Reading to Write

At the close of Kenneth Branagh's 1993 adaptation of *Much Ado about Nothing*, the music soars joyously, and the cast begins a merry dance of celebration. The camera lifts into an all-embracing crane shot and takes in more and more revelers as if to signal the completeness of the comic ending. The young Claudio, the film's ending suggests, has grown up, learned his lesson, and been united with Hero. Branagh's Benedick and Emma Thompson's Beatrice remain feisty and quick witted but nonetheless enter into what the audience is asked to imagine as a perfect marriage of two independent minds.

With such a triumphant depiction of the play's resolution, the casual viewer might be forgiven for imagining that *Much Ado about Nothing* is Shakespearean comedy as its most festive and heartening. The careful reader of the play text, however, will have some questions. Certainly, finding and attempting to provide some answers to these questions will be the key to producing a strong essay on a play that, as many modern critics have observed, is deceptively simple.

The work's complexity is evident in a close reading of the often-cited passage in which Benedick apparently transforms from a cynic into a lover. He has just overheard the staged conversation between Don Pedro and Claudio in which they dupe him into believing that Beatrice is madly in love with him:

> This can be no trick: the conference was sadly borne. They have the truth of this from Hero. They seem to pity the lady: it seems her affections have their full bent. Love me! why, it must be requited. I hear how I am censured: they say I will bear myself proudly, if I perceive the love come from her; they say too that she will rather die than give any sign of affection. I did never think to marry: I must not seem proud: happy are they that hear their detractions and can put them to mending. They say the lady is fair; 'tis a truth, I can bear them witness; and virtuous; 'tis so, I cannot reprove it; and wise, but for loving me; by my troth, it is no addition to her wit, nor no great argument of her folly, for I will be horribly in love with her. I may chance have some odd quirks and remnants of wit broken on me, because I have railed so long against marriage: but doth not the appetite alter? a man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age. Shall quips and sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humour? No, the world must be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married. Here comes Beatrice. By this day! she's a fair lady: I do spy some marks of love in her. (2.3.220–46)

This passage would be, obviously, vital to an essay on Benedick but also useful in a variety of other essays, such as one addressing the theme of love in the play. We can consider both issues more or less simultaneously here, and both essays would, of course, contain significant overlap. Benedick's ideas here are wittily peculiar; though they seem to be familiarly romantic at first glance, they are in fact highly unusual. Consider what motivates Benedick to "requite" Beatrice's supposed love. How do the first eight lines of the passage present a mix of several motivating emotions, not necessarily at...
odds with one another but not exactly in harmony either? The line "I did never think to marry" takes the passage in a new, self-reflective direction. What many commentators have remarked on over the years and found so attractive in both Benedick and Beatrice is honesty. There is something incongruous about the highly rational way Benedick is discussing love here—to be seen again in As You Like It's Rosalind—and the reflections on love (a topic that can elicit speech or dialogue of the most ornate and artificial kind) seem remarkably self-aware and frank. He glosses his sudden and total shift in romantic perspective as simply "mending" "detractions." What follows is a pragmatic account of Beatrice's virtues, to be contrasted sharply with the standard Renaissance poetical device of the blazon, a hyperbolic and implausible reckoning of a woman's idealized beauty. This favorable account of Beatrice on Benedick's part is less about praising his beloved than rationalizing his transformation. This line of thinking takes Benedick back to what he imagines will appear as hypocrisy on his part. Again, another thin, even dismissive remark is offered to account for the change of heart: "but doth not the appetite alter? A man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age." This is all the more remarkable because moments earlier, at the beginning of the scene, speaking of Claudio's infatuation with Helena, Benedick remarks:

I do much wonder that one man, seeing how another man is a fool when he dedicates his behaviors to love, will, after he hath laughed at such shallow follies in others, become the argument of his own scorn by failing in love...

More surprising still, Benedick's earlier speech contained the glimmers of self-awareness and acknowledgement of personal change that makes possible the coming character transformation:

May I be so converted and see with these eyes? I cannot tell; I think not: I will not be sworn, but love may transform me to an oyster; but I'll take my oath on it, till he have made an oyster of me, he shall never make me such a fool.

