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Satirizing the Silence: A Critique of the Patriarchy's Destruction of the Female Character in *Much Ado About Nothing*

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SATIRIZING THE SILENCE: A CRITIQUE OF THE PATRIARCHY’S DESTRUCTION OF
THE FEMALE CHARACTER IN MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

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The purpose of my Research Honors project is to analyze women’s roles in Much Ado About Nothing using both semiotic and feminist theory. The play enacts the disastrous effects of placing strict limitations on women and endowing men with unquestionable authority simply because of their gender. Much Ado presents two possible responses for women in a patriarchy: Hero’s silent, compliant tongue and Beatrice’s rebellious, outspoken tongue. Despite Hero’s compliance with the patriarchy, the men read her as a text and assign meaning based on their interpretations, which leads to their slander of her spotless reputation. Although Beatrice is given a more privileged tongue, her voice is ignored due to her gender. I argue that the ending of the play is left intentionally unresolved to spark social debate on problems with the patriarchy: no matter what her response to patriarchal rule, a woman will always be silenced and overruled.