

Subconscious Mind Revealed through  
Distorted Communication  
--- Eavesdropping in *Much Ado about Nothing*

歪められたコミュニケーションにより浮き彫りにされる潜在意識  
—— 『から騒ぎ』 にみられる盗み聞き

ASHIDA Ruri  
芦田 ルリ

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**Abstract:** 『から騒ぎ』の中の恋人たちは繰り返される盗み聞きによって翻弄されるが、その盗み聞きは恋人たちの潜在意識を浮き彫りにしていく。Claudio が潜在意識の中では美しい女性に対して不信感を持っていること、結婚を個人的な結びつきではなく社会的に結ぶ絆と考えていること、男友達との繋がりを捨てられないこと、さらにはその友人さえも真に信用してはいないことなどが、盗み聞きによって浮き彫りにされる。一方で、Benedick と Beatrice は潜在意識の中でお互いに好意を持っていたことが、盗み聞きを通して浮き彫りにされる。盗み聞きとは一方通行の歪んだコミュニケーションといえる。耳に挟んだ話を完全に信じるか、疑うのか、全く信じないか、後に事実を確かめようとするかは、当事者の潜在意識や人間関係、信頼関係によるところが大きい。

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**Key words:** distorted communication, subconscious, eavesdropping, self-knowledge

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Richard Grant White observed that in Shakespeare's time, "nothing" was pronounced "no thing," so that "nothing" and "noting" sounded much the same. He argues that the play is much ado about "noting," watching and observing. Ralph Berry adds a third layer to the near pun, "note" and "know," and argues that the play is much ado about "knowing."<sup>1</sup>

In *Much Ado about Nothing*, both the main plot (love relation between Claudio and Hero) and the sub-plot (love relation between Benedick and Beatrice) depend on eavesdropping---the consequent miscommunication, the misunderstanding, and the final reconciliation. The sub-plot interrelates as analogous or opposed counterpart and stands almost equal to the main plot: both plots are of noble men and women--Claudio and Hero follow courtly love conventions, while Benedick and Beatrice follow their personal passion; both groups of lovers seem to have known one another before the opening of the play; both plots are maneuvered by the brothers, Don Pedro and Don John, though one good and one bad-- (Richard A. Levin even sees a connection between the two groups in the

alliteration of their names: Don Pedro-Don John, Claudio-Conrade, Benedick-Borachio);<sup>2</sup> both plots question love relationships (one maneuvered towards separation and one towards union, and they both end in marriage); and finally, both plots are activated by eavesdropping.

Eavesdropping is not a two-way conversation. Communication is distorted as the person who eavesdrops does not come out of the closure to confirm the truth. (Thus, the same fact of Don Pedro's proxy wooing is overheard differently--falsely by Antonio's servants and truly by Borachio.) And yet the matter the person overhears seems very true as it is a free talk made on the assumption that whoever concerned is not present. Nevertheless, whether one entirely believes what one overhears or not much depends on one's own subconscious. If Claudio had known Hero's truth and believed strongly in her chastity, Don John's malignant plot would not have had such an effect. There was something in his own subconscious that made him easily believe her infidelity. Also, if Benedick and Beatrice had really detested one another, they would not have fallen in love.

On hearing Don Pedro's proxy wooing, Borachio and Don John find the chance to deceive Claudio. Though they know him to be Claudio under his mask, they trick him as if they were addressing Benedick, thus leaving Claudio in the same situation as if he were eavesdropping. They tell him that Don Pedro himself has fallen in love with Hero and that he has won her. Claudio believes them immediately without any doubt:

'Tis certain so, the Prince woos for himself  
 Friendship is constant in all other things  
 Save in the office and affairs of love;  
 Therefore all hearts in love use their own tongues.  
 Let every eye negotiate for itself,  
 And trust no agent; for beauty is a witch  
 Against whose charms faith melteth into blood.  
 This is an accident of hourly proof,  
 Which I mistrusted not. Farewell therefore Hero!<sup>3</sup>

(II.i.174-182)

He is deceived easily because he has fallen in love with Hero's outward beauty, while in his subconscious, he distrusts beautiful women, "for beauty is a witch." On seeing Hero, he says, "Can the world buy such a jewel?" (I.i.181) and "In mine eye, she is the sweetest lady that ever I look'd on" (I.i.187-188). He says, "That I love her, I feel" (I.i.228), but not having confidence in himself he has to ask others' opinions of her. Moreover, instead of wooing Hero himself to form a spiritual individual love relationship, he lets Don Pedro woo her for him and even negotiate the marriage with her father. Claudio feels himself ready for marriage, but actually he looks to a social bonding rather than a spiritual bonding, and seems to be unable to break away from his male friends to form a

man-to-woman love relationship independently (though ironically, he is also seen as not being able to totally trust his friends).