As you prepare to write, then, you are forced to address a vital question: How is this transformation to be read? Should it be seen as psychologically realistic? Perhaps, as many have suggested, it is not a transformation at all but rather a confession of what has long been true: Benedick loves Beatrice. Another possibility emerges too. Should we read this as consciously unrealistic on the dramatist's part? We have seen the fickle and mercurial ways of the heart dramatized in A Midsummer Night's Dream. People, especially in matters of desire and passion, Shakespeare seems to argue in that play, are singularly prone to sudden, apparently unaccountable transformations. Is Benedick's own metamorphosis (along with Beatrice's) another example of Shakespeare's thoughts on the matter? Moreover, how does Benedick's famous claim that "the world must be peopled" conclude the passage? As you write, look for the unorthodox elements in the passage, the unexpected rhetorical turns that Benedick produces to help him (and us) understand his own dramatic change in character.

### Topics and Strategies

Every essay requires a focus; you cannot write about everything in the play at once. As a specified focus evolves into a thesis, so observations develop into arguments. The starting point, nonetheless, always comes from a direct engagement of the text. The topic suggestions included here are geared toward helping you make the most of the budding ideas you will have as you read Much Ado about Nothing. By no means should you feel limited to these topics, however.

#### Characters

Although, as has often been observed, the personalities of Beatrice and Benedick usually steal the show, in terms of narrative and dramatic structure, all of the major characters are intriguing, a little ambiguous, and deserving of essay treatment. Let us take Claudio, for example. Remember that workable formula for a character essay: "character X is ___ at the beginning of the work but by the end is ___." This ready made thesis statement provides a nice focused argument and a reliable structure for your essay. Sometimes the process of transformation is subtle and quite difficult to interpret (this will be the case with Beatrice and Benedick), as a result deserving ample essay space, while other times the transformation is less extreme or the focus of the paper simply naturally leans toward the pre- or post-transformation stage of the character. This is likely the case with Claudio, and the focus may well rest a little more on discussing exactly what
kind of character Claudio is in the first acts of the play. After all, he has traditionally received a rough ride, painted as something of a foolish young man who is gullible, too quick to act, and, frankly, callous. Evaluate Claudio’s response to the claim that Don Pedro is wooing Hero for himself, and then the second and more substantial plot involving Margaret at Hero’s window. The wedding scene (4.1. presents the culmination of this movement and is certainly worth careful reading in your paper. The Branagh version has Claudio physically throw Hero over and then angrily toss chairs in front of an amazed wedding party. As an interpretive move, this works very well, reinforcing for us the erratic and immature mind of the young Claudio. But is this what you see in the scene? Finally, as the essay moves on, do you discern any significant shift in Claudio at the end? Behind his remorse and penitence, what can be found? A young man painfully forced to see his own foolishness, growing as a result? If you look to complicate this a little, you may want to distinguish between the period in which Claudio is aware that he has caused Hero’s death and the period in which he believes Hero to be dead and knows she was innocent.

If Claudio has his youth and inexperience to excuse him, the older Don Pedro can make no such appeals. An essay exploring Don Pedro’s motivations and purpose in the play could be very interesting. He seems to imagine himself as some kind of human Cupid, a "true love god," as he puts it, one of the authors of the dramatic action. How does he go about this role? How should we judge his success or failures? However, he is in direct competition with his brother, Don John, who also seeks to write the action of the play, though his vision is one of tragedy not comedy.

Sample Topics:

1. **Don John:** What is the effect of having Don John, a character clearly belonging to the genre of tragedy, in a romantic comedy?

Many critics have seen in Don John a prototype of Shakespeare's most chilling villain, *Othello*'s Iago. It seems remarkable, then, that the seed of such a character is planted in a play that has often been cited as among Shakespeare's most merry comedies. How do you account for this choice on Shakespeare's part? Look at what sets Don John immediately apart from the others in 1.1 (think, for example, about language, such an important aspect of the play). Obviously, pay close attention to the account Don John makes of himself in 1.3, again looking at how he distinguishes himself from the other characters of the play. You may find it useful, especially if the paper needs be a little longer, to incorporate an understanding of Don John through comparison and contrast with Don Pedro (2.1 will offer you some good Don John material with which to begin this work). You may wish, too, to think about connections between Don John and Benedick, both men who foreswear love early in the play. Other than the obvious answer of "a story," what is accomplished by inserting Don John into the play? How might Shakespeare be using Don John not just as a narrative device, a catalyst to make things happen, but as a philosophical or thematic device, part of larger debates in the play about such things as love and stagecraft?

2. **Beatrice:** How can we account for Beatrice's transformation from a woman who claims "I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me" (1.1.108) to one who announces Benedick can tame her "wild heart" with his "loving hand" (3.1.115)?

