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LAH 102H

## Shakespeare Research Assignment

Central Question: How does Shakespeare portray and use gender in *Much Ado About Nothing*?

### Source One: Online Reference Tool

"Much Ado about Nothing." *Shakespeare for Students: Critical Interpretations of Shakespeare's Plays and Poetry*. Ed. Anne Marie Hacht. 2nd ed. Vol. 2. Detroit: Gale, 2007. 614-648. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 21 Oct. 2014.

Document URL

<http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CCX2896100030&v=2.1&u=txshracd2598&it=r&p=GVRL&sw=w&asid=e62c31e4247fef416f113852cbd5f994>

This source reveals Shakespeare's main design of gender in the play: he frames the sexes as fundamentally in a state of war. This mobilization of gender adds not only comedy to the play (i.e. the war of wits between Beatrice and Benedick), but also feeds into the overarching theme of deception (e.g., Balthasar's song). As apparent in the accusations of infidelity thrown at each gender by the other, deception reveals true reality: namely, that quarrels between the sexes often stem from deceit.

### Source Two: Scholarly Book

Gay, Penny. *As She Likes It : Shakespeare's Unruly Women*. London: Routledge, 2002. eBook Collection (EBSCO). Web. 21 Oct. 2014.

This excerpt highlights Shakespeare's emphasis on the workings of gender in society, his main use of gender in the play. The author suggests that Shakespeare crafts the contrasting images of man and woman (e.g., Claudio's demeanor is based in male military ideology, while Hero embodies the role of a helpless and protected daughter) to expose the respective rarified roles of the genders in society: particularly, that patriarchy promotes marriage as the only plausible enterprise for women.

### Source Three: Scholarly Journal Article

Scheff, Thomas J. "Gender Wars: Emotions in 'Much Ado about Nothing.'" *Sociological Perspectives* 36.2 (1993): 149-66. JSTOR file.

This article suggests that Shakespeare aims to portray genders in the play as primarily conflicting. It indicates that gender partakes in a masquerade (deception) that gives way to warfare between the sexes as a result of unacknowledged emotions of shame and anger. This source strikes at the core of Shakespeare's portrayal of gender: he deploys gender as a rhetorical strategy in so far as it catalyzes conflict in the play, moving the plot along.

### Journal Article Précis:

The journal article I used, titled *Gender Wars: Emotions in “Much Ado About Nothing,”* seeks to highlight and understand the grim portrayal of gender relations in the play as inherently tense and contrasting. The author, Thomas Scheff, identifies three layers of emotion: hostility; love and attraction (masked by hostility); and shame and anger. He finds that shame and anger are often unacknowledged and tend to drive the conflict between man and woman. Scheff also suggests that there is a parallel between warfare and romance, present in the emotional and physical violence in the conventional relationship of Claudio and Hero (e.g., public shaming) and the unconventional relationship of Beatrice and Benedick (i.e. Beatrice asks Benedick to kill Claudio). Finally, he proposes that deception and distortion are fundamental in relations between the sexes. As a result, the couples in the play shift from the polarizing extremes of “idealizing” to “profaning” their significant others.

### Research Narrative:

My research process began with refining my research question. After careful rumination, I decided that the role of gender in the play most intrigued me. The research process, while tedious, was a helpful learning experience. However, before finding useful sources, I ran into some trouble with the search requirements. It took a great deal of effort in refining my search terms in order to strike a balance between a lack of sources and an abundance of sources. Once I was able to hone my searching skills, employing the use of asterisks and quotation marks, I found an array of sources that connected to my question. The best advice I could give to someone would be to keep on refining their search terms and to make use of the guidelines covered in the library research workshop.