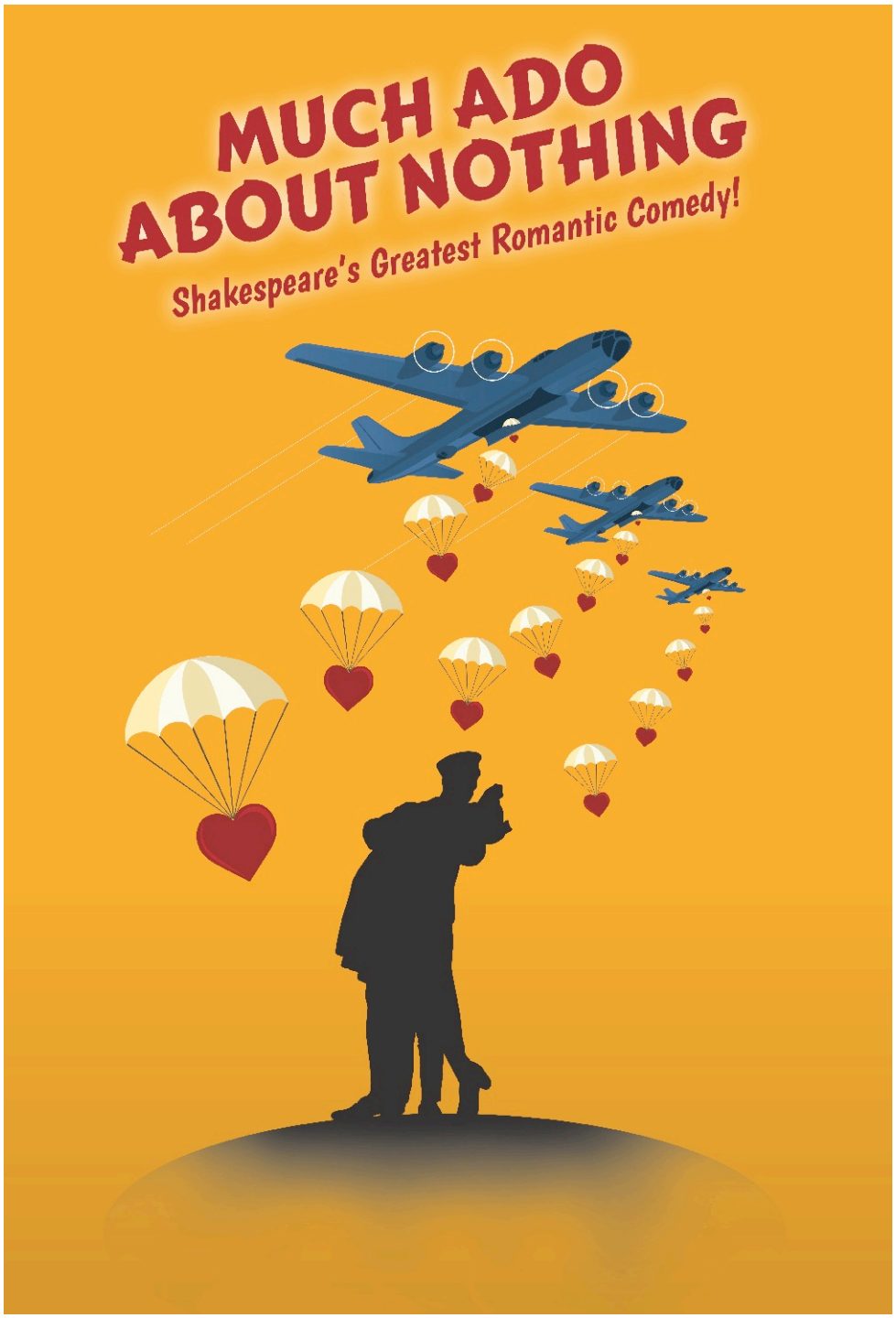
Northern Broadsides

Education Resource Pack



About this pack

We hope that teachers and students will enjoy our production and use this learning resource pack.

It may be used in advance of seeing the performance – to prepare and inform students about the play; and afterwards – to respond to the play and explore in more depth. Teachers may select, from the broad range of material, which is most suitable for their students.

The first section of this document is a detailed companion to our production: plot synopsis, who's who in the play, and interviews with cast and creatives. It reveals the ways in which our company met with the many challenges of bringing Shakespeare's **MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING** to the stage, and the educational work that accompanies this production.

The second section examines the historical and creative background to the play, and Shakespeare's language.

The third section features exercises and suggestions for study in Creative Writing and Drama.

This pack complements **WORKSHOPS** for KS3/4, which are being offered to schools while the show is on tour, until 25 May 2019.

A MUDDLE IN MESSINA by Sophia Hatfield is an accessible retelling of the play with live music, with a fun digital map. This show for children aged 4-11 & families, features a cast of 3 actors-musicians and is **touring to local libraries** alongside the main show tour.

For details of how to book **WORKSHOPS**, or to find out about performances of **A MUDDLE IN MESSINA** please email helen@wearefilament.co.uk

Digital Resources

Working in association with Filament Projects and augmented reality company Ooh-Ar, we are pleased to offer a bespoke digital resource to accompany **MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING** and **A MUDDLE IN MESSINA.** This is an interactive app, featuring rehearsal footage, conversations with cast and creatives, and downloadable worksheets.

To download the Much Ado About Nothing App visit **northernbroadsides.co.uk**

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Messina!

William Shakespeare's ever popular comedy was penned around 1598, almost at the midway point of his writing life. He had already written many of his most famous works, including Richard III, Romeo and Juliet, and The Merchant of Venice, while the great tragedies of Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello and Lear were yet to come. At the turn of the century his creative powers were flowering into full maturity.

It's possible to imagine Shakespeare having terrific fun writing this play. Even the title is a little joke – a pun on the word 'noting', which in Shakespeare's time meant overhearing, eavesdropping, and gossiping, and which sounded to the ear very like the word 'nothing'. Not including the famous 'gulling' scenes or the duping of Don Pedro and Claudio, there are over half a dozen instances of hearsay and misunderstanding in the play.

The setting for the story is Messina, a real port on the island of Sicily at the toe of the boot of Italy. Shakespeare drew his plot from Italian sources and stayed with the original setting but, as with all his plays, this becomes more a symbolic place than a real one; and the 'wars' from which the men return are generic rather than specific.

This lack of specificity gives scope in production, and the 'Messina' of our production is England; and the war from which the men return is World War II. Rather than being soldiers, our Don Pedro, Claudio and Benedick have served with the RAF – arguably the most glamourous of the armed forces.

Those magnificent men touchdown in the idyllic world of Leonato's leafy estate, where the women have developed resilience and independence working the land. Into this garden of Eden a serpent must inevitably come, and in the form of the villainous Don John – a bitter groundling, full of envy and malice.

Don John's malpractice is targeted against Claudio and Hero, who are the lovers of the main plot; but the couple that have become synonymous with the play belong to the subplot. The ridiculous bachelor Benedick and merry spinster Beatrice have long been considered the leading roles in this rich comedy of errors, and for over four centuries audiences have flocked to Messina to see them fight, flirt and finally fall in love…

SECTION ONE

OUR PLAY

Characters

Featuring costume drawings by designer Lis Evans.

Leonato
Governor of Messina, and a venerable and good-natured man. The great love of his life is his only daughter, Hero.

Antonio
Leonato's brother. In our production the Antonio is combined with the role of the Friar. This means that the priest at the wedding is a family member, and has an even greater interest in the welfare of Hero and her father.

