nothing” and “noting” to sound very similarly—then there is another layer of meaning to the play. All of these instances of “Much Ado” being made over “Nothing” involve eavesdropping, watching or spying. Beatrice and Benedick are duped when they “note” their friends’ private conversations (which, of course, weren’t actually private at all but meant

for the pair to overhear); Claudio is deceived by “noting” a prank put on by the villainous Don John and his henchman Borachio; and the tragic element of the play is put to rest when the clownish constable Dogberry and his rag-tag team of watchmen overhear Boracchio confessing the duplicitous act.

From the title of the play and its multiple meanings, you can see the central points of the plot. You can also discern that the play is full of wit and humor. Note well the title—it is all, and nothing.

Source: <https://sites.google.com/site/muchadodramaturgysite/>

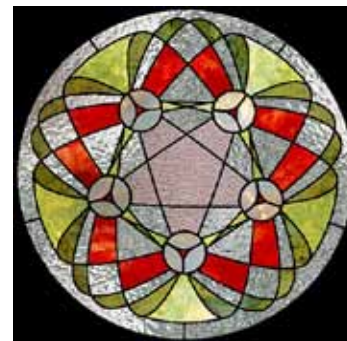
What is verse?

Verse is a kind of un-rhymed poetry that follows a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. Iambic Pentameter, the kind of verse Shakespeare uses most frequently, follows the following pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables:

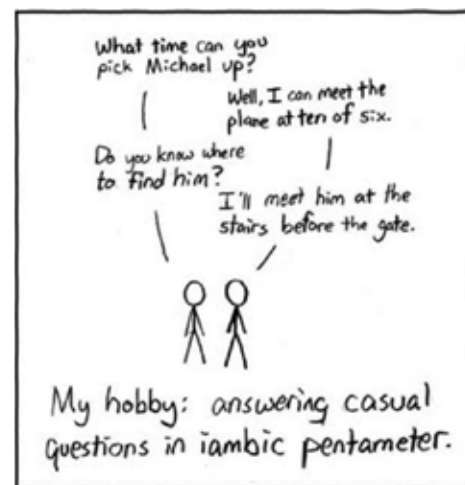
de-DUM-de-DUM-de-DUM-de-DUM-de-DUM

An iambic pentameter line consists of five pairs of stressed and unstressed syllables.

Just because iambic Pentameter is a form of poetry, it doesn’t mean that all of Shakespeare’s verse is flowery or silly. It also means that Shakespeare’s verse need not be complex, and



from iambicpentameter.net



certainly not impossible to understand, just as this comic illustrates.

Look at the comic above (provided by xkcd.com). Do you see any kind of pattern? Everything the figure on the right says is in iambic Pentameter! Try reading those words out loud to the “de-DUM-de-DUM-deDUM-de-DUM-de-DUM” pattern described before. And, the next time you think about iambic Pentameter, remember that it’s just a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, as natural as the statement “I’ll meet him at the stairs before the gate.”

Source: <https://sites.google.com/site/muchadodramaturgysite/shakespearean-verse>

Much Ado About Feminism

By Heather Nowlin

Shakespeare wrote his plays in a very different time period from the one in which we now live. In fact, it's often hard to imagine how it must have been then: despite the fact that Shakespeare wrote some of the most well-rounded, complex and conflicted characters—of both sexes—in English history, only men were allowed to portray those characters onstage.

Thankfully, that is not the case today. We can, perhaps, more fully enjoy the plays Shakespeare wrote by seeing women portray female roles. The ideas of feminism and sexism seem like 20th century concepts, but plays like *Much Ado About Nothing* show us that they might have been on people's minds even in cultures where young boys playing roles written for women seemed perfectly natural to everyone.

