**Explore Shakespeare’s presentation of male and female relationships in *Much Ado About Nothing* .**

*Much Ado About Nothing* is a comedic play written by William Shakespeare, thought to have been written between the years 1598 and 1599. The play follows the story of Leonato, along with his family and friends, who all welcome visitors who are arriving back from war. The plot follows several sub story lines, many of which are related to the themes of love and patriarchy. The play explores different presentations of love, examples being true, emotional love, as well as examples of artificial love, where a relationship is formed as a result of societal pressure.

*Much Ado About Nothing* displays an example of stereotypical “true” love within an affectionate relationship, where both partners display genuine feelings for one another. The most significant example of this is the pairing of Beatrice and Benedick. This relationship begins and grows in a more natural and realistic timescale, where love and affection seems to be non-existent at first and develops over time. An example of this is within the first scene, where the couple linguistically duel with flirtatious remarks about each other. An example of the linguistic duelling that occurs would be where Benedick uses the declarative “Truly I love none” to which Beatrice response “a dear happiness to women.” This is an example of the flirtatious jesting that occurs within the play between the two, as it shows Beatrice suggesting that no woman would want to take Benedick as her own, however the expected tone of this suggests it would have undertones of wit and sarcasm, depicting that she was saying so in a playful way. Beatrice uses the pre-modifier “dear” to enhance the insult intended within what she says. This shows that even though there is no affection between the two at this point, there is already an unserious relationship present. The use of the stative verb “love” from Benedick also foregrounds the affection they will grow to share. This is because by mentioning that he does not love anyone, he jinxes this statement, making the audience think about the true purpose of this scene, which is of course to begin the journey of their relationship and to show what it stems from.

Shakespeare suggests that the flirtation between the two intensifies after Benedick is tricked into thinking Beatrice loves him, therefore changing the way in which he speaks to/about her. This is shown in the declarative “I thank you for your pains.” The iambic pentameter suggests a further adaption to the emotions felt for Beatrice before, as this emphasises the love that he has for her due to the stressed syllables making the words stand out to the audience and catch the attention of the audience. However, even though his words are now less unmannerly due to him thinking that she loves him, his words are still laced with wit and flirtation. This is because he uses an ordinary blank verse which means very little, and showed no compassion or true meaning, indicating his true feelings as he’s attempting to hide his desire for her by making it seem as if he does not care at all. The use of the abstract noun “pains” also connotes that he is eager to determine whether she does in fact love him, as he plans on getting reactions from her that would indicate how she feels as well as how he feels. This suggests he’s testing the situation before he admits his true feelings towards her. This relationship goes on to develop throughout the play, after the deception within the play tricks them both into thinking that they are in love with one another but without the other knowing that they know. Beatrice uses the short imperatives “Benedick, love on. I will requite thee.” This immediately reinforces the theory that their verbally abusive relationship beforehand was indeed flirtatious behaviour, rather than a situation where the argument was intended to cause hurt and upset. This is because through the use of the imperative “Benedick, love on.” Beatrice conveys the idea that she wants Benedick to love her, and now she believes that he does, she doesn’t want it to end. The use of imperative verb “love” also gives an idea of how significant her feelings may be, as she wishes their emotional bond to be as strong as it possibly can be. She also uses the declarative “I will requite thee” to inform the audience that she too has affection for Benedick, as she uses the transitive verb “requite” which conveys that she will match Benedick’s supposed feeling for her, which again shows her interest. The couple’s immediate change in attitude towards each other, and their willingness to accept that the other loves them shows that they have always had feelings, which have built over time. This is an example of how love is presented in a more realistic way, as it has intensified over time rather than holding the love at first sight ideology. Thus, this relationship displays features of real love rather than artificial love.

*Much Ado About Nothing* also explores examples love that could be perceived as false love, where true affection is not displayed between the couple, which is likely to mean that the relationships has been arranged on their behalf. A prime example of this is of course the superficial love associated with Hero and Claudio’s relationship. The interrogative “can one buy such a jewel?” is a prime example of how naïve and adolescent their ‘love’ is. Claudio’s affection for Hero is firstly based purely on physical attraction. This is shown through the use of the concrete noun “Jewel”, as this precious stone is known for it beauty and carries connotations of wealth and being aesthetically pleasing. It also carries connotations of being able to stand out. This shows that Claudio is conveying that he has passionate affection towards Hero, where in actual fact he is just physically attracted towards her and barely feels emotions towards her at all. Claudio goes on to use the declarative “the sweetest lady I have ever laid eyes on”. This again uses Hero’s physical appearance as a catalyst for his feelings towards her, as her beauty is the sole reason for their relationship, which bases their relationship on objectification which is stereotypical of the patriarchal society in which the play is set. The superlative “sweetest” also gives us an example of how superficial the relationship between the two is. This is due to the fact that “sweetest” lacks intensity and real meaning, suggesting that he does not know Hero’s personality enough that would allow him to use more personal descriptions of her.

Claudio’s lack of understanding of Hero as an individual is further demonstrated through his deception by Don John and his belief that Hero is no longer pure. Instead of feeling heartbreak, his desire is for revenge. The verb phrase “there I will shame her.” is a demonstration of how much Claudio actually feels towards Hero. The use of the transitive verb “shame” portrays his priority which is getting revenge instead of displaying distress which would be a real reaction to the allegations against Hero if Claudio truly loved her. This relationship is of course an example of a relationship that has developed due to patriarchy, as society would expect a man of Claudio’s place within society to marry someone who fits the stereotypical physical criteria. Hero too would have been pressured by her father, Leonato, to marry someone of an upper class in order to meet the expectations of society. This would be to add to his already respectable reputation, as he would then have links to Claudio’s family, who is likely to have a very high place within the social hierarchy. This connection therefore boosts Leonato’s social reputation. The relationship between Claudio and Hero is also an example of a stereotypical Shakespearean relationship, as the ‘love at first sight’ theory was strife during Shakespearean times; Claudio bases his relationship on physical qualities rather than emotion.

In conclusion, the relationships explored and analysed share the similarity of being established in a patriarchal society but with different outcomes. Beatrice and Benedick fall in love naturally despite the fact that their relationship would have still been approved by society’s expectations. However, it is possible to conclude that the relationship between Claudio and Hero was based upon societal expectations alone, without the presence of true, mature emotions.