Hero
Leonato's daughter. She is bright and bonny. A dutiful daughter and very innocent.

Beatrice
Hero's older cousin. A confirmed singleton, having almost certainly had her heart broken in the past by Benedick. She is incredibly quick witted, which enables her to keep men at bay, and also see the funny side of life.

Don Pedro
The Prince of Aragon, and the poshest person in the play. He wears his high status lightly and doesn't pull rank very often. He's an old-fashioned romantic at heart, but unlucky in love. It's lonely at the top.

Benedick
A soldier in the company of Don Pedro, and his friend. Benedick is an overgrown child. He avoids emotional responsibility, and is always at the centre of bloke-ish revels, but never taken seriously. He is funny and absurd, and needs a little help to get in touch with his feminine side.

Claudio
A young soldier in the company of Don Pedro, who has distinguished himself by the courage of his actions in battle. He's young and impetuous, and prone to irrational jealousy.

Don John
Don Pedro's dodgy half-brother. We learn early on in the play that the brothers have recently become reconciled following some dispute – which we may reasonably put down to some bad behaviour on the part of Don John. He probably has good reason to resent his lot in life, but that's no excuse for what he does to Hero. The man's a villain.

Margaret
Hero's maid. A bawdy lass!

Ursula
Hero's maid. A clever lass.

Borachio
One of Don John's men. A lecher, a loudmouth, and sometime boyfriend of Margaret.

Conrade
In our production this character is a woman; a servant of Don John, and one who enjoys the status of her master.

Balthasar
A minstrel at the service of Leonato and Don Pedro.

Dogberry
The officious Master Constable of Messina.

Verges
A very official local official.

Plot Synopsis

Featuring production photographs by Nobby Clark.

NB – this synopsis is of our production, and incorporates our cuts, character doubling, and gender changes.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

In the town of Messina, a messenger brings word to the Governor, Leonato that his friend Don Pedro of Aragon will arrive in the town at any moment. He has been away, serving with the forces, but now the war is over. Leonato's daughter is delighted to hear that a young soldier called Claudio is also returning, and proud that he has distinguished himself in battle.

Leonato's niece, Beatrice, asks after another soldier in Don Pedro's company - a man named Signor Benedick. The messenger is baffled by Beatrice's playful mockery, and Leonato is obliged to explain that there is a kind of merry war between Beatrice and Benedick – and that they never meet without a skirmish of wit.

Don Pedro, Claudio and Benedick arrive, along with Don Pedro's illegitimate brother, Don John. We learn that Don Pedro has recently become reconciled with his brother after a serious breach of trust – though we don't know what this was. Leonato welcomes Don John warmly for his brother's sake. Don John doesn't say much.

As all the old friends are becoming reacquainted, Beatrice and Benedick pick up where they left off – with a verbal sparring match. Beatrice is quicker than Benedick, but he scores a cheap point with his final remark, and we see that the history between them has a more painful undertone - and may be a little more than just a war of words.

Don Pedro accepts Leonato's invitation to stay, and a homecoming celebration is planned for that night. Everyone then leaves to prepare for the festivities, except Claudio and Benedick. Claudio confides in Benedick that he liked Leonato's daughter Hero before he went to war, and now he has returned he realises he is in love with her. The confirmed bachelor Benedick

is disgusted by this, and teases Claudio mercilessly. When Don Pedro returns looking for them, Benedick tells him that Claudio is in love with Hero.

Don Pedro is pleased for his friend, as he considers Hero to be worthy. Benedick continues his scorn of women, and Don Pedro prophecies that one day Benedick will too fall in love, before sending on an errand Leonato.

Now in private conference with Claudio, Don Pedro offers to help. That night there is to be a masked fancy dress party. Don Pedro in disguise will pretend to be Claudio, declare his love to Hero, and discover how she feels. If she is agreeable, Don Pedro will talk to his friend Leonato, and smooth the way for a match.

Scene 2

As preparations for the party are underway, Leonato is accosted by his brother, the Reverend Antonio, who is very excited. He tells Leonato that a servant has overheard Don Pedro talking with Claudio and professing his love for Hero. He means to woo her that night during the party, and then as Leonato for her hand in marriage. This is the first instance of many, in the play, where something is overheard and misunderstood.

Leonato is cautious of this intelligence, and says he will not take the rumour seriously until Hero is actually courted by Don Pedro. He resolves to tell Hero of it, however. So, if she is approached, she knows how to answer.

Scene 3

Don John is questioned by his servant, Conrade, about his bad moods. He explains that he cannot hide his nature, which is unsociable and cannot change to suit other people.

Conrade reminds Don John that he has only recently become friends with his brother again, and that if he wants to remain on good terms with Don Pedro he ought to make more of an effort. But Don John is bitter towards his legitimate brother, who has all the status and wealth that he is denied. The reconciliation has come at a price to Don John, who is constrained and humiliated. If he could, he would bite.

Borachio, another of Don John's servants, arrives with the news of an upcoming marriage. Borachio has also overheard Don Pedro and Claudio making plans, but Borachio has correctly understood what he has heard. He realizes that Don Pedro plans to court Hero in the name of Claudio. Don John, hates Claudio – in particular for his closeness to Don Pedro. He vows to use this information to make trouble for Claudio. Conrade and Borachio will help him.

ACT TWO

Scene 1

Beatrice keeps Hero, Leonato, and Antonio entertained while they wait for the evening's masked ball to begin. She thinks that the perfect man may be a blend of Don Pedro's sulky brother and Signor Benedick. One talks too much and the other not at all. Her uncle, Leonato, tells her she'll never find a husband with such a shrewish wit, but Beatrice is content to remain single. Antonio advises Hero to be obedient to her father, to which Beatrice adds that any husband Hero takes should be to her liking also. Leonato is still under the misconception that Don Pedro may woo Hero at the party, and presses upon her the importance of her response if he should do so.

The party guests all arrive, and the men put on masks. Supposedly, the women now cannot tell who the men are. Music strikes up, and the dancers pair off to converse while they dance. A musician, Balthasar, dances with Hero's servant Margaret, and Antonio dances with Hero's other maid, Ursula.

Meanwhile, Don Pedro begins to flirt with Hero, and they leave to continue their conversation…

Benedick has made the mistake of insulting Beatrice, under the illusion that she doesn't know it's him. She turns the tables on him, and tells him that Benedick is the Prince's jester; he thinks he's witty, but others find him annoying. Benedick is furious.

Don John, who has seen his brother Don Pedro courting Hero, approaches Claudio. Pretending not to recognise Claudio behind his mask, Don John addresses him as Benedick. He tells 'Benedick' to warn his friend that Don Pedro is actually courting Hero for himself and means to marry her that very night.

Claudio is of an insecure and jealous disposition, and believes Don John without question. When the real Benedick enters a few moments later, with the news that the Prince has wooed Hero, his misery is confirmed. Angry and betrayed, Claudio rushes out.

Don Pedro comes in with Hero and Leonato, and Benedick learns that the hand of Hero has been won for Claudio, as promised. Benedick's vanity has been wounded by the things Beatrice said to him during the dance, so when she approaches with Claudio, he begs Don Pedro to send him on some impossible, arduous errand rather than be forced to endure her company. Don Pedro laughingly insists that he stay, but Benedick leaves anyway.

The match is then made between Hero and Claudio, with the blessing of all. Beatrice shares her joy for her cousin with Don Pedro, and lightly bemoans her own spinsterhood. To her great astonishment, the Prince then offers to marry her. She manages to let him down gently, and is relieved when her uncle appears to send her on an errand.