Sexism refers to discrimination against someone because of gender, but also to cultural elements that make that kind of discrimination possible. An answer to sexism in our time is the idea of feminism, or promoting equality for women in political, social and economic areas. A major theme in *Much Ado About Nothing* is the social standing of women, specifically in Europe around the time the play was written – which was 1598. There



Rosie the Riveter, a cultural icon since World War II.

are several ways this theme is demonstrated in the play, especially through its female characters, and most notably through Hero and Beatrice.

Beatrice is presented as an adult capable of making up her own mind; she is presented with more choices and better consequences than her foil, Hero. Beatrice has far more dialogue than Hero; in fact, Hero is present for several scenes of the play in which she says nothing at all. Although Hero does fall in love and that love is (eventually) returned, Beatrice receives two different marriage proposals, and makes her mind up about which—if any—to accept according to her own wishes, and not her family's as was customary for the time period. Claudio falls in love immediately with Hero, based solely on her looks. Beatrice and Benedick eventually realize their love for one another, but only after a lengthy battle of wits – that Beatrice more often “wins,” or at least gets the last word.

Can you think of other indicators of feminism (or sexism) in this play?

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Don John want to cause trouble? Why is he so sullen and morose?
2. Do you think Beatrice and Benedick know each other when they speak behind their masks? Why or why not?
3. Why does Don Pedro's plan work so well?
4. What are Leonato's instructions to his daughter, Hero, and what do those instructions show about traditional attitudes?
5. Why does the Watch arrest Borachio and Conrade?
6. Is the punishment Leonato places on Claudio fitting? Why or why not?
7. Why do Beatrice and Benedick speak about loving each other only according to reason? How do they really feel about each other?



Ashley Wickett as Hero and Terrell Donnell Sledge as Claudio.

Tragicomedy

By Heather Nowlin

Much Ado About Nothing seamlessly blends a potential for disaster with side-splitting humor—so much so that some scholars refer to this work as something within its own category: A “tragicomedy.”

The comedic elements of the play start the play off and finish it up, like bookends to a storyline that brings us right up to the edge of genuine tragedy. After he establishes both “high” and “low” forms of comedy, Shakespeare tugs at our heartstrings with Claudio’s outburst to his great love Hero at the couple’s wedding. She is humiliated and destroyed; he feels heartbroken and betrayed. And the results of that encounter are indeed tragic.

Once Claudio condemns Hero, Beatrice is resolved to avenge her. Through his love for, and the wit and persuasiveness of Beatrice, Benedick is resolved to challenge, and potentially kill, Claudio. Benedick is then faced with an inner conflict that is the stuff of darkest tragedy: Is he willing to do anything for the one he loves, even if it means killing a man he has fought alongside in battle?

However, the low comedy in the character of Dogberry intervenes. Dogberry, like the character Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, “mispronounces his way through Acts IV and V,” and tragedy is averted.

The play introduces us to its characters in a light-hearted, traditionally comedic setting. The men are coming home from war, victorious. There is excitement throughout the land, and Beatrice immediately sets to work on Benedick (as well as others) with her beloved wit and humor that have charmed countless audiences for over four centuries. The clownish constable Dogberry, his band of foolish watchmen, and their malapropisms are the perfect low-comedy foils for Beatrice and Benedick’s high-comedy battle of wits.

Hero’s serving girl, Margaret, demonstrates a little more low comedy with her bawdy speech and off-color jokes. The play ends with what is perhaps the most telltale sign of comedy of all: an elaborate and joyous wedding—a double wedding, in fact.

But the perfect blend of the elements of both comedy and tragedy is demonstrated in the

act of Borachio wooing Margaret, as Margaret is dressed in Hero’s clothes, while the others make Claudio watch. The scene that takes place between Borachio and Margaret is practically a farce; Borachio is wooing her, but his purpose in doing so is a mean-spirited prank. And so, his speech is tongue-in-cheek, her reactions are confused and distrustful. But Claudio naturally thinks the whole time that Hero, his greatest love, is betraying him before his eyes, which leads to a misunderstanding of disastrous proportions.

