Much Ado About Nothing

The comedy *Much Ado About Nothing* remains popular today for a number of reasons, among them its sparkling wit and wordplay; its explorations of relationships between men and women, gender and society, and "outsiders" and society; and the questions it raises about marriage as a social institution. The play is timeless in its themes and as contemporary as an episode of *Sex and the City*, which itself might be viewed as a current-day reworking of many of the themes found in *Much Ado*, and whose title could serve as an alternate title for the play.

Shakespeare does not provide easy answers to the questions he raises; rather, he presents complex and multifaceted characters caught up in events that they can only partially control, if that. In other words, his characters exist much as we do. The men and women of the play have to sort out personal issues, issues of their own identity, problems with their relationships with members of their own sex, and problems with their relationships with members of the opposite sex. Feminists and theorists on gay and lesbian studies have found much to discuss here; indeed, the play's sexual politics are fertile ground for analysis and discussion of current ideas of gender and sexual roles.

*Much Ado* shows us that we are often victims of the plots, schemes, and tricks of others who seek to get us to act in certain ways. Certainly, such trickery is no less common in our generation than it was in Shakespeare's; indeed, in this world of Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, and other forms of social networking, the opportunities for manipulation, game playing, and peer pressure might be even greater.

Similarly, the play delves deeply into the issues of appearance and reality. It asks such basic—and important—questions as "What is real?" "What is true?" "How do I know the truth?" Characters in the play come near disaster and suffer numerous problems, often being unable to distinguish truth from falsehood or appearance from reality. Situations and scenes are contrived. Characters are "set up." Events are staged. People don disguises and masks to hide their true feelings or, sometimes, to allow themselves to express their true feelings. Characters learn that what they see and hear is not always true or real. In our modern, image-driven, multimedia environment, questions as to what is true, what is real, and what is authentic remain all-important. *Much Ado* is a play that helps us think more carefully and deeply about such questions.

While *Much Ado* offers a wealth of interesting and, yes, entertaining explorations of gender and relationships, it also offers important insights into the nature of society. The Messina of the play is a society administered by a governor. The play commences just after the successful conclusion of a military campaign, as a group of mostly young nobles come to the city fresh from the fight. The play's action navigates a path between the states of peace and war, military power and the rule of law, civil and military society. The forces at work are strong enough to tear the society apart, but in the end, these forces are reconciled, at least temporarily, by the social convention of marriage, a force that brings people together. In our own age of far-flung wars, political polarization, and conflict between socioeconomic groups, the play's lessons remain entirely relevant.

*Much Ado* also has much to offer regarding the role and effects of the "outsider." In the character of Don John, we have a classic example of the angry outsider, a person dispossessed by the nature of his illegitimate birth from a respected place in society. He is angry, antisocial, and vengeful, and he provides the worrisome dark side to the comedy's light side of romance and marriage. *Much Ado* poses questions on how society creates its Don Johns and how it should deal with them.

In contrast to Don John, there is the constable Dogberry. This bumbling, comic figure should, by the usual social and economic standards of society, also be an outsider. Yet, rather than seethe with resentment as Don John does, Dogberry has evidently taken his lowly position in the social hierarchy and turned it to his advantage. He is a self-made man, representative of a new civil order in which industry, merit, and self-confidence provide the path to status. Don John, on the other hand, may be seen as a man "unmade" by his weakness of character and failure to find a meaningful role in society. One may—and does—laugh at Dogberry's fumbling and mangling of the language, yet he is one character who actually speaks meaningfully of the events of the day. It must also be kept in mind that it is Dogberry and his companions who discover the plot hatched by Don John, rather than any of the more educated and privileged nobles. Again, the play provides us with food for thought on how individuals and groups can make a place for themselves in society.
The play's far-off setting of Messina, located off the "toe" of the Italian "boot," on the coast of the island of Sicily, would have suggested to Shakespeare's audience a remote, fantastic, and romantic place. One might argue, however, that the distant location allowed Shakespeare to explore certain themes that might otherwise have been more difficult to portray were the play set at home. While set in a distant land, the play does draw on realities of English, Italian, and Spanish history and aspects of English life, especially courtly life. Thus, some background on these matters is helpful.

First, while Messina might have served to represent a distant other world for Shakespeare's audience, it was a real place. Messina's history was one of occupation by succeeding conquerors. At the time of Shakespeare, the city was under the control of the Spanish and was substantial and important. The fact of Spanish rule is reflected in the name of some of the play's characters, most notably Don Pedro and Don John. It is useful to keep in mind that Protestant England under Elizabeth I viewed Catholic Spain with deep suspicion and even antagonism. After all, the English had fought off the Spanish Armada in 1588, probably only about a decade before the play's initial performance, which was probably in 1598–99. The portrayal of Don Pedro and, even more so, Don John as schemers and tricksters, whether for good or ill, would probably have resonated with the English audience.