Don Pedro shares with Leonato his idea that Benedick would make an excellent husband for Beatrice. Leonato thinks this is impossible. When Claudio and Hero arrive, their wedding day is fixed for a week's time. This seems like an age to the lovesick Claudio, but Don Pedro has a plan to keep them all amused: to make Beatrice and Benedick fall in love with each other…

Scene 2

The Prince's nasty brother, Don John, is furious at the impending marriage of Claudio and Hero, but his servant Borachio has a plan to thwart it. He is currently the lover of Hero's servant, Margaret, and can make her look out of her Lady's chamber window any time he wishes. They hatch a plan to convince Don Pedro and Claudio that Hero is not a virgin, and is carrying on a sexual relationship with Borachio. Don John is eager to try anything that would ruin all his enemies in one fell swoop. He will tell his brother that Borachio claims to have slept with Hero many times, and will then demonstrate proof of this by bringing him and Claudio to observe 'Hero' talking with his servant at her window the very night before her wedding. It will be Margaret they see, but they won't know that. For this treachery, Don John will pay Borachio a thousand ducats.

Scene 3

Benedick is loitering in the orchard, musing on Claudio's folly in falling in love and marrying, when he sees Don Pedro, Leonato, Claudio approaching with the minstrel Balthasar. He shins up a tree to avoid meeting them – which is exactly what they want him to do.

After singing a love song, the three friends then start on their plan to play Cupid. They praise Beatrice, and discuss how much she is passionately in love with Benedick – though she would rather die than ever reveal her feelings. They all agree that Benedick is a fool to scorn her, and that he is unworthy of her.

When the trap is complete the friends go in to dinner, and Benedick is left alone to come down from his hiding place and consider this unexpected news. He is converted in an instant, and decides that Beatrice's love must be requited.

Unaware of Benedick's sudden change of heart, Beatrice arrives, having been sent to call him to dinner. She is irritated by the errand and, slightly puzzled by Benedick's unaccustomed politeness, delivers a parting barb as she heads back inside. The newly infatuated Benedick interprets everything now as a sign of love, and in a final show of commitment to romance he heads of to get Beatrice's portrait.

ACT THREE

Scene 1

It's now the turn of the women to gull the unexpecting Beatrice. Once more in the orchard, Hero sends Margaret off to whisper in Beatrice's ear that she and Ursula are talking about her behind her back. While Margaret is gone, Hero instructs Ursula on the plan to make Beatrice fall in love with Benedick.

Sure enough, a few minutes later, Beatrice arrives and hides to overhear their conference.

Hero and Ursula then skilfully paint the picture of Benedick as a poor lovesick gentleman, pining away for the scornful Beatrice. They praise Benedick's many qualities, and criticise Beatrice for her pride. The plan is as effective on Beatrice as it was on Benedick. She emerges from her vantage point a changed woman, determined to return Benedick's love and to marry him!

Scene 2

It's the day before the wedding and Don Pedro and Claudio tease Benedick about the change in him. He behaves like a lover, with a new haircut, fancy clothes, and smells of perfume. Benedick is immune to their mockery, and draws Leonato aside to discuss his suit to Beatrice in private. Don John now appears to pour his poison into the ears of Don Pedro and Claudio. He tells them Hero is corrupted and disloyal, and offers them the proof that very night.

INTERVAL

ACT THREE

Scene 3

In a street outside Leonato's house, the town Constable, Dogberry, calls together the Watch, to give them their duties for the night. Dogberry and his deputy, Verges, are honest but simple men. Dogberry is a master of malapropisms, and under his direction the men of the Watch have a quiet life, but are not very effective.

Dogberry's final order before departing is to be vigilant near the house of Leonato, due to the wedding that will happen in the morning.

The Watch prepare to go to sleep, but are interrupted by the arrival of Borachio and Conrade. They hide and listen into the conversation of Don John's villainous servants.

Borachio boasts to Conrade how that very night he has made love to Margaret at the window of Hero's bedroom; how Margaret was dressed in Hero's clothing and answered to her mistress's name; and how Don Pedro and Claudio had been directed there by Don John, to witness this lecherous scene.

Claudio, now convinced of Hero's guilt, plans to publicly disgrace her the next morning instead of marrying her – with the support of Don Pedro.

The Watch, who have quietly listened to this whole secretive exchange, now reveal themselves and arrest Borachio and Conrade for lechery. They haul them away to Dogberry and Verges for questioning.

Scene 4

On the morning of her wedding Hero is excited, but strangely uneasy also. Her maid, Margaret, chatters about the wedding gown, and when Beatrice arrives, full of cold (lovesick) she teases her with bawdy comments. It's a scene of feminine fun and preparation. Ursula enters to say that the men are now ready to take Hero to church, but she's not yet dressed!

Scene 5

Dogberry and Verges have intercepted Leonato on his way to church. They tell him that they have caught two criminals and want to interrogate them in front of him. However, their attempts to communicate their message are so ineffective and foolish that Leonato fails to realise the urgency of the matter. Instead, he tells them to question the men themselves, and bring the testimony to him later. Dogberry and Verges head off to question the prisoners on their own, and Leonato proceeds to the wedding.

ACT FOUR

Scene 1

Everyone is gathered at the church to celebrate the wedding of Claudio and Hero. When Leonato's brother, Reverend Antonio, asks if they know of any impediment to the marriage, Claudio begins his campaign of publicly shaming Hero.

Before the congregation he declares that her outward beauty and blushes hide inward corruption and infidelity. Last night she talked with a man at her window – a man who has confessed to having sexual relations with her on many occasions before.

Leonato cannot believe his ears, but his friend Don Pedro confirms the truth of Claudio's accusations. Hero denies all, but to no avail. Don Pedro and Claudio leave the scene with the wicked Don John as Hero collapses with grief.

Benedick and Beatrice rush to offer Hero their assistance, but a devastated Leonato tells them to let her die, as that would be better than for her to live in shame. He pours out his grief, wishing that Hero had never been born, that he had not loved and valued her as he did, rather than have her so shamed. Beatrice is convinced that her cousin has been slandered.

Reverend Antonio, now speaks up. He has wisely determined from the expressions of shock he has seen on Hero's face that she is not guilty. Hero regains consciousness and insists that she has no idea what her accusers are talking about. Benedick realises that if the accusation is a lie, it must originate with the villainous Don John.

Reverend Antonio now suggests a plan. The Prince and Claudio have left Hero for dead – so let everyone think that she has indeed died of shock and grief. When her accusers hear this, their anger may turn to regret. If the accusation is false, then perhaps the treachery will expose itself, and Hero can come back to life. In the worst-case scenario, Hero can later be taken off quietly and placed in a convent to become a nun. The heartbroken Hero and Leonato agree to go along with the plan.

Everyone departs with Hero, leaving Benedick and Beatrice alone together. Benedick, tries to comfort Beatrice and confesses that he is in love with her, acknowledging how strange it is for his affections to reverse so suddenly. When she confesses to loving him in equal measure, Benedick asks her to bid him do anything for her. She quickly demands that he kill Claudio.

The shocked Benedick refuses. Furious, Beatrice denounces Claudio's savagery, saying that if she were a man she would kill him herself for his cowardly slander of her cousin.

After listening to her, Benedick changes his mind and soberly agrees to challenge Claudio - for the wrong that he has done to Hero, and for Beatrice's sake.