With such high stakes at nearly every turn, brought on and relieved by brilliant comedy, it’s no wonder that some scholars can’t fully place *Much Ado About Nothing* in one camp or another, and so use the term tragicomedy to categorize it.

Source: “*Much Ado About Nothing*,” *English Association Shakespeare Bookmarks No. 3*, by Roland J. Martin.



Constable Dogberry and his “Watch.” L-R: Brigham Inkley, Max Robinson, Mia Bagley and Zoe Heiden.

Activities

1. Dogberry represents the “clown” character in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and Shakespeare demonstrates that personality trait through his speech. Dogberry uses several “malapropisms,” or words that are used incorrectly. Some examples: “Is our whole dissembly appeared?” in Act 4, Scene 2, Dogberry says “dissembly,” when he really means “assembly.” What other malapropisms can you find in Dogberry’s speech? Try writing some malapropisms in your own speech.
2. Choose a scene from the play and design the set for that scene.
3. Choose a character from the play and design costumes for him or her.
4. Choose a character from the play and write a letter to a friend from that character’s point of view. What is going on in the household? What pieces of information does the character you choose have to share with someone?
5. The play is set in the Italian city of “Messina.” Study a map of Italy, and pinpoint the places mentioned in the play. What can you find out about the area during the time of the play, which was written in 1598? Can you tell which wars Don Pedro and his men have been fighting?

Further Reading

On the theme of Love:

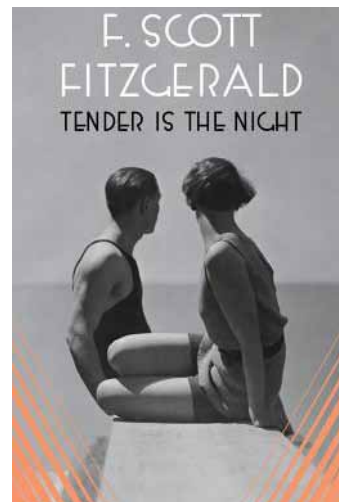
1. *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte
2. *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte
3. *Tender is the Night* by F. Scott Fitzgerald
4. *The Phantom of the Opera* by Gaston Leroux
5. *Great American Love Stories* by Lucy Rosenthal

On the theme of Appearance vs. Reality:

1. *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad
2. *The Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton
3. *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams

On the theme of Gender Roles:

1. *William’s Doll* by Charlotte Zolotow
2. *Philip Hall Like Me. I Reckon Maybe.* by Bette Green
3. *Smile Like a Plastic Daisy* by Sonia Levitin
4. *I’m Not Your Other Half* by Caroline Cooney



OUR EQUITY CAST

* Member of Actors' Equity Association



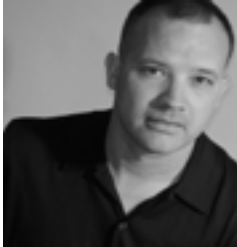
JOHN AHLIN*
(Leonato)

MATT AUGUST (Director) returns to PTC after *In the Heights*. He is excited to work with the talented cast assembled for *Much Ado About Nothing*.

JOHN AHLIN* (Leonato) Broadway credits: *Waiting for Godot*, *Journey's End* (2007 Tony Award Best Revival), *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, *Macbeth*, others. Film/TV: *Law & Order: SVU*, *Late Night with David Letterman*, *Inside Llewyn Davis* and others. PTC debut.



DAVID MANIS*
(Don Pedro)



TOBIN ATKINSON*
(Borachio)

TOBIN ATKINSON* (Borachio) Juror 5 in *Twelve Angry Men* at PTC, Utah Shakespeare Festival, Plan-B Theatre, SLAC, the Asolo (FL), the Studio (DC), and the Shakespeare Theatre (DC). Co-founder of Plan-B and Meat & Potato Theatres.



MAX ROBINSON*
(Dogberry)

COLLEEN BAUM* (Ursula/Master) PTC: *Our Town*, *The Heiress*, *Lost in Yonkers* and *You Can't Take It With You*. Many appearances at SLAC, Plan-B Theatre and Old Lyric Repertory Theatre.

