

## Review

Overall, I enjoyed this film, though I found it slightly aged. In particular, I felt the humorous tone of the play was maintained throughout the film. Shakespeare's works are all written in a humorous sense, for at least parts of the plays, and any accurate film portrayals reflect this.

I was surprised and impressed by the quality of the cast. Many actors who appear in the film are now household names, including Kenneth Branagh (Poirot, Tenet), Robert Sean Leonard (House MD, Tape), and Denzel Washington (Equalizer, Gladiator). I feel that the nuances and skills required for an accurate portrayal of a Shakespeare play develop high-quality acting, and this cast reflects those skills.

The film work and visuals of the film reflect its age. Although it is set in Renaissance-era Italy, the camera work is typical of 1990s films. In particular, the sweeping and moving shots, as well as facial closeups, remind me strongly of other period films. I don't think this decreases the quality of the film; rather, it lends it character.

If I had been familiar with *Much Ado About Nothing* through reading, I would have found the film difficult to follow. Sometimes the story jumped around, and the presentation of the plot was not linear. In addition, the old English requires some thinking to comprehend. This is a difficulty endemic to Shakespearean films – should the filmmaker revert to modern English at the cost of authenticity, or use old English at the cost of clarity? In this debate, I stand on the side of authenticity.

Overall, I felt that this was a funny, enjoyable, and well-presented film rendition of *Much Ado About Nothing*.

## Character Examination

This section examines the character Dogberry. In the film, the renowned actor Michael Keaton plays Dogberry. In the original play, Dogberry provides comedic relief, as well as driving the resolution of the main conflict in the plot, brought about by Don John. He is oblivious to his own stupidity.

These characteristics make it difficult to portray the character of Dogberry. The actor must be self-aware, yet portray a character who is not self-aware. The comedic relief must remain funny and unintentional and not stray over to annoying stupidity. Keaton accomplished this in part by using exaggerated gestures and grunts. His costume contributes to the portrayal, with his dirty and disheveled appearance clarifying his role to the audience.

Overall, I think the film portrayal of Dogberry is faithful. However, I think a portrayal with more dialogue could have better reflected the wit with which Shakespeare wrote the character.

## Entrapment of Benedick and Beatrice

The deception of Benedick and Beatrice is the perfect instance to exhibit one of film's strengths, point of view. The key aspect of both these scenes is that the audience and Benedick and Beatrice 'overhear' a conversation which was meant to be overheard. This is an intricate nuance and is difficult to portray in written media.

In Act 2, Scene 3, the camera takes Benedick's point of view. As the audience, we are also peeking through the hedge. We hear the conversation between Don Pedro, Leonato, and Claudio along with Benedick. We also see Benedick's reaction, which drives the plot. In comparison, in Act 3, Scene 1, we see Beatrice from an overhead perspective. We also see her reactions as she hears what is going on. However, as a character she is more introspective, leaving the audience guessing more.

The biggest difference between a stage and movie portrayal is the connection between actor and audience. The film is shot very close up, so the audience has access to the actor or actress' facial expressions. These expressions are key, especially in Act 3, Scene 1. In addition, the beautiful outdoor setting in the film would be impossible in a stage production to the same fidelity. Overall, I think film is a better medium for the delivery of these two scenes.

I think the film portrayed these two key scenes well. They fit in to the overarching plot. The scenes are similar in writing, but are shown differently on screen. I thought this was a nice touch – the unique nature kept me engaged, and clearly showed the difference between the two characters. The humorous tone was well-preserved, but the meaning was not lost.

### **Works Cited**

Abele, Robert. "Review: Trauma Haunts 'The Monkey,' but the Film Is More Interested in Going Bananas." *Los Angeles Times*, 21 Feb. 2025, 12:05 p.m., [www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2025-02-21/the-monkey-review-theo-james-osgood-perkins-horror-neon](https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/movies/story/2025-02-21/the-monkey-review-theo-james-osgood-perkins-horror-neon).

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