Scene 2

Dogberry, Verges, and the Watch interrogate Borachio and Conrad before the Sexton. It's a ridiculous procedure in which the prisoners become increasingly frustrated. The men of the Watch report what they overheard Borachio telling Conrad the previous night – that he has helped his master Don John trick Claudio and the Prince into thinking that Hero is unfaithful, and that they will denounce her at the wedding. The Sexton confirms that this is indeed what has happened that very morning, and that Hero has died of grief as a result. Dogberry, Verges and the men of the Watch then tie up their captives and take them to Leonato's house.

ACT FIVE

Scene 1

Leonato, Hero's father, has fallen into a state of deep grief and shock. His brother Antonio encourages him to have patience.

They run into Don Pedro and Claudio, who try to get by them quickly, but neither of the brothers are going to let them off so easily. They tell them that Hero is dead, and in no uncertain terms let the Prince and his friend know that they are to blame. Don Pedro protests the truth of their accusations, but Leonato will not be appeased. He and Antonio leave, vowing that their griefs will be heard.

Don Pedro and Claudio try to make light of this encounter when Benedick arrives. They hope he will cheer them up, but Benedick is on serious business. He challenges Claudio to a duel, and informs Don Pedro that he will no longer keep company with him. He leaves them with the discomforting news that Don John has fled Messina…

As Benedick leaves, Dogberry and Verges arrive with their captives, Borachio and Conrade. Unable to get a straightforward answer out of Dogberry, Don Pedro directly questions Borachio who admits that Don John paid him to falsely slander the lady Hero. Shocked and horrified, Claudio and Don Pedro absorb the full meaning of this news.

Leonato returns with Antonio and the Sexton, who has informed him of the discovery. Leonato demands to look on the man who has killed his child, but won't allow Borachio to take all the blame. Don Pedro and Claudio are also culpable – along with Don John, who has fled already.

Guilt stricken, Don Pedro and Claudio beg for forgiveness, and offer to do any penance Leonato asks of them. He demands that they publish Hero's innocence throughout Messina, and sing an epitaph at her tomb that night. Then tomorrow, Claudio must marry his brother Antonio's daughter, without seeing her. Claudio humbly agrees to all these demands. Don Pedro promises to accompany him.

Borachio is led away, protesting Margaret's innocence in the deceit, and Dogberry is solely preoccupied by the fact that during interrogation Conrade called him an ass.

Scene 2

Benedick is trying to write poetry, and failing. He sends Margaret to bring Beatrice to him.

When she arrives, she first wishes to determination that he has kept his word in challenging Claudio. When assured that he has, they drop into their usual banter – though more affectionate than before.

Ursula arrives suddenly with the news that Hero's innocence is proven. Beatrice and Benedick joyfully go to Leonato's to hear all.

Scene 3

That night, at Hero's tomb, Claudio enacts the first part of his penance. He reads aloud an epitaph declaring Hero's innocence, and sings a lament. As the dawn breaks, Don Pedro says it is time to go to Leonato's, where Claudio will marry Antonio's daughter.

Scene 4

Leonato, Antonio, Beatrice, Benedick, Hero, Margaret and Ursula, prepare for the second wedding of Claudio and Hero. We learn that Margaret has been interrogated, and that she never realised that she was part of Don John's treachery.

Benedick is also relieved that the truth has come to light, for now he does not have to kill his friend Claudio. Leonato sends the women off, to return masked upon cue. Quietly, Benedick takes Leonato aside and asks for his permission to marry Beatrice.

Don Pedro and Claudio arrive, and Antonio goes off to fetch the women. While they are waiting, Don Pedro and Claudio tease Benedick about the fact that he will soon be

married, but he has changed more than they realise, and has no time for their shallow swagger.

Hero, Beatrice, and the waiting women enter, all wearing masks. Claudio vows to marry one, whom he believes to be Leonato's mysterious niece. But upon his promise, Hero takes off her mask. Leonato tells him that now her name has been cleared, Hero can come back to life and be his wife, as she should have been before.

The party prepares to go to church for the ceremony, but Benedick stops everybody. Having established which of the other masked women is Beatrice, he publicly asks her if she loves him. Beatrice denies it, and Benedick, in turn, denies loving her. It seems they are trapped by pride once more, but Claudio and Hero both have stolen written evidence – a sonnet from Benedick, and a love letter from Beatrice. Faced with proof in their own hands, the lovers still insist on sparring until Benedick stops Beatrice's mouth with a kiss.

Don Pedro begins to tease Benedick again, but Benedick doesn't care. He is determined to be married, and nothing will put him out of his good humour. He and Claudio assert their friendship again, and Benedick calls for a dance before the double wedding.

A messenger arrives to inform the company that Don John has been caught and brought back to Messina. Benedick advises Don Pedro to put off thinking about the villain until tomorrow, when Benedick will personally devise his punishment.

Music plays and the lovers dance before they are married.

THE END

PRODUCTION

Meet the team…

Back row: Beverly Edmunds (Choreographer), Robert Wade, Linford Johnson, Robin Simpson, Matt Rixon, Andrew Whitehead, Conrad Nelson (Director)
Middle row: Catherine Farish, Anthony Hunt, Heather Phoenix, Simeon Truby, Rebekah Hughes (Musical Director), James McLean, Jay Hirst
Front row: David Nellist, Sophia Hatfield, Sarah Kameela Impey, Richard J Fletcher, Rachel Hammond, Isobel Middleton

The team is pictured here in the rehearsal space at the New Vic Theatre, where the production opens. This theatre is in The Round, but as we tour around the country the performance will adapt to different venue sizes and shapes. We play many different configurations: Traverse; Thrust; Proscenium Arch (a conventional raised stage with concealed wings either side) and sometimes even an Elizabethan style theatre.

When directing Conrad Nelson must keep in mind that the show has to be very adaptable. He redirects the action for each theatre we play. Designer Lis Evans creates a flexible design that is robust enough to stand up to the rigours of the road, and Lighting Designer Daniella Beattie produces a lighting plot that will adapt to the technical capabilities of every venue.

In Rehearsal…

Interview with Conrad Nelson

The Director's job…

The role of the director is to unify all the different elements in a production: getting the cast together, employing the designer, and talking to them about the concept, where you're going to set the piece.

The director sets the approach to the text – the words, which are the main energy, the driving point, the engine of the play – particularly in Shakespeare. Wherever we set it, whatever we do to it - the words are the core of the story.

My job is to first of all concentrate on the story, concentrate on the text and then bring in other people to flesh it out and bring it alive on stage. And that's a fantastic privilege – picking an actor, asking them to join us on this journey, or asking a designer, or a lighting designer, so that they can join this wonderful picture that we're making.

This version of Much Ado About Nothing has got a lot of actors – 15, which is a really big cast to have on a stage. My job is to sort of shepherd everything together: how do we put the music in, and how do we make those dramatic choices. The tasks are many, because you've got many different elements to the performance and you're drawing them all in to make one coherent performance.

Over all, I'm looking from above on a production – looking down on all those elements that put it together. See the whole thing come to life, from the words on the page into the final production is – it's a bit like magic…

The play and the playwright…

Much Ado About Nothing has lasted 400 years, and you could tell it at any time. It's a romance. All of Shakespeare's work is about humanity, about people; how they respond to each other. We've sort of never changed, which is sort of a joy and a disappointment perhaps. We just relive the same emotional journeys, generation after generation – just the setting is slightly different.

That's why plays by Shakespeare have got such relevance now because they're about people, about exchange, about emotions, susceptibilities, weakness, about strengths, about love!

The setting…

The play needs to be set in the context of the end of a war, and in settling on the Second World War it was a sort of personal celebration of my Dad, who lived through that time as a boy and did his national service with the Royal Air Force (RAF). My Dad's generation are now in their 80s, but it's only a generation removed from me so I have an almost direct memory of that time. I was born in 1963, only 18 years after the end of the second world war – and there's some sort of connection with that. It felt like a time I could relate to.

