Wiliam Shakespeare's play *Much Ado About Nothing* set the standard for contemporary romantic comedies. First penned between 1598 and 1599, and published in the First Folio in 1623, it is written almost entirely in prose. Set in Messina, Italy, the play follows the courtships of two couples and the mix of funny misadventures and underhanded sabotage that follow closely behind them. Balancing cheerful banter with serious moral dilemmas, this play explores how misinformation and mischief-makers—try as they might—can never overthow love.

In keeping with comic style, *Much Ado About Nothing* is witty with wordplay, slapstick in action, and none of the characters die. What makes this play classically Shakespearean, however, is that this storyline is just a plot twist away from a tragedy like *Romeo & Juliet*. The character Don Pedro, the good-hearted Prince of Aragon, acts as a matchmaker to the couple, while his troublemaker brother, Don John, does his best to undo all of Don Pedro's hard work. The accusations against Claudio's bride, Hero, are so gravely serious that she can only be pardoned through staged horrific consequences. It is only because these consequences are so fleeting that the play is allowed to end as a comedy and not as a tragedy.

The tragic overtones of the play's plot are also softened by the characters' chirpy dialogue and silly mishaps. Some of the Bard's finest crafted wit and wordplay are spoken through the reluctant sweethearts Beatrice and Benedick and the dutiful watchmen, Dogberry and Verges. Beatrice and Benedick's clever and spitfire dialogue is so magnetic that they are often cited as the founding couple of the contemporary romantic comedy. Dogberry and Verges, the bumbling watchmen and the defenders of justice and malapropism, also help keep the play light. While these characters appear both hopeless and oddly effective in their pursuit of justice, their distracted banter and amusing misuse of language has since given rise to the term, "Dogberryism." Both sets of characters are the guiding forces of comedy throughout the play.

Shakespeare's iconic *Much Ado About Nothing* presents an intermingling of tragic and charmingly comic events. Deception and sabotage nearly cause the downfall of each of the characters, but the essence of the play—that love conquers all—sets the tone so that such negative forces are comically overpowered. The cumbersome events, mixed with merry back-and-forth and authentic love, lend *Much Ado About Nothing* a special kind of depth, which helps to cement its legacy as one of Shakespeare's most loved theatrical comedies.