Attempting to answer this question takes your essay right to the heart of the play. The wit of Beatrice, the quality of her dialogue, and the indeterminate nature of her transformation all guarantee ample material for a strong essay. Now, in selecting this topic, though, the student must make some calculations. Because Benedick and Beatrice are such magnets in the play for our attention and interest, you can be sure that many students will opt to write on these characters. I normally advise students to reach for originality in their essays, to look for arguments and topics that others in the class are not likely to choose. This does not mean, of course, that you should not write essays on popular topics, just that you have to distinguish your essay by the way you treat and explore the material. If one word had to be used to describe how this is done, it would probably be "depth." Others may map out the character's progress and perhaps offer a single idea to account for the transformation, but by lingering on the text, close reading the details of what Beatrice says, what she thinks, and who she is, along with the acknowledgement perhaps of multiple interpretations or possibilities behind the transformation, you will likely still stand out from the pack even though your essay treats familiar material. The golden piece of advice for literary criticism essay writing is nearly always "say more!" This thought, expressed in one way or another, probably accounts for the bulk of comments an instructor will make on a first draft essay, so anticipate it and look for ways to spend more time with each idea and point you make.

So which areas of the text are likely to provide you with this material? Of course, the early sparring between
Beatrice and Benedick in 1.1 and Beatrice's rejection of love in 2.1 will be a natural starting point. You may wish to, as some critics have done, reflect on the implications of the history between the couple alluded to by Beatrice (2.1.240). Hero's description of Beatrice (3.1.47–56) may also be useful, as well as Beatrice's response at the end of that scene to the conversation she has heard. The complicated exchange between Beatrice and Benedick at the end of the wedding scene (4.1. deserves to be carefully unpacked as well. And, of course, the oddly ambiguous final lines between the couple at the close of the play may certainly aid you in assessing the nature of the transformation. Remember, in literary criticism it is not necessarily your task to solve the problem at hand, but rather to help the reader understand the complexity of the problem. Sometimes, paradoxically, this can actually involve creating new problems and finding complexity where others will look for simplicity and easy answers. This is likely to be the best path for an essay on Beatrice.

3. Benedick: How should we read the final lines between Beatrice and Benedick that appear to partially undercut the comic union of the couple? Do they have a happy ending?

It would be very possible to write the essay on character "transformation," the one outlined for Beatrice above, with an emphasis on Benedick, of course. Many of the same scenes would be applicable, with the addition of material treating Benedick's "conversion" scene in 2.3 (see "Reading to Write" section above). The consideration of a "happy ending" is also really just a reformation of this basic movement, shifting the emphasis from how and why the "transformation" takes place to the effect it has on the audience. How does the play seem to want us to respond to the pairing at the close? What, for example, are we to make of both lovers ambiguously claiming they love the other "no more than reason" (5.4.74)? What of the fact that Benedick's second to last speech recalls the anxiety over female sexuality and fidelity so prominent throughout the play? You will certainly be able to devote some of the essay to tracing how and why the lovers come to this point at the close of the play, legitimately opening up much of the first four acts for your use, but some concentrated meditation on the play's final arrangement, so to speak, is vital. You may feel sorry for Benedick and Beatrice, that they have been somewhat bullied and tricked into conformity, or you may feel, conversely, that they in fact represent the image of ideal lovers in the play, perhaps the most ideal lovers anywhere in Shakespeare.

Philosophy and Ideas

One of the key changes to how this play is viewed, as many critics have been eager to point out in more recent times, is that it is a play loaded with serious ideas and complex questions. As these critics point out, this is in contrast with the older view of the play as particularly light and, despite its dalliances with danger and sadness, somehow monotone in its comic vision. Much Ado seems eager to play intellectually and linguistically, in fact, and there are many patterns of words and ideas that would make for effective essay topics. For example, one of the play's reoccurring images often pointed to is "Fashioning." Some variation of the word "fashion" appears frequently and deliberately enough throughout the play to give a nice, fairly easy to find structure to your paper. After cataloguing the appearances of the word in your prewriting notes and brainstorming, start to look for both distinctions and similarities in the way the concept of "fashion" is used. For example, of course, you may want to begin with a useful division between occurrences and references to "fashion" (social trends and preferences; see the conversation between Conrad and Borachio in 3.3 for a particularly interesting appearance of the word in this sense) and "to fashion" (to make or design something). A good thesis statement may attempt to draw these apparently very distinct uses of the word "fashion" together, arguing for a cumulative meaning, a third sense of "fashion," if you will, that emerges by combining these two uses together. You may want to think, for example, about the implications of associating Don Pedro's obsessive need to fashion, and what exactly it is that he is fashioning (conventional marriage between two unconventional people), with the idea of faddish and socially manufactured desires. Look for moments where people make big decisions with one eye on how they are viewed by society. A number of critics have gotten very good mileage out of such connections.