Also, we chose it because there's been a lot of First World War themes going around, it being the Centenary. We wanted to do something that was not so sad, and had a little bit more romance to it. There's nothing romantic about war – we know that – but there's something about the music, those big bands, swing numbers that have a romance about them.

It was an emotional as well as an artistic choice, made with the designer Lis Evans. She wanted to do something a bit fresher than the army we've seen a lot of. She liked the blue of the RAF uniform, rather than the khaki of the iconic British Tommy.

Setting contextualises the play. If you dress the actors in doublet and hose (as they would have been in Shakespeare's time) it can remove an audience from the play. Some people love it, and think Shakespeare is only 'traditional' when you dress it like that. But of course, Shakespeare only dressed his actors like that because that was contemporary. That's the way people dressed in his time. You have to treat Shakespeare's plays as contemporary material, not as an archaic, old fashioned, difficult, inaccessible piece of script – because it isn't.

The actors and the text…

The key to that is not only what the production looks like, though this can make it more accessible, particularly to younger people. In addition to your design choices that help you key into a production, is the text… You treat the text, not as a difficulty, but as something that makes sense.

It's the job of the actor to be the conduit, the road down which the text is delivered to the audience.

The actor must make the text live, must make sense of the words for the audience – and it will then be relevant to now. We swallow the text and then deliver it with clarity, life, love. It's for everybody. Ultimately, that's the key – whatever you're wearing.

You don't get every word. We don't get every word, until we work it out. It's our job to interpret the text, so that even if individual words or constructions are difficult for our audience, they understand it. And that's why Shakespeare's plays are best seen in the theatre, rather than just read. That's when it comes alive in the hands of the performer. As actors we need to get out of the way of it, to become the vehicle through which the text is delivered.

It's very challenging for an actor to do that – but wonderfully exciting.

Northern Broadsides and the natural voice…

Thankfully, lots of people come to Broadsides productions who haven't had a good experience of studying Shakespeare and our style and approach opens up the plays for them.

I'm a northern actor and a director, and I've never felt the need to play classical texts in any other voice but my own.

Often people do think that it has to be done in a 'posh' voice – or a standardised, southern accent, called Received Pronunciation. But most of the country doesn't speak like that. And there's an immediacy and a different relationship to the text if you speak it in your own voice. That could be flat-vowelled Northern Broadsides, but you could have a Somerset Broadsides – or 'Anywhere' Broadsides. It's just about that connection with the text. If you put on an RP voice that's not your own, you're already borrowing something from somewhere else, which means you're acting through a filter, so you're already a step removed from the text – and therefore the character and the story.

As an actor speaks with their native accent, whatever that is, it immediately sounds more accessible – like something we can understand, not something we're being excluded from. It's a voice we know. It removes the notion of class.

Specifically, with a northern voice, for a northern audience it lands differently on the ear. And although there isn't any more energy in a northern voice than a southern voice, just the speed through the air of a flat vowel and a hard consonant is completely different. It's percussive and direct. In my view it has immediacy, energy and life.

Voice is about identity, place and origin. It matters.

You don't have to be privileged, or highly educated, or upper class to understand Shakespeare's plays. He wrote them for all of us, and whoever you are, wherever you come from – they are for you.

YOUNG LOVERS

Actors Sarah Kameela Impey and Linford Johnson took time out of rehearsals to talk to us about their careers and their characters, Hero and Claudio…

We began by asking them how they got started as actors…

Sarah: I was in two youth theatres when I was younger. I kind of like to try my hand at a lot of things, so did tramplining and then gymnastics, and then found acting on a summer school. I then trained for three years in London at drama school. And it's really nice because you get to make all the mistakes that you need to make in those three years; play all the characters that you might never get to play.

Linford: I was quite into sports and all that kind of thing, but I always enjoyed acting. I used to go to a youth theatre at the Bolton Octagon Theatre. Then after I left school I went to College and did a Musical Theatre B-tech, and then I auditioned for drama school and I went to Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts. I was there for three years and did Musical Theatre course

Sarah Since leaving drama school I've done lots of touring. It's really amazing because you get to go to so many different parts of the country, and loads of different venues so you're always having to adapt the piece, your voice, the way you move, to the different venues. And lots of retraining in jobs as well – so extra puppetry stuff, or circus stuff, or more singing…

Linford … yeah, you learn so much with every job you do. My first job when I left drama school was on the stage adaptation of War Horse, so I toured for 18 months in that. It was intense hard work, but an amazing experience. We went to South Africa for three months, so that was an amazing experience. I've also been involved in quite a few musicals, and done a couple of Shakespeares before this one, so I've done quite a variety of different styles of theatre.

What inspires you?

Linford I get a real buzz, and a real challenge, because I don't think I was naturally inclined to do it. I think it's partly the challenge, and wanting to be good at it, and also it's a buzz, and you get the round of applause at the end. It's like sport – but not as painful…

Sarah … and being creative. Being able to share expression with people is the funnest time. Youth theatre – I just absolutely loved it. You got to be wild, and a bit crazy. So lovely.

Linford It's a lot of fun and you get to be a child… and I don't think a lot of people get to do that on a daily basis, do they.

When approaching a character, where do you start?

Sarah I definitely start with the script. Look at everything in the script to do with your character. What people say about you, what you say about yourself… any hints as to age and place, and history. Because a lot of the time, and especially with Shakespeare, everything is there in the text. And then there are specific things that you might go and research afterwards…

Linford … especially with Shakespeare, when you don't know what half the words mean. So you have to do a lot of looking up what everything means. It's the same for me. I read the script to get a feeling for the story and the characters, and then you get a picture in your mind of what your character is like. After that it's quite instinctual. You're getting up and doing the scenes, and eventually you kind of find the character. I wouldn't come in on day one and say, 'this is my character.' It's kind of a process, so I start rehearsals sometimes and I'm like, 'what is going on? What am I doing?' – but eventually, usually, it comes good.

Sarah Sometimes it's easier to make decisions about really 'characterful' characters. People who are going to have maybe a different physicality to you, or a different voice. But when it's a character that's similar to you, it feels like you're doing nothing. So for a long time you can be like, 'oh, I feel like I need to put on a voice, or make her walk like this…'

Tell us about your characters in Much Ado About Nothing…

Linford Claudio is quite a young man and he's just come back from the war. Our production is set just after World War II, so he's a returning RAF pilot. And with Claudio it's a difficult one because he's not necessarily the most likeable character, because he makes a lot of questionable decisions in the play. But I think it comes from a place of youth… he's not very wise.

Sarah He's all right!

Linford He's very impulsive. He'll see something, and he'll believe it. I can relate to him, in that I think 10 years ago I was fairly similar. When you're young you do make rash decisions, and you learn from them. At this point he's at that point in his life when he's making a lot of those decisions. It's joyful as well – just falling in love immediately. That's quite nice, and quite true to reality as well – when you're an 18 or 20 year old…

Sarah … yeah, definitely. So, I play Hero. She's Leonato's daughter and she's been at home during the war and her and Claudio knew each other before they went away, but it's only when he comes back that they realise they love each other – and that it's so lucky that he has returned. Hero's been doing a lot of Land Army Girl stuff, so I think all the women have this extra power that they might not have had before the men left. But she's still very youthful, and she's full of love…

Linford She's really nice!

Sarah … and I think that's why when she's set upon, it's so shocking. Because you shouldn't believe that she could ever do that, but the men do.

