

Problematic and
themes raised in
much ado about
nothing



At first glance, the reader is not likely to notice the immediate clue which presents itself in the title of William Shakespeare's comedy, *Much Ado About Nothing*. If one, however, would follow the example of a Shakespearean player in Elizabethan times and pronounce the word "nothing" as "noting," he would be introduced to a pun that is very significant because the ideas of noting, or observation, and nothing, are important themes in this story. Noting is something which motivates the characters to take actions which greatly affect the plot, and it is an idea which reflects the theme of reality versus appearance, in which reality is nothing and appearance is due to noting.

First of all, it is the characters' noting which drives them to take actions which influence the plot. The earliest example of this is when Claudio falls in love with Hero. The relationship between these two characters plays a major role in the story, and it originates with Claudio noticing Hero - "Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of Signior Leonato?" (Act 1: 1, l. 158-59) Claudio then asks the Prince to woo her for him. The important chain of events which follows - the pastime of formulating a romance between Beatrice and Benedick, the scheme of Don John, the "death of Hero" - is all on account of Claudio's falling in love with Hero, which wouldn't have happened, had he not noted her.

Another example is when Benedick and Beatrice fall in love with one another. The only reason this happens is because, first of all, Benedick notes the Prince, Claudio, and Leonato discussing how Beatrice is in love with him: "Come hither, Leonato. What was it you told me of today, that your niece Beatrice was in love with Signior Benedick?" (Act 2: 3, l. 95-7) This, of

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course, is not true, but Benedick believes it, and he falls in love with Beatrice - " I will be horribly in love with her!" (Act 2: 3, l. 237) Likewise, Beatrice overhears Hero and Ursula purposefully inventing Benedick's love for her, and she falls in love with him - " I will requite thee, taming my wild heart to thy loving hand." (Act 3: 1, l. 117-18) The relationship between these two characters is important to the plot, as many events revolve around them, and it comes about only because Beatrice and Benedick note others' conversations which falsely discuss their love for one another.

Probably the most important instance of a character's noting affecting the plot is when Claudio observes Borachio wooing Margaret and believes her to be Hero. Thinking Hero to be disloyal, Claudio shames her publicly and refuses to marry her. This event, and the actions taken to solve the problems it creates, make up the major conflict in the plot. The characters must devise a way to prove Hero's innocence and make Claudio feel remorse for his actions. This they do, by staging Hero's death and uncovering her slander. None of this would have occurred, however, if Claudio had not noted Borachio wooing " Hero" and then acted on his false impression.

Two more examples of the significance of noting are when the Watch notes Borachio telling Conrad of the crime he committed by helping to slander Hero. The two men are then arrested, which is important to the plot; otherwise, they never would have been interrogated, and Hero's innocence would never have been confirmed. The other example is when Dogberry goes to tell Leonato that he has apprehended some criminals, who happen to be Borachio and Conrad. Leonato notes Dogberry, who speaks in

malapropisms, and sends him away. Had Leonato noted him further, he
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would have realized that it was important to interrogate the criminals right away, and he then would have been able to prevent the slander of his daughter. In this way, his failure to note Dogberry properly greatly affects the plot.

Noting does not only serve to motivate the characters - it reflects the story's continuing theme of reality versus appearance. One aspect of this theme involves the idea that objects or affairs, when noted, are not always what they seem to be. The frequent use of masks throughout the story supports this idea. Masks create a distorted version of reality by giving a person a false appearance. The first use of masks is at the dance, where several instances of people seeming to be other than they are occur. Antonio flirts with Ursula, pretending he is not himself. The Prince woos Hero, pretending to be Claudio. Claudio pretends to be Benedick, and so allows himself to hear Don John saying that the Prince is wooing for himself. Benedick, recognizing Beatrice, who may or may not recognize him, is subjected by her to a series of harsh criticisms of himself. In the end of the story, Claudio marries Hero when she is behind a mask, not knowing her identity. All of these events take place when most of the characters are behind masks, which therefore relate to the reality versus appearance theme by giving a false appearance to a reality, and which relate to the noting theme by depriving the characters of their ability to note one another properly.

The reality versus appearance theme, which involves objects or affairs not being what they seem to be, goes to a higher level. Characters are deceived by what they note because the things they note seem to be other than they are. Then, by reacting to what they believe they noted, the characters react

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to what is, in reality, nothing. For example, Beatrice and Benedick fall in love because, by what they note others to say, it appears to them that each is in love with the other. They react to the false appearance that they note by actually falling in love with one another. They later discover that neither one originally loved the other, and so their reaction of falling in love was based on, in reality, nothing.

Another example of the reality versus appearance theme is when Claudio notes Margaret and Borachio and believes Margaret to be Hero, then slanders Hero, justifying himself with the idea that she appeared to be disloyal. While he shames her, he makes many references to the contrast between her appearance and what he believes her to be in reality: " Behold how like a maid she blushes here! ...Would you not swear, all you that see her, that she were a maid,/ By these exterior shows? But she is none." (Act 4: 1, l. 34-40) He later makes another statement which refers again to the theme of reality versus appearance, in which he describes what she seems to be and what he thinks she is: " You seem to me as Dian in her orb/ As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown./ But you are more intemperate in your blood/ Than Venus, or those pampered animals/ That rage in savage sensuality." (Act 4: 1, l. 58-62) Thus Claudio, causing a great upheaval in the plot, accuses Hero in reaction to her appearing to be disloyal. He later discovers that she was innocent all along, and that what he noted was false. His accusations were built on nothing - she had appeared unfaithful but was, in reality, loyal.

The title, Much Ado About Nothing, summarizes the entire story. It has two meanings, each of which are significant to the plot - if it means " much ado <https://assignbuster.com/problematic-and-themes-raised-in-much-ado-about-nothing/>

about noting," it describes all of the activity which takes place on account of the characters' noting. If it means "much ado about nothing," it describes how all of the characters' activities are based on nothing. The title itself, in all its cleverness and mixed meanings, is representative of the clever and complex text within. The title, then, is one of the few aspects of this play which do not have a deceitful appearance. In fact, this work is so preoccupied with the idea of deceitful appearances and such that it makes the reader wonder about his or her own life. How many times have we been deceived? How many objects or affairs in our lives currently are not what they seem to be? Also, are we, like the characters, going to be lucky enough to have the truth revealed to us? This comedy of Shakespeare is not so humorous as scary, because it provides us with questions to which we might never know the answers.