

### Bearing the Yoke

In the Shakespearean comedy *Much Ado About Nothing*, it can be seen that the concepts of courtship and marriage largely explore the innately chaotic nature of human sexuality. One of the chief ways the chaotic nature of human sexuality was explored in the play was through the extensive use of courtship and marriage as a symbolism for the apparent taming of a previously free spirited and unbound individual. Now this concept is largely mirrored in the exchange between Signor Benedick and Don Pedro from Act I Scene I which states: “*Prince: In time the savage bull shall bear the yoke. Benedick: The savage bull may, but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull’s horns and set them in my forehead, and let me be vilely pained and in such great letters as they write ‘Here is good horse to hire’ and let them signify under my sign ‘Here you may see Benedick the married man.’*” Thus it can be seen that although courtship and marriage are apparently inescapable facets of human life, a good number of characters from Shakespeare’s comedies, such as Benedick and Beatrice from *Much Ado About Nothing*, attempt to resist the inevitable by claiming to favor their own individuality and personal freedom over the apparent sine qua non for happiness in the Shakespearean context: human partnership, and all of this clearly shows the highly contradicting nature of human sexuality. Furthermore, this apparent quality

appears to showcase the seemingly chaotic nature of human sexuality because marriage in the Renaissance setting can be seen as the ultimate prerequisite that needs to be accomplished before an individual can achieve true happiness and complete integration into society, and as a result it can be seen that by choosing to preserve a sense of individualism, characters such as Beatrice and Benedick are effectively denying themselves a chance to become whole and complete.

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, the concept of outstandingly individualistic characters resisting the seemingly inevitable yoke of partnership and marriage is clearly mirrored through the use of various figures of speech involving the taming of wild animals by William Shakespeare. Like what can be inferred from the aforementioned exchange between Signor Benedick and the Prince, it can be seen that characters with an extremely strong sense of self-identity and personal pride and freedom tend to view the concepts of marriage and courtship as the metaphorical reduction of one's self from a proud bull to a humbled farmhand, which will forever be guided by its yoke. And even when the said characters have finally submitted themselves to the concept of love and partnership, it can be seen that they still view these as a taming of sorts, and this is seen in Beatrice's line in the second scene of the first act, which states: "*I will requite thee, taming my wild hear to thy loving hand.*" Although this metaphor is not as explicit with regards to animal imagery as the first quote, it can be seen that speaker is still using the

concept of the taming of a proud and majestic animal to refer to marriage. The metaphor in Beatrice's line alludes to falconry, in which a proud and majestic bird of prey willingly submits itself to its master by resting on his/her arm.

Aside from the wordplay used in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the concept of proud and laudable individuals with a strong sense of identity can also be seen through the literary elements of the play, primarily through the characterization of the protagonists Benedick and Beatrice by Shakespeare. It can be seen that these characters were given highly laudable traits and characteristics, such as a nonpareil wit, physical charm and a strong sense of morality, however they humorously appear to possess a single flaw that sharply contrasts with all these traits: their excessive pride. This humorous flaw is clearly portrayed in the lines: “*But nature never framed a woman's heart of prouder stuff than of Beatrice. Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes... and her wit values itself so highly that all matter else seems weak.*” Now this apparent flaw in both Benedick and Beatrice reconciles with concept that they are both comparable to proud and majestic beasts that strongly refuse the burden of being perpetually subject to the will of another.

To conclude, it can be observed that the inherently chaotic and disorderly nature of human sexuality can be observed through the individualistic characters in the play, who like proud and noble beasts, strongly attempt to avoid being subject to the

yoke of partnership and marriage. Now this attitude towards courtship and marriage can be seen to be highly paradoxical, as knowledge on society during the Renaissance strongly suggests that it is only through undergoing the chaotic rite of passage which is marriage that one can be able to be truly happy and unbound. Hence it can be said that it is the apparent conflict between one's desire to preserve one's sense of individuality and the seemingly inevitable need to be integrated as a part of a greater whole is a very strong facet that supports the concept of the chaotic nature of human sexuality.

Word Count: 866