But though Messina was occupied by Spain, it was an Italian city. Although Shakespeare almost certainly never visited Italy, many of his plays—The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Romeo and Juliet, The Taming of the Shrew, and others—are set there. Shakespeare's interest in and involvement with Italy is substantial. Much Ado reflects many of the attitudes and views, often contradictory, that Shakespeare and the English held about Italy. For Shakespeare, it was a land of strong, even violent, passions. We can see this in the outbursts of Leonato, first against Hero when it is alleged she is unfaithful, then against Don Pedro and Claudio when it is found that they have mistakenly slandered Hero.

Because of Italy's reputation for strong sexual passions and illicit liaisons, it seems more natural to charge inappropriate conduct against Hero. At the same time, Italy also had a tradition of courtly and idealized love, exemplified in Dante's love for Beatrice and Petrarch's love for Laura. It is this tradition that underlies the nature of the romance between Hero and Claudio before Don John attempts to sabotage it. It might be argued that the relationship between Beatrice and Benedick is fascinating just because it walks a fine line between both traditions, the passionate and the courtly.

The literary sources Shakespeare drew on for the play were Italian as well. Canto 5 of Ludovico Ariosto's Orlando Furioso (1591), which Shakespeare probably read in a translation by Sir John Harington, probably provided him with the story of the marriage between Hero and Claudio and Don John's plot to prevent it. It is believed that Matteo Bandello's La Prima Parte de le Nouelle (1554) gave Shakespeare the idea of setting the play in Messina, while Baldassare Castiglione's The Courtier (1588), perhaps in Sir Thomas Hoby's translation, offered a source for the romance between Beatrice and Benedick.

Thus, while Messina was indeed a far-away place, the locale generated certain assumptions and attitudes on the part of its initial English audience, and it had already become somewhat familiar, at least to the well-educated members of the audience, through earlier stories by Italian authors.

The play was written, produced, and first published under the reign of Queen Elizabeth (1558–1603), at a time when English cultural life and national feeling was at a new height. The victory over the Spanish Armada helped inspire these feelings, giving the English a sense of independence and identity, aided by their mastery of the seas. This maritime strength also brought about increases in trade, which then led to a greater interaction with foreign cultures and foreign citizens. In addition, the turn to Protestantism, begun by Elizabeth's father, King Henry VIII, and continued under Elizabeth, marked for many citizens a new freedom from the domination of the pope and the Roman Catholic Church (although some English remained devout, if covert, Catholics). Against this background, Much Ado, set in Italy and shaded with Spanish influence, might be said to occupy a space between fascination and opposition in the view of its English audience.

Finally, the play itself contains another form of theatrical entertainment within it: the masque, which had been popular in England and preferred in royal circles. Masques were a sort of costume play, or ball, built around a theme, often from mythology or literature. Perhaps the most famous literary work built around the form of a masque is Milton's Comus (1634). The members of the royal circle would each dress up in a chosen role, and the masques would continue through the evening, often with much partying and merrymaking. These performances gave the nobility a chance to show off, literally and figuratively, in ways that they could not do in their normal routine. They also provided a chance for romantic
dalliances; it was reported that Henry VIII wooed Anne Boleyn during a masque. In *Much Ado*, the masque gives Don Pedro a chance to woo Hero for Claudio. This scene would have looked very familiar to some members of the audience. Shakespeare's use of the masque might also indicate that in the language of Beatrice and Benedick and Hero and Claudio, he may have been reflecting what he heard at actual masques in which he participated. Certainly, the play offers a kind of highly bred yet bold language that would not have been alien to a courtly masque.

**Date and Text of the Play**

Most authorities date the play to the winter of 1598–99. Shakespeare was then becoming well known as a playwright. During this same period, he wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*. The play was probably first performed by the acting troupe the Lord Chamberlain's Men at The Theatre, just prior to that playhouse being dismantled and rebuilt later as the now legendary Globe. The Theatre was an outdoor, open-air amphitheatre, just outside the jurisdiction of the City of London, with three gallery levels and a roofed stage area. It is important to keep in mind that all the actors, or "players," as they were called, at this time were men. Since women were not permitted to perform onstage during Elizabethan times, their roles—Hero, Beatrice and others—were played by boys. Although the actors were male, both men and women formed the audience, which typically was drawn from all London society but was predominately of the lower social and economic classes.

The play was first published in 1600 in a quarto edition and later included in the 1623 First Folio collection of Shakespeare's plays. The title page of the quarto states that *Much Ado About Nothing* "hath been sundrie times publikely acted by the Right Honourable, the Lord Chamberlaine his seruants." The only surviving records for early performances are the payments made by the Lord Chamberlain to John Heminge in May 1613 for presenting several plays, including *Much Ado About Nothing*, for Princess Elizabeth (daughter of James I) and Frederick V (Elector Palatine of the Rhine), who were married that year. The performance of this play would seem to be a fitting wedding present.

