

## **Much Ado About Gender. A Visual Analysis of Joss Whedon's Shakespeare-Adaptation**

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My presentation will explore the visual staging of gender in Joss Whedon's Shakespeare adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing*. As being written over 400 years ago, the dialogue was only slightly modified for the movie. Such a staging of a fixed text emphasizes the importance of the visual "Mise en Scène" even more.

As director, producer and the person responsible for the screenplay, and editing, Whedon is in charge of the representations of his Characters. Adapting Shakespeare is largely about choosing what elements of the script to emphasize, what story you want to tell with the material. Whedon's adaptation gives the play a modern setting, therefore opening up new possibilities for representing gender, which Whedon has tried to emphasize in almost all of his work. One would think that *Much Ado*'s subversive attacks on masculine pride or the story, which hinges on an act of "slut shaming" would prove fertile ground for Whedon's trademark dismantling of male-female archetypes.

A handful of blogs have criticized Whedon on behalf of emphasizing misogynist gender-roles in *Much Ado About Nothing* or are seeing a lack of representing Woman of Color, having a blindness on intersectional approaches. It should be possible to change the perspective of the play, without toughing the dialogue. For example Whedon kicks things off with a wordless prologue that suggests that the center pair had a drunken one-night stand.

It should be revealing to take a look at the representation of gender-roles by investigating the visual material Whedon gives us: where he is free in the visual interpretation of the fixed text. This visual material will be analyzed through taking a look on the vestment of the characters as in the use of the very specific ties, suits and dresses, furthermore by taking a look at the habitus and gesture of the characters, analyzing the rooms and backgrounds, which were chosen to characterize, sometimes emphasize or ironize the characters gender-roles. Actors are not alone responsible for their gendered approaches to their role, as is the wardrobe designer Shawna Trpcic not alone responsible for the clothing. It is Joss Whedon's obligation - by calling himself a feminist or genderist - to deconstruct the basis for inequalities.

Furthermore it will be revealing to compare Kenneth Branagh's sun-drenched film adaptation, with Whedon's interpretation of a Shakespeare-comedy.