Although Claudio's misunderstanding is soon cleared by Don Pedro in the same scene and Claudio gets his Hero, he is liable to be deceived again for he essentially does not change. He is delighted that Don Pedro has arranged his marriage for him and wants to marry Hero the next day. He does not seem to be interested in communicating with her personally to form a spiritual bonding. Hero also simply follows her father's will. It is a good match. These "courtly love conventions" as Ruth Nero says, "camouflage a courtship of convenience, the substance of which will be tested and found wanting."<sup>4</sup>

Even on the day before his wedding, Claudio is seen as still not ready to break away from his male friends to take responsibilities of married life as he offers to go with Don Pedro to Arragon immediately after the wedding. Claudio and Don Pedro are deceived easily by the malignant plot because Borachio knows where they can be most offended: "honor . . . his friend's reputation" (II.ii.37-38) and "the semblance of a maid" (II.ii.39). When Don John tells him that "the lady is disloyal" (III.ii.104), Claudio says, "Who, Hero?" (III.ii.105), "May this be so?" (III.ii.117) and he readily jumps to the conclusion, "If I see any thing to-night why I should not marry her, in the congregation, where I should wed, there will I shame her" (III.ii.123-125). None of the conventional matters obstruct marriage, such as arbitrary laws, triangular loves, parental objections or social distinctions. It is the lovers' subconscious that blocks the marriage. Anthony Lewis says that Claudio is just ready to run through a door opened by the bastard.<sup>5</sup>

As the plotters are arrested before the church scene, it seems at first that the truth will be revealed immediately and the lovers will be united as in Act II when Claudio was first deceived. However, in Act II, it was only Claudio himself that was deceived and he had the help of Don Pedro. However, this time, both Claudio and Don Pedro are deceived. The strong relationship between male friends still prevails over man-to-woman relationship. Claudio is easily deceived because his distrust of beautiful women and disinterest in personal bonding have not changed.

In contrast, in the sub-plot, Benedick and Beatrice are both intelligent and independent individuals. They will not indulge themselves in romantic love and get married. Benedick calls Beatrice "Lady Disdain" (I.i.118). He says, "She speaks poniards, and every word stabs" (II.i.247-248), and "I cannot endure my Lady Tongue" (II.i.274-275). Yet, Benedick and Beatrice fall so easily into Don Pedro's benevolent plot and fall in love. On overhearing his own fault and Beatrice's love for him, Benedick concludes without doubt:

This can be no trick . . . Love me? why, it must be requited. I hear how I am censur'd. . . I did never think to marry. I must not seem proud; happy are they that hear their detractions, and can put them to mending. They say the lady is fair; 'tis a truth, I can bear them

witness; and virtuous; 'tis so, I cannot reprove it; and wise, but for loving me; by my troth, it is no addition to her wit, nor no great argument of her folly, for I will be horribly in love with her.

(II.iii.220-235)

He is all too willing to believe what he has overheard and fall in love because in his subconscious, he has been interested in Beatrice from the beginning of the play. When Claudio asks Benedick's opinion of Hero, Benedick immediately mentions Beatrice: "There's her cousin, and she were not possess'd with a fury, exceeds her as much in beauty as the first of May doth the last of December" (I.i.190-192). Benedick is ready to admit his own faults, "put them to mending," and transform himself into a lover. However, he feels the social pressure on him against this transformation since he has "rail'd so long against marriage" (II.iii.237). He has to work out his own defense:

. . . but doth not the appetite alter? . . . Shall quips and sentences and these paper bullets of the brain awe a man from the career of his humor? No, the world must be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married.

(II.iii.238-244)

His self-satisfying reason for getting married reveals that, though not realizing himself, he has always been ready for marriage.

Beatrice is also ready to believe and accept what she overhears: her own fault and Benedick's love for her. She says:

Stand I condemn'd for pride and scorn so much?  
 Contempt, farewell, and maiden pride, adieu!  
 No glory lives behind the back of such.  
 And, Benedick, love on, I will requite thee,  
 Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand.  
 If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee  
 To bind our loves up in a holy band;  
 For others say thou dost deserve, and I  
 Believe it better than reportingly.