Language

Why does the play so self-consciously draw attention to language itself as a theme not just a medium? Literary art is by definition self-conscious of language (even if that awareness is in the form of consciously minimizing and naturalizing the visibility of the language used in the text), and Shakespeare is justly and famously celebrated for his linguistic and rhetorical gifts, of course. But language seems to be much more than a vehicle for poetry and wit in Much Ado. In turns it is both part of the dramatic structure of the play, used to define differences and connections between characters, and a
philosophical theme in itself, an integral part of the play's fascination with "fashioning." So an essay on the function of language in *Much Ado*, what it does more than what it says in the play, would make for a strong and distinct paper.

You might begin by asking how a character is represented through their use of language. The sparring of Beatrice and Benedick is an obvious place to begin, but think about Don John and Dogberry, too, among others. In the case of the former, his lack of language sets him apart from the other infinitely more verbal characters, while the malapropisms and other linguistic errors of Dogberry provide both comic momentum and vivid examples of blocked and confused meanings, misunderstandings that linguistically mirror the many misunderstandings structuring the plot. Making points bigger than individual observations here will be central, as always. Try to find things to say about the way the play uses language as a whole rather than offering a sequence of observations on how individual characters speak. If language itself does become a theme in the play, what does the play finally "want to say" about that theme?

**Form and Genre**

Critics have widely debated the generic quality of the play, what proportions it contains of comedy and tragedy, and where it should be placed in the trajectory of Shakespeare's comic development. Should it be thought of stylistically alongside the earlier comedies, at least in part because of a kind of "lightness" that some have seen in *Much Ado*? Should it, instead, be put alongside the comedies of the middle years (which is, in fact, chronologically speaking, where it belongs), rich, ripe with multi-faceted emotions and possibilities? (Even here, though, critics discussing this issue have rightfully drawn distinctions between the spirit of *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, the latter being closely related to the former but laced with much darker stuff.) Or, does the play belong in the company of *The Merchant of Venice* and, eventually, the problem comedies such as *All's Well That Ends Well*? Or, finally, does it straddle all of these different subsets of Shakespearean comedy, mixing, say, the early "battle of the sexes" theme seen most vividly in *Taming of the Shrew* and the potential for tragedy witnessed in *The Merchant of Venice* with the neutralizing benign force of an *As You Like It*? All of these are perfectly credible options—though the flexibility of the last option probably makes it the most attractive. So what we have in *Much Ado About Nothing*, then, in a sense, is a microcosm of all Shakespearean comedy, and, as a result, gold for the essay writer interested in exploring generic elements.

**Sample Topic:**

1. **Tragic threats:** To what extent does the malign presence of Don John destabilize the comic force of the play? What other (if any) elements further threaten the comic outcome?

   First you have to decide how you view the characters. Do you see connections between, say, Don John and Don Pedro that complicate an easy and reassuring opposition between the two? Some have seen Don Pedro in a more negative light than is common, and if we do so, imagining him as schemer and meddler rather than his self-proclaimed title of "love god," the pair move closer into alignment. There are potential connections to be forged between Don John and Benedick as well, and we will explore all of this further in the compare and contrast section below. For now, however, it is enough to say that if you are writing about the blend of comedy and tragedy in the play, do note that it might be an effective strategy to view Don John as both outsider and insider, someone at odds with the other characters but also someone who reflects obliquely many of their own thoughts and practices.

   Nonetheless, for all of this careful joining of dots between the various characters, it remains clear that Don John is intended to be a clearly anti-comic force in the play, a villain whose motives are not in any way justifiable or explicable, and one that will not be—by nature cannot be—reabsorbed into the comic society and feast of resolution at the end of the play. This marks him out as fundamentally different from the other characters and also marks the play out as fundamentally problematic. Put simply, Don John doesn't *belong* in an early modern comedy. His very spirit is at odds with the genre and his presence reminds us of the artifice of the comic form and ruptures the escapist fantasies of the play. He is, in fact, as many have pointed out, nothing less than a prototype of Shakespeare's great vision of evil, Iago. But whereas Iago, with his unquenchable thirst for mayhem and death, belongs in *Othello*, belongs in tragedy as a depiction of the very darkest of human thoughts and actions, he does not, surely, even in prototypical form, belong in a comedy about love. So why is he there? Exploring the incongruity of Don John will ease you into some important reflections on the shape and spirit of the play as well as, if you wish, broader thoughts on the nature of comedy itself.

