

# Much Ado About WHAT?

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The meaning of “nothing” in the title of this play is multivalent. Significantly, in the 1590s, “nothing” was a sexual euphemism for having “no thing.” This other meaning of the word signals the play’s focus on questions surrounding the status and agency of women.

The image to the right depicts an event that never takes place in the play, the scene where “Hero” meets with a man outside her window. Given only one image to represent the play, Rockwell Kent’s choice as the artist thus highlights the “nothing” the entire play is about, a moment that demonstrates the unyielding anxieties of the men toward women’s sexuality and potential treachery.

Our heroines are left unapologetically at the mercy of the men around them and dependent on how they feel about women and their “no thing.” The constant cuckoldry jokes and the readiness to believe the lie about Hero’s infidelity suggest that what scares the men the most is women’s sexuality and the power to make their own decisions - including the ability to be as unfaithful as men.

The image of “nothing” combined with a second meaning behind the title demonstrates the male-centric power that *Much Ado About Nothing* is enveloped in. Women in this society are not in control of their fate; decisions about their lives are made by their fathers, and their honor is left to rumors. In what ways can women defend themselves? Though a single word in the title, “nothing,” defines this play and its characters. The fiasco at the play’s center escalates to its climax because of their anxiety about women and their power to make their own choices.