(III.i.108-116)

She admits Benedick's worth as "better than reportingly," and accepts his love because she also has been taking much interest in Benedick from the beginning of the play. Benedick is the first person she inquires of in the play: "I pray you, is Signior Mountanto return'd from the wars or no?" (I.i.30-31). She tells Benedick, "I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior Benedick, nobody marks you" (I.i.116-117), though *she* is marking him. Beatrice's willingness to get married reveals that she also has been always ready for marriage. When they are communicating face to face, they can only argue

with one another. However, in a one-way distorted communication where they can only reflect on their inner selves, their subconscious feelings are incited and revealed. It is their interest in each other, their willingness to admit their own faults and to transform themselves, their capability to break away from their own sex, and their readiness for marriage that make them believe entirely what they have overheard. It is ironic that although the plotters think they are deceiving Benedick and Beatrice, they are actually uncovering the truth about their love. This takes place on stage, while Claudio's eavesdropping (a false deceit) takes place off stage. The truth is on stage and the falsehood is off stage.

Benedick, in contrast to Claudio and Don Pedro, breaks away from his male friends. After Claudio's slander in the church, he does not go out with Claudio and Don Pedro but stays behind with Hero and Beatrice, being "so attir'd in wonder" (IV.i.144). Beatrice forces him to choose between herself, his lover, and Claudio, his male friend.

Benedick: Come, bid me do any thing for thee.

Beatrice: Kill Claudio.

Benedick: Ha, not for the wide world.

Beatrice: You kill me to deny it. Farewell.

Benedick: Tarry, sweet Beatrice.

(IV.i.288-292)

Beatrice requires total trust and understanding of her, not to "kill" her but to live with her. Benedick finally resolves to kill Claudio, affirming the man-to-woman love relation.

Claudio only repents when he is told the truth by Borachio. He asks forgiveness of Leonato, and humbly accepts Leonato's offer to marry Antonio's daughter. He says, "I do embrace your offer, and dispose / For henceforth of poor Claudio" (V.i.294-295). His speech seems to symbolize a kind of spiritual death of the young, distrustful Claudio. The solemn, purgatory ritual at the tomb, and the approaching of dawn, "the gentle day" (V.iii.25), prepares for Claudio's symbolic rebirth. He takes Antonio's daughter—who is actually Hero. This time, Hero is masked, and Claudio has to accept her as she is, without her "seeming," her outward appearance. In contrast, Beatrice takes off her mask and identifies her "name" before Benedick asks her to marry him. Their love is more grounded on a spiritual relationship. It seems unlikely that Leonato would give Hero to Claudio after all the abuse and rejection in the church scene. However, it is a socially restored marriage, and Leonato says that Claudio and the Prince are innocent. It is a good match. Leonato mentions that Claudio is to marry Antonio's daughter who is the only "heir" (Vi.i.290) to the Governor of Messina, and Claudio also reveals his interest in Hero's inheritance at the beginning of the play, as he says, "Hath Leonato any son, my lord?" (I.i.294).

Thus at the end, the play ends with two couples of lovers united. However, for all the realization and ritual compensation Claudio has gone through, it still seems that he has not changed much.

Claudio and Hero simply obey Leonato's will and follow courtly love conventions. Nevertheless, through eavesdropping, their subconscious feelings were revealed, and to some extent, the lovers were brought to self-knowledge: Claudio realizes his mistake and forms a marriage bonding regardless of the woman's appearance; and Benedick and Beatrice become aware of their true feelings and form a spiritual man-to-woman bonding. Thus, the play can be said to be much ado about "noting" and "knowing."

#### Notes

1. See A. R. Humphreys, Introduction, *Much Ado About Nothing* by William Shakespeare (London: Routledge, 1991) 4, and Ralph Berry, *Shakespeare's Comedies: Explorations in Form* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1972) 146-174.
2. Richard A. Levin, *Love and Society in Shakespearean Comedy* (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1985) 94.
3. William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton, 1974) 339. Henceforth, all quotations from *Much Ado About Nothing* is from this edition, and all references will appear in the text.
4. Ruth Nero, *Comic Transformations in Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1980) 164.
5. Anthony J. Lewis, *The Love Story in Shakespearean Comedy* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1992) 57.