   It would be possible to write a shorter essay on the comic form of the play by just unpacking the function of Don
John, but for longer essays, or simply more varied one, you can expand your treatment of the play to cover a number of episodes and their effect on the totality of the play's structure. For example, 4.1, the wedding scene, is key both thematically and structurally. A wedding is, indeed, the definitive episode of early modern comic resolution, the coming together of lovers, the celebration of their defeating the various obstacles that blocked their path to union, and the celebration of the community brought together in joyous reconciliation. Such is the quintessential conclusion of a comedy, even if such an event is used ironically (as may be the case in As You Like It) or downright cynically (as we see in the later All's Well That Ends Well). Here, however, as many have noted, the wedding occurs in the wrong place and, in the event, is foiled and becomes a destructive moment of temporary separation rather than unison. The scene is filled with interesting lines and actions worth reading closely. Think for example about the actions of Claudio and Leontes, their motivations and their justifications (or lack of). Think, too, about the roles of Benedick and Beatrice. Moreover, what do you make of the fact that the "wedding scene" actually ends with death (albeit a feigned death), the hallmark of tragic catharsis not comic resolution? Similarly, 5.3, the mourning of Claudio and Don Pedro for the "dead" Hero, is a tragic rather than comic ingredient and can be included effectively in your essay. And, of course, the final scene—as with the final scene of any Shakespearean comedy in an essay on comic form—deserves prominent attention. As ever, assess the dueling elements of comic and anti-comic energy and, essentially, keep score and show your reader the tensions between the two, perhaps even stake a position on the winner. For example, what do you make of the final return of Don John through report of the messenger and the tortures that await him? What of the decidedly ambiguous exchange between Beatrice and Benedick? What of the reunion of Claudio and Hero? Do you find this latter spark of comedy unsatisfying or undeserved, or perhaps even unpromising? Do you sense that Claudio, in other words, has matured enough to deserve Hero after his exceptionally dubious conduct up to this point? To put all of this together, when Benedick offers the play's last line, a call for pipers to strike up, is this finally a reflection of the play's ultimate tone, a celebration of the comic spirit's victory over the darker hues of the play, or a flimsy attempt to cover up the lingering problems unresolved by the play?

**Compare and Contrast**

As discussed above, Much Ado mirrors a number of Shakespeare's comedies in interesting ways. Particularly tight interactions can be developed with The Taming of the Shrew, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merchant of Venice and The Winter's Tale. Less obvious, but still interesting comparisons can be noted with plays such as As You Like It and All's Well That Ends Well. Shrew and MND both depict the idea of the "battle of the sexes" revisited by Much Ado several years later. A strong essay could be crafted around the struggle between Petruchio and Kate in Shrew and Beatrice and Benedick in Much Ado. Though both plays begin with vigorous linguistic tussles between central pairings, it appears as though the plays diverge significantly when Petruchio's "rough wooing" takes a particularly unpleasant turn during the country house scenes. Benedick and Beatrice appear gentile and amicable by comparison. And yet the overarching dynamics of both relationships remain closely connected. In both pairs the lovers struggle with each other in a bid to assert and maintain some sense of individual agency, while, perhaps more importantly, both couples negotiate social expectations and arrive at some sense of harmony that appears to (and perhaps does) resolve the tension between what society expects of them and what they themselves need. (See the Shrew chapter in this volume for many more leads that might help with this compare and contrast essay.)