What's it like working for Northern Broadsides, compared to other companies?

Sarah It's similar in the way we approach the work, but in terms of a family feeling of something, the fact that lots of the cast have worked with Broadsides before… they know the room, they know how it works, and you're just completely brought into this family.

Linford It's very welcoming, and there's such a nice atmosphere in the cast. Everyone's absolutely lovely. I felt very comfortable in rehearsals. There's a

really nice atmosphere and everyone's just up for it. What's new to me is working with so many musicians. I'm used to working in musicals, but being in an acting company where they're also playing all the music has been a really cool experience. Because I don't play any musical instruments at all…

Sarah Nor do I - and to go from one to the other… putting your instrument down, getting on stage, going and picking a completely different instrument up… It's amazing, and the learning of that is incredible. When we were just doing lines!

Linford A lot of the time when you're working on a play it won't be that heavy music-wise, so it's nice being part of a really musical version of the show.

Sarah This is the show that's had the most music that I've ever done. Because I trained in acting, and didn't do musicals. In fact, Linford and I worked once before together – on Pinnochio the musical. And that was my first ever musical – that I kept calling a play. I think that's happening across the board, with more music – but I know that Northern Broadsides are known for their music and it's just been great! Especially to work with Bex Hughes on those harmonies…

Linford it's beautiful music. And with a cast of 15, it's quite a luxury these days to have that many people in a cast, so it's really nice to be part of that. It's really nice for the audience…

Sarah … and it helps with the party feel!

Did you know Much Ado About Nothing before working on this production?

Linford I didn't really know it. I'd seen it years ago – an amateur, college production – but I was too young to really remember it. But I think that meant that I came to it with fresh eyes, and no preconception of what it's supposed to be and what the characters are supposed to be. And there's no pressure that way, so I feel in a way that's a good thing.

Sarah I'd seen it really recently – at the Globe Theatre in London. But they'd done it really differently, as they'd set it in Mexico. It was interesting, but this

production is so different, and it's amazing to see there are so many things that I focused on differently, or that were brushed over in the Globe production that have become real focuses in ours. Especially for the female scenes, because they're often rushed, or not given the weight of the male scenes.

Linford No stone left unturned. Conrad (Nelson) has been on it, and it's been so good to work in that way – getting the most out of every moment.

Sarah Every word!

Linford It's really helpful for you as an actor, because you never go on stage thinking, 'I don't really know what I'm supposed to be doing here.' You know what's going on at all times.

What parts of the play might appeal to a younger audience?

Sarah The underlying theme of gossip, lies, mishearings. All that stuff about how it's really important to be clear and truthful…

Linford … and that kind of thing happens a lot when you're a kid, doesn't it! You're always hearing things, and the whole premise of this play is hearing the wrong thing basically. Seeing wrong information. Also – it's really funny, which is good for a young audience. The characters are quite big too.

Sarah And the period too – because not many people will have seen something set just after World War II, and there's all the costumes and props of the time.

What were your earliest experiences of Shakespeare*?*

Sarah I was really little, maybe 7, and my brother was in A Midsummer Night's Dream at high school. And I think because it was a family member, but because the story was so magical, I think for a person of that age I understood everything – I think more than some of the adults.

I loved the magic of it, and the language, although it was so different. And I think from them I wanted to look at more Shakespeare plays. It was the perfect one to start.

Linford I think my biggest memory of Shakespeare growing up was the Romeo and Juliet film with Leonardo Di Caprio. I remember watching that and being blown away. But I never thought I'd be able to do anything like that. I don't even remember thinking, 'oh this is Shakespeare, it doesn't make sense'. I think that's how you know you're watching a really good production.

Do you have any top tips for approaching Shakespeare texts?

Sarah Just approach it like you would any text. Just be open, and if you don't understand something that's absolutely fine. And there will be books with notes…but there are loads of different opinions about it as well, so trust your instinct.

Linford I think with Shakespeare, because it is quite an alien language for people, you need to know what the meaning of the line is. Because once you know what you're saying, you can say it how you would say anything. And… going to the end of the line.

Sarah Definitely!

Linford That's the thing you'll hear the most from Conrad. The subject and the sense is at the end of the line, so you have to aim for that and not trail off.

Sarah It's knowing specifically where the thought ends – although there's so many beautiful words in between, it's almost like driving over those to get the full sense across.

Are you looking forward to the tour?

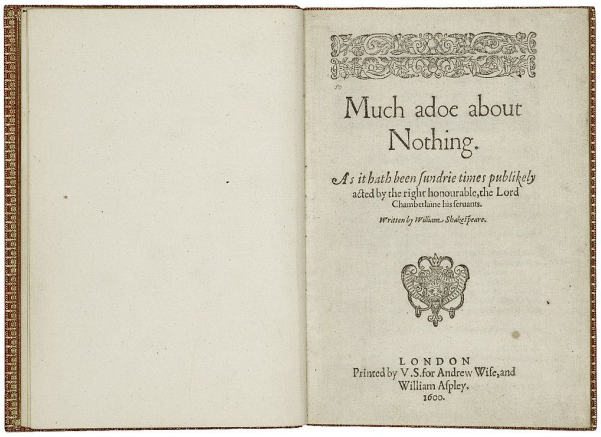
Sarah Excited!

Linford Yeah. I'm excited to see places and theatres that I've never seen before. Just need to book somewhere to stay…

SECTION TWO

BACKGROUND and LANGUAGE

THE TEXT


Much adoe about Nothing.

As it hath been sundrie times publikely acted by the right honourable, the Lord Chamberlaine his seruants.

Written by William Shakespeare.

LONDON
Printed by V.S. for Andrew Wise, and William Aspley.
1600.

Scholars believe that Much Ado About Nothing was written some time towards the end of 1598. It doesn't appear in the contemporary survey of notable works, which was entered in the Stationers' Register on 7th September 1598. Shakespeare was a very successful dramatist and any new play by him would have been entered here.

However, there's a big clue that indicates the play could not have been written long after this date, as the name of the comic actor Will Kemp appears in Dogberry's speech headings in the first printed version of the play – the *Quarto of 1600. However, Will Kemp left Shakespeare's theatre company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men, in early 1599.

Most compelling to scholars in relation to the date of the play is how brilliant it is. Shakespeare is firing on all cylinders in the writing of this work, indicating a full and confident maturity as a writer.

The play also appears in the first **Folio of 1623

MR. WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARES
COMEDIES,
HISTORIES, &
TRAGEDIES.
Published according to the True Originall Copies.

This was the title of the first Folio, printed in 1623 in the shop of William Jaggar and Son. The thirty-six plays are not in order of writing, and Much Ado About Nothing appears amongst the Comedies.

* Quarto simply means a book in which the paper is folded twice to make four leaves. Shakespeare's plays were printed individually during his lifetime in this format.

** Folio is a book in which the paper is folded once to created the leaves of a large book. From the earliest days of printing folios were used for most prestigious publication.

MUCH ADO IN PERFORMANCE

On the title page of the Quarto of 1600 it states that the play had been 'sundry times publicly acted', and if Will Kemp did indeed play Dogberry, then the first performances must have been some time in the autmn/winter of 1598/99.

The first recorded performances are two that were given at Court in the winter of 1612/13. These performances were part of the celebrations that preceded the wedding of King James' eldest daughter, Princess Elizabeth, on 14 February 1613.

Though the comic cameo of Dogberry is the first role to be associated with any actor, thereafter it's the role of Benedick that great actors of history have wanted to play. The play, and its subplot lovers have never been out of favour – except when the playhouses were closed following the English Civil War.

