

## Much Ado About Nothing

It is a beautiful spring afternoon. The air is full of the radiance of freshly bloomed daisies and the energizing chill of the periodic spring breeze. Puffy large cumulus clouds fill the azure sky with gray thunderheads looming off in the distance. Looking down from the clouds, one can see a gathering of finely dressed people. Birds flying overhead hear the murmurs of the crowd gathered for a wedding of gentry.

Shakespeare could never have planned the first scene of Act IV in Much Ado About Nothing so well. The serene sky overhead symbolizing the beauty and joviality of the occasion; dark rain clouds looming in the distance foreshadowing the mischief to come. Despite his inability to control weather patterns, Shakespeare developed marvelous scenes which he displayed in his own theater, The Globe. How did Shakespeare portray the emotional aspects of his characters and their strife to his audience? How did he direct the actors and what did the open air stage of The Globe look like?

Imagine yourself in London circa 1600, a short year after the completion of the Globe Theater and perhaps a few months after the completion of the play Much Ado About Nothing, Act IV has just begun. Claudio and Hero are facing each other in front of a simple, yet anciently beautiful altar, garbed in Elizabethan costume fit for the occasion. Hero is wearing a long white dress with trailer and high neck which is adorned according to the fashion trends of the time. Claudio has donned a royal looking doublet with silver trim and hose to equally as majestic. Sitting on either side of the couple in ancient pews, shrouded in solemn silence, are Don Pedro the Prince of Aragon, Don John the Bastard, Leonato, Benedick, Beatrice and the attendants of Beatrice and Hero. Facing the couple, positioned in between them so the audience may hear him, is Friar Francis wearing a simple white robe and golden cross, his only possessions. Don Pedro wears a doublet ornately embroidered with golden designs. He is the only person on stage looking finer than Claudio, marking his royal blood to all. The others wear fine doublets and dresses, although not decorated elaborately, to show their respect for the wedding pair.

Scene IV actually begins when Leonato stands and makes his brave but respectful request to the Friar to be brief with the ceremonies (IV i,11). Knowing his duties, the Friar continues square-faced with the wedding by asking Claudio of his intentions to marry Hero (IV i,15). Without hesitation Claudio responds, "No." (IV i,16) He means that he does not intend to marry Hero. The audience and the attendants of the wedding are slightly shocked. Murmurs run through the crowd of people standing on the floor of the theater asking whether they heard correctly or not. Leonato stands up from his seat meaning to correct the Friar by informing him that the Lady is to be married to the Count, and not vice versa (IV i,17). As relief spreads through the audience, the tension is cleared. The audience knows of Don John's plan to ruin the ceremonies of the day, but they hope his schemings do not come to fruition. As the audience contemplates the possibilities, building up more tension than was washed away merely seconds ago, Hero continues the scene with the affirmation that she has come to be married to Claudio (IV i,110). She bows her head in humility and gives her response to the Friar's question, deeply aware of its meaning, her voice soft with love and compassion. The audience is now waiting for the Friar to continue. They wish that Friar Francis would hurry and be brief as instructed by Leonato, even though he speaks no slower or faster than anyone normally does. Francis goes on telling the couple to speak of any reasons that they should not be married, or risk their souls to eternal damnation (IV i,111-3). Claudio quickly responds in a cynical voice by asking Hero if she knows of any such reasons not to be wed (IV i,114). His quick jabbing remark sets the audience on edge once again. Perhaps Don John succeeded in his vile plot to foul the wedding! Conrade and Borachio may not have been simple drunkards confessing fictitious stories to one another in a dark alley. The tension has mounted and Hero's negative answer to the Count's inquiry cannot cut it back. Friar Francis'

repetition of the question, directed at Claudio brings the tension to a peak in the play. When Leonato stands again and boldly intercedes he only succeeds in holding the tension at its current level. The audience is curious what his remark could bode for the characters being wed. The play is at its climax and everyone feels the need to know how the scene will close.

Claudio turns on his host crying, "O, what men dare do! ... What men daily do, not knowing what they do!" (IV i,118-9) Referring to Leonato's recent remarks. The wedding attendants all jump to attention, frantically looking around to see if they are not having nightmares. Benedick tries to save the situation with a jest but even his remarkable wit cannot rescue the situation. Claudio's indignance has surfaced and his iron will has turned to boiling water fitfully puffing into the air. Asking the Friar to stand aside so that he may confront Leonato as the father of the bride, Claudio lashes out at Hero. "There, Leonato, take her back again. Give not this rotten orange to your friend. She's but the sign and semblance of her honor. . ." (IV i,1130-3) Turning to the audience to continue his defilation of Hero, Claudio unleashes the vile plans of Don John, to run loose among his companions and the audience. Shocked, the audience can only listen more eagerly to the deliberations of Claudio, Leonato and Claudio's would-be bride, Hero. Leonato faces not only his daughter's shame, but the shame she has brought upon his house. Valiantly he persists in defending his daughter until he is forced to capitulate to the sheer immensity of fact supported by evidence.

Very little scenery is present on stage, but one feels the immense emotional tension and confusion that is present in the play. Even the costumes are unimportant, because the actions and the words of the actors are the meat of the scene. Indignant voices, hands thrown into the air and violent wheeling around are all examples of the actions that could be made by the actors. The vital characteristics of this scene are the characters themselves. If the actors remain unseen throughout the scene, and only the characters shine through, the true emotions and thoughts of the scene must be felt by the audience.