MICHAEL JEAN DOZIER* (Conrade) *Macbeth*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *Barnstormer*, and *Trav'lin: the New 1930's Harlem Musical* (off-Broadway). Film/TV: *Treme* (HBO), *Lights Out* (FX), *Untitled Barry Sonnenfeld Pilot* (NBC), and the film *City Island*.



COLLEEN BAUM*
(Ursula)

CHRISTOPHER DUVAL* (Don John/Fight Choreographer) Sacramento Theatre Company, Idaho Repertory Theatre, Utah Shakespeare Festival, Oregon Shakespeare Festival (13 seasons), others. Assistant Professor in the ATP at the U of U. PTC debut.



TERRELL DONNELL SLEDGE*
(Claudio)

TERENCE GOODMAN* (Antonio) New York: *Jesus Christ Superstar* (original), *Damn Yankees* (w/Gwen Verdon and Ray Walston), *Titanic*. Regional: *Eliot Ness in Cleveland*, dir. Hal Prince/Nick Corley, *Great Expectations*, others. Many films and over 30 television roles.



MICHAEL JEAN DOZIER*
(Conrade)

DAVID MANIS* (Don Pedro) Broadway: *War Horse*, *Henry IV*, *Exit the King*, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, *Arcadia*, *The Coast of Utopia*, others. Off-B'way: *Our Town*, Shakespeare In The Park. TV: *Frasier*, *King of Queens*, *Monk*, *The Onion News*, *The X-Files*, others.



T. RYDER SMITH*
(Benedick)

MAX ROBINSON* (Dogberry) Nearly 100 PTC productions. Studio Theatre (DC); Utah Shakespeare Festival, SLAC, the Grand Theatre, other regional theatres across the country. Film/TV: Woody Allen's *Shadows and Fog*, Disney's *Pixel Perfect*, and many TV credits.



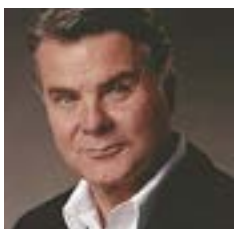
CHRISTOPHER DUVAL*
(Don John)

TERRELL DONNELL SLEDGE* (Claudio) Off-B'way: *Dakota Atoll*, *Dunkfest '88*, *Find and Sign*. Many regional theatres: *The Threepenny Opera*, *Vieux Carre*, *The Lady From Dubuque*, *Blood Knot*, others. TV/Film: *Blues in the Night*, *Troop 491*. PTC: *Find and Sign*.



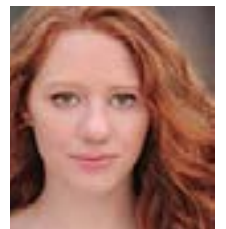
REBECCA WATSON*
(Beatrice)

T. RYDER SMITH* (Benedick) Broadway: *War Horse*, *Equus*. Off-B'way: *Passion Play*, *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, *Underneath the Lintel*, the 3-actor, 40-character *Lebensraum*, others. TV/film: *Nurse Jackie*, *Damages*, *White Collar*, *The Venture Brothers* (voice), others.



TERENCE GOODMAN*
(Antonio)

REBECCA WATSON* (Beatrice) Broadway/NY: *The Cocoanuts*, *Disney's Hercules*, others. Tour: *Moon Over Buffalo*. Many regional, including world premieres. TV/Film: *The Big C*, *Deception*, *Law & Order*, *Third Watch*, *The Normal Heart* w/Mark Ruffalo, others.



ASHLEY WICKETT*
(Hero)

ASHLEY WICKETT* (Hero) Regional: *Once in a Lifetime*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *Scapin* with Bill Irwin (A.C.T.), *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Misanthrope*, *As You Like It*, *A Month in the Country*, *Almost, Maine*, *Britannicus* and new plays with The New Harmony Project. PTC debut.