Beatrice and Benedick were even lifted from the play and included in other entertainments. The great actor David Garrick played him for the first time in 1748, and continued to play him until 1776. The first actor to be knighted, Sir Henry Irving was also a famous Benedick – here pictured with his equally famous leading lady Ellen Terry as Beatrice in 1862.

The 20th Century brought new technical opportunities to present the play, on radio, television and cinema.

The first sound version in English released to cinemas was the highly acclaimed1993 film by Kenneth Branagh. If you look closely, you might spot our youthful director, Conrad Nelson, playing the part of Hugh Oatcake in the Watch…

MUCH ADO ABOUT LANGUAGE:
Verse and Prose

The plays of William Shakespeare are frequently treated as 'literature', particularly in educational and classroom situations. However, this is far removed from their original purpose, and the way in which they are meant to be experienced. Before the plays were printed in that first 'Quarto' form, even the original actors would not have received a full script, but merely their own part written out with their cues, so they knew when to speak. At the point of creation, the only way to experience a full play in its entirety was to see it performed.

The dramatist has a very basic raw material with which to work – what people say and what they do. There is no scope for detailed descriptions of the landscape or the room, or long passages of prose explaining what characters know, or think they know, or what they are feeling etc… Shakespeare sometimes allows characters to break the fourth wall to tell the audience what they are thinking through the use of direct address (soliloquy) but for the most part, like any other dramatist, he supplies the audience with all the info they need by what his characters say and do within the drama.

It sounds as if that should be simple, but it's a very sophisticated form of writing, where all the clues for the actor must also be in the text.

It's clear at a glance that the scripts of Shakespeare's plays are written in a stylised form. Though the way people spoke 400 years ago was different to how we speak now, it's very unlikely that they spoke in verse – so we know that Shakespeare's theatre is not striving for the kind of naturalism that we're used to today – particularly in film and television.

In fact, naturalism is a kind of illusion anyway. Even in modern drama when we think people are just talking how they do in real life, you only have to watch some reality TV to see that dialogue in drama is highly constructed. The famous film director, Alfred Hitchcock famously said, 'drama is life with the dull bits cut out'.

In the Elizabeth theatre, the use of a heightened rhetorical form of speech was very effective for outdoor performances. It is difficult to be heard in a space with no roof, when the sound cannot bounce off the ceiling, and so poetic devices of rhyme and alliteration, and a regular rhythm, all help with audibility.

Shakespeare was also writing within a classical tradition, and one in which the construction of the language carries a lot of clues for both audience and actor, about the nature and status of characters.

For example, most of Shakespeare's verse is written in what's called iambic pentameter. This means that each line consists of 10 syllables, split into 5 sets of two (called 'feet') where the first syllable of every pair is weak and the second syllable is stressed. Like this:

For look / where Bea / trice like / a lap / wing runs

This kind of verse would generally indicate high status, romantic characters, such as Romeo and Juliet. Lower status characters, such as the Rude Mechanicals in A Midsummer Night's Dream, are more likely to speak in prose.

Another form of verse used by Shakespeare would indicate supernatural characters. This form has only 4 feet in a line of verse, with the first syllable stressed. This is called 'trochaic tetrameter'. For example, Puck's speech at the end of A Midsummer Night's Dream begins:

If we / Shadows / have o / ffended
Think but / this and / all is / mended

Unusually, Much Ado About Nothing is written mostly in prose – although this still uses lots of poetic devices and rhythm. He mixes up this looser style and that of verse, depending on what is happening in the drama.

When Shakespeare does elevate the language into verse, it's when the intentions of the characters take a more classically romantic or tragic turn.

The first time Shakespeare uses verse in Much Ado is in Act 1, scene 1, when Don Pedro talks to Claudio in private about his love for Hero. The prosaic Benedick has left the stage, and Don Pedro turns to Claudio with a line of perfect line of pentameter:

My love / is thine / to teach; / teach it / but how

What's follows is a very classical conceit – that Don Pedro will woo Hero in Claudio's name and then 'give' her to his friend. The rest of this scene is conducted in verse.

Likewise, after a prosaic start to the wedding scene in Act 4, scene 1, the tragic shaming of Hero is conducted in verse. Leonato's violent, despairing speeches, and the good council of the priest continue the verse form, until Benedick and Beatrice are left alone onstage – at which point they drop into prose.

The Actor's approach.

In many ways the actor's approach doesn't differ from verse to prose, but if we examine a speech in verse, we can identify a lot of the indicators that Shakespeare has left on the page to help the actor play the scene.

Let's look closely at Leonato's speech from Act Four, scene 1…

LEONATO Wherefore! Why, doth not every earthly **thing**
Cry shame upon her? Could she here **deny**
The story that is printed in her **blood**?
Do not live, Hero; do not ope thine **eyes**:
For, did I think thou wouldst not quickly **die**,
Thought I thy spirits were stronger than thy **shames**,
Myself would, on the rearward of **reproaches**,
Strike at thy life. Grieved I, I had but **one**?
Chid I for that at frugal nature's **frame**?
O, one too much by thee! Why had I **one**?
Why ever wast thou lovely in my **eyes**?
Why had I not with charitable **hand**
Took up a beggar's issue at my **gates**,
Who smirch'd thus and mired with **infamy**,
I might have said 'No part of it is **mine**;
This shame derives itself from unknown **loins'**?
But mine and mine I loved and mine I **praised**
And mine that I was proud on, mine so **much**
That I myself was to myself not **mine**,
Valuing of her,--why, she, O, she is **fallen**
Into a pit of ink, that the wide **sea**
Hath drops too few to wash her clean **again**
And salt too little which may season **give**
To her foul-tainted **flesh**!

If you read down the left-hand side of the speech, you can see that the words are not very interesting. These tend to be conjunctions, prepositions; but look at the words at the end of the lines. They are nouns, verbs and adjectives – very active and exciting words. In speaking this speech, the actor will aim for the line endings, to get the sense for the audience. Obeying the construction of the line, and the rhythms of the verse helps to make the speech clear.

As a general rule, the emphasis should always come on these interesting words. Most of the time it will be wrong to stress a preposition, a conjunction, or a pronoun.

Now let's look at the end of this speech again, and how Benedick is the next to speak…

But mine and mine I loved and mine I **praised**
And mine that I was proud on, mine so **much**
That I myself was to myself not **mine**,
Valuing of her,--why, she, O, she is **fallen**
Into a pit of ink, that the wide **sea**
Hath drops too few to wash her clean **again**
And salt too little which may season **give**
To her foul-tainted **flesh**!

BENEDICK Sir, sir, be patient.
For my part, I am so attired in wonder,
I know not what to say.

Leonato finishes on a half line, which is completed by Benedick. This indicates that Benedick almost interrupts Leonato. Shakespeare intends no gap here, as Benedick completes a line of verse. Of course, the actors could leave a gap in which Leonato may weep (or something) and for Benedick to say his line more gently, but this is not what's written. Instead, the energy of the lines keeps going, moving forward.

In performing Shakespeare's plays it's important to remember that the emotion happens on the line, rather than between the lines.

Modern naturalistic drama often involves a lot of acting between the lines, or 'off the text', but this form of classical verse drama works best without too many emotive pauses. That's the Northern Broadsides style, and it makes the performance go a lot quicker.