Thinking about MND alongside Much Ado presents an opportunity to reflect on changes of heart. Both plays draw on the theme of emotional metamorphosis and transformation, the idea that love can be unreasonably found and lost almost in the moment, a fluid tide setting us adrift and washing us back to safety once more. An entirely different train of thought, meanwhile, can be pursued by following The Merchant of Venice with Much Ado. Here we find Shylock to be a cousin, though perhaps a distant one, of Don John. How do these obstacles to comic resolution resemble or differ from each other? And finally, just as Hermione is believed dead and restored to life and love at the end of The Winter's Tale, so too does Hero's "resurrection" return her to the arms of someone whose foolishness and baseless jealousy cost him dear. Though Claudio's suffering is, of course, infinitely lighter than Leontes's 16 years of bitter guilt and lament, the same device sits behind both sets of dramatic action and could be explored productively in a comparative essay. However, surprisingly, the most striking opportunity for compare and contrast in Much Ado takes us not to one of Shakespeare's comedies for a partner text, but to the tragedy Othello.

**Sample Topics:**
Comparing Don John to Iago from Othello: To what degree can these two characters be said to resemble each other? Less obviously, are there any important differences between the two? What are the implications of these similarities and differences for the comic framework of Much Ado?

The romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge famously remarked that Iago exhibited "motiveless malignity," that the play Othello provided too little in the way of explanation to account for the character's ferocious evil. Interestingly, though, Iago seems to have more motivation than Don John, or at least Iago takes the trouble to create some half-convincing cover stories for his hatred. Whereas Iago is the consummate deceiver, appearing to be "honest Iago" and fully integrated into the affairs of Othello and the state (see Kenneth Branagh's terrifying switches from amiable to evil, captured in devilish conversations directly with the camera and audience, in Oliver Parker's 1995 film adaptation of the play), Don John eschews all pretenses of civility and (importantly) "fashion." So you might make much of this distinction in your essay, perhaps, but it may be that at the core of each character you find similar stuff: "I had rather be a canker in the hedge than a rose in [Don Pedro's] grace...." (1.3.21). Both characters are indeed "cankers" in their respective play worlds, insidiously existing, it seems, only to take away the happiness of others. And both end their plays facing painful extraction from the world, the threat of tortures looming large at the end of each text. But then consider also the effects each character has on others. In Much Ado, it is the malice of Don John that seems to bring Beatrice and Benedick together in sympathy for Hero (many critics have pointed out the tenderness between the two in the final movement of 4.1., as well as, arguably, allowing Hero and Claudio to enjoy a stronger and more mature relationship after the too-gullible Claudio has been painfully tested. This may, then, be a difference worth exploring in your work as well, and perhaps a key distinction between a certain kind of comedy, the kind that recognizes the existence of sadness and pain, and the world of tragedy. In the comic universe evil becomes visible just in time to avert disaster, while in the tragic universe it smiles and charms long enough to bring about the ruin of the innocent and naïve.

Finally, too, connections between Don John and Don Pedro as well as Don John and Benedick were alluded to in the "Character" section above. These, of course, structured even between each character, would make for two great compare and contrast choices also.

Comparing the play text to Kenneth Branagh's film: What vision or interpretation of the play lies behind Kenneth Branagh's film adaptation of Much Ado about Nothing?

Samuel Crowl, a leading Shakespeare-on-film scholar and dedicated ambassador of Branagh's films and legacy (there are certainly plenty of scholars who do not, in general, like Branagh's Shakespearean films), makes some big—and apparently quite justifiable—claims for this film. He argues that it was this film, along with Branagh's earlier film version of Henry V, which paved the way for a decade and more of Shakespearean cinema by breaking down the barriers between Shakespeare and a popular audience. A good place to begin your essay, then, might be to study the film for evidence of how Branagh achieves this groundbreaking popularity. Think, for example, about casting decisions, the "look" of the film, really getting down into the contents of individual shots and sequences, and Branagh's careful selection and arrangement of the play text into the screenplay. Crowl argues (without belittling the choice at all) that Branagh aims straight for the younger movie-going demographic, those who might traditionally not venture into a Shakespeare film at the multiplex (and certainly not at the art house theater, the traditional domain of Shakespearean films up to the time of Much Ado's release). What evidence do you see to support this claim? What is gained or lost by Branagh's doing so? Obviously watch the whole film carefully, more than once, but particularly useful and illustrative scenes to watch include the opening sequence, the scene in which Don Pedro and Claudio attempt to gull Benedick (the equivalent of the play's 2.3), the "wedding" scene in which Claudio erupts quite violently against Benedick, and, of course, the final sequence of the film. Adding all this together, your thesis could usefully offer a definition of how the film re-imagines the play. You are likely to be working with the idea of "light" when it comes to the film's tone, and this appears very reasonable, but do not ignore the film's many splashes of dark, even if this is just to emphasize how resilient the film's comic glow really is.

Further Information


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