SECTION THREE

STUDY

Creative Writing

Exercise 1 - Poetry

Much Ado About Nothing is a very romantic play. Benedick is an unlikely lover and he struggles to compose a love song to Beatrice…

Marry, I cannot show it in rhyme; I have tried: I can find out no rhyme to 'lady' but 'baby,' an innocent rhyme; for 'scorn,' 'horn,' a hard rhyme; for 'school,' 'fool,' a babbling rhyme; very ominous endings: no, I was not born under a rhyming planet, nor I cannot woo in festival terms.

Shakespeare is as well known for his poems, as his plays. These are called sonnets. Literally meaning 'Little Song' in Latin, a Sonnet is usually (though not always) about love.

The construction of the Sonnet is 14 lines, divided up into three groups of four (called quatrains) and one group of two (called a couplet)

The three quatrains rhyme on alternate lines, and the couplet also rhyme. The rhyming scheme may be written like this: ABAB CDCD EFEF GG

Like much of the verse in his plays, Shakespeare's sonnets are written in iambic pentameter.

Here's one of Shakespeare's most famous sonnets – the first line of which is in perfect iambic pentameter.

We have highlighted it in different colours, so you can see the construction and the rhyme scheme clearly.

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate.
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date.
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimmed;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to Time thou grow'st.
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

TASK

Write a sonnet – on your own, or in a group.

A Sonnet is traditionally a love poem, but it doesn't have to be romantic. You can write about anything that you care about.

For example, you could write about your idol – a singer or musician, a sporting hero, an explorer or adventurer, or a character in a book.

In your poem you could talk about:

- What your subject looks and sounds like
- When and where you might see your subject
- How the subject of your poem makes you feel
- What it is that you like so much about the subject

Try to draw a conclusion in your final rhyming couplet.

Remember to include some poetic devices too, such as:

- Rhyme
- Rhythm
- Metaphor
- Simile
- Alliteration
- Assonance
- Onomatopoeia

CREATIVE WRITING

Exercise 2 - Prose

In addition to the two famous 'gulling' scenes in which Benedick overhears that Beatrice is in love with him, and vice versa, Much Ado About Nothing contains many other moments of overhearing and misunderstanding:

- Antonio's servant overhears Don Pedro and Claudio, and thinks that the Prince is going to woo Hero for himself.
- Borachio overhears Don Pedro and Claudio, but he gets the story right and tells his master, Don John.
- At the party Claudio 'overhears' that the Prince has wooed Hero for himself, when Don John deliberately mistakes him for Benedick.
- Benedick in disguise tells Beatrice he overheard someone insult her.
- Benedick 'overhears' Beatrice insult him, thinking that she cannot see through his disguise.
- Don Pedro and Claudio believe that they see Hero at her window, talking with Borachio.
- The Watch overhear Borachio telling Conrade about the deception of Claudio and Don Pedro.

Have a look at these scenes in the play, and consider the nature of the overhearing. Is it deliberate or accidental? Who is in control of the information being imparted? What are the consequences – good or bad?

TASK

Write a story which hinges on something overheard.

Here are some questions to get you started:

- Is the information overheard true or false?
- Does the listener hear by accident, or are they set up?
- Is the moment of overhearing an instigator of action, or is it something that leads to the resolution of the problem – such as The Watch overhearing Borachio and Conrade?

DRAMA

Speaking Shakespeare

This section contains exercises to help you with speaking Shakespeare. This work is complementary to our workshops, but can also be used independently in the classroom. You will find it useful to read the section on Shakespeare's language on page 32 of this pack.

Exercise 1 – Iambic Pentameter (*is nothing to be scared of)*

A good way of really understanding how Iambic Pentameter works is to get up on your feet and walk around the room saying:

I am, I am, I am, I am, I am

When you've said I am five times, change direction abruptly and say five more. You'll soon get used to where the end of the line is supposed to come.

It's also a good way of remembering the word - **I-am**-bic - and what it means.

Now try it with a bit of text – such as Shakespeare's sonnet:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Or a line from Leonato's speech from Act Four, scene 1:

Why ever wast thou lovely in my eyes?

Now have a go at making up your own line of iambic pentameter.

It's a very natural rhythm for the English language – you shouldn't find this too difficult.

Here are some examples to get you started:

- Today I went to buy a loaf of bread
- I put a lot of pepper in my soup
- I wish that I had listened more at school

Now you try…

Exercise 2 – breaking down the text (*won't break you*)

Working individually or in groups, choose a speech or short scene from the play.

Verse or prose?

Can you work out what form of language Shakespeare is using at this point in the play?

Here are some pointers to help you:

- How does the text appear on the page?
    - Is it in a block or set out like a poem?
- What is the subject matter?
    - Is it important?
    - Is it about love?
    - Is it tragic?
    - Is it comic?
- Who is speaking?
    - High status or low status characters?

If it's in prose, why do you think Shakespeare wants to use a less formal kind of language at this point?

If it's in verse, why has Shakespeare switched into this form at this point?

Having established whether your section is in verse or prose, how do you think this indicates the mood at this moment in the play?

So, what's going on?

Using your knowledge of the story (the plot synopsis from this pack will help you) make sure you understand what's happening in the section or speech you have chosen.

Here's some questions to focus your enquiry:

- What has just happened?
- Who is talking and who are they talking to?
- Where are they?
- What do the characters want at this point in the story?

Active words.

Whether in verse or prose, what are the important (active) words in the text?

With verse you can usually find a lot of these on the end of each line.

With prose, there are active words too. Look for nouns and verbs.

- What do these words tell you about the character?
- How are they feeling?
- What do they want?

Are there any repeated words?

Say it out loud!

Now you've got a clearer understanding of the speech or scene, try saying some of it out loud. Aim for the active words, and the end of the sentence, or at the end of a thought or idea.

It might help to walk around the room while you say it. Look at the punctuation. Every time you see a full stop, stop. Then start walking again with the new sentence.

Share your findings with the whole group.

Exercise 3 – paraphrasing (*to make it your own*)

Working individually or in groups, choose a speech or short scene from the play. You're now going to put this section into your own, modern way of speaking. Here is a process to help you…

Step 1

- Identify any vocabulary you don't know.
- Find out what those words mean.
- Replace the unfamiliar words with ones you know.

Read the adapted Shakespearean text out loud. Notice what has happened to the rhythms. Does it make sense yet? Probably not.

Step 2

- Change the form of language around the new words, so that it makes sense.
- If the text is in verse, don't worry about that. Just work on it sentence by sentence, or thought by thought.

Read the changed text. Now it should sound more like modern language – though it may still be a bit dry.

Step 3

- Focus on the emotional journey of the section. Is your paraphrasing expressing the feelings of the characters effectively?
- Ask yourself how you might feel in this situation.
- Shape the modern text, using more *active* and dynamic words to express the characters' emotions.

Step 4

- Read your Shakepeare's text, and then your text, sentence by sentence.
- Read your whole text out loud.
- Read Shakespeare's text out loud.

Consider how the two texts differ.

How has the paraphrasing exercise helped with understanding and speaking the Shakespeare text?

You might like to record your work, and listen back to it.

Remember – speak the text in your voice, with your own natural accent.

Don't forget what director Conrad Nelson says in his interview: **Often people do think that it has to be done in a 'posh' voice – or a standardised, southern accent, called Received Pronunciation. But most of the country doesn't speak like that. And there's an immediacy and a different relationship to the text if you speak it in your own voice.**

Credits and links

Production and rehearsal shots © Nobby Clark

Costume drawings by Lis Evans

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Much_Ado_About_Nothing#/media/File:First_Quarto_of_Much_Ado_About_Nothing.jpg

The Arden Shakespeare. Edited by A. R. Humphreys

https://www.britannica.com/topic/Much-Ado-About-Nothing-by-Shakespeare

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