**Synopsis**

**Brief Synopsis**

A messenger arrives in Messina to spread the news that the recent military conflict between Don Pedro, Prince of Aragon, and his half brother, Don John, is resolved, with Don Pedro claiming victory. This success comes as good news to Leonato, the governor of Messina, and the members of his household, including Beatrice. Don Pedro arrives, accompanied by Benedick, Claudio, and his brother, Don John. Benedick and Beatrice exchange humorous insults, each of them asserting an extreme aversion to love, particularly for the other. Once alone, Claudio confesses to Benedick that he has fallen in love with Leonato's daughter, Hero, and wishes to marry her. Benedick reveals Claudio's desire to Don Pedro, who offers to court Hero while pretending to be Claudio at the masque scheduled for that evening. Once assured of Hero's response, he will approach her father on Claudio's behalf.

Don John privately complains to his attendant Conrade of his bitter melancholy and asserts that he wishes to spread discontent.

Don Pedro and his courtiers arrive for the festivities, and all the participants put on masks. Benedick and Beatrice, in disguise, trade insults. Don John tells Claudio that he has heard the prince courting Hero. After Claudio leaves embittered, Benedick berates Don Pedro for betraying Claudio. The prince assures Benedick that he means well by their friend. When Claudio and Beatrice appear, Don Pedro tells Claudio that he has arranged his marriage to Hero. After Beatrice leaves, the prince reveals his plan to trick Benedick and Beatrice into falling in love with each other.

Borachio proposes a scheme to the villain Don John: he, Borachio, will recruit Hero's waiting-woman, Margaret, to disguise herself as Hero and admit him into Hero's window that night. If Don John can get Claudio and Don Pedro to witness this charade, they will believe that Hero has a lover, and Claudio will repudiate her.

In the garden, Benedick reflects on the seductiveness of love. When Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato appear, he hides himself in an arbor. They see him and, following Don Pedro's plan, speak loudly about Beatrice's passionate love for him. When they leave, Benedick declares that he will marry Beatrice. Beatrice appears to summon him to dinner, and Benedick comically imagines that he hears double meanings in her words that prove her love.
When Beatrice eavesdrops on Hero and Margaret talking in the garden, she hears them speak loudly of Benedick's passion for her. They profess reluctance to tell Beatrice this news, fearing her mockery. Beatrice decides that she will return Benedick's love.

Don John appears and tells Claudio and Don Pedro of Hero's infidelity, offering to prove the truth of his accusation that night.

The rustic Constable Dogberry assembles the Watchmen for their nightly patrol. Conrade and Borachio appear. Borachio describes the success of his plan to deceive Claudio and tells of Claudio's determination to disgrace Hero at the wedding. The Watchmen arrest the two men.

During the marriage ceremony, Claudio rejects Hero, asserting that he has witnessed her rendezvous with a lover. Although Leonato initially rages cruelly at Hero and supports Claudio, he finally recovers his faith in his daughter when Friar Francis, Beatrice, and Benedick assert their faith in Hero. The Friar suggests they pretend that Hero has died. Then, if Hero is not exonerated, she can at least be secretly transferred to a nunnery. Beatrice and Benedick reveal their feelings for each other. Beatrice demands that Benedick prove his love by challenging Claudio to a duel in support of Hero.

Don John has fled from Messina. After Dogberry fails at interrogating Conrade and Borachio, the sexton questions the Watchmen, who tell of Don John's plot. The Sexton orders the prisoners bound and taken to Leonato, and he goes to report what he has learned.

Benedick challenges Claudio to a duel. Dogberry arrives with his prisoners, and Borachio confesses all. Claudio begs for Leonato's forgiveness, promising to perform any penance. Leonato states that he must publicly mourn Hero and then marry Hero's cousin.

Claudio prepares to marry the veiled cousin, who reveals herself to be Hero. Benedick and Beatrice cannot bring themselves to admit their love for each other. Claudio produces a love poem that Benedick has written about Beatrice, and Hero presents a similar lyric by Beatrice about Benedick. Exposed, Beatrice and Benedick agree to be married. As plans are made for a double wedding, word comes that Don John has been apprehended.

**Act I, Scene 1**

The play opens with a messenger arriving in Messina (Sicily). The messenger meets Messina's governor, Leonato; Leonato's daughter, Hero; and Leonato's niece, Beatrice, and he tells them of the successful military campaign waged by Don Pedro, prince of Arragon. He also reports that Don Pedro is on his way to Messina that evening with his entourage to rest and celebrate the victorious campaign. We learn that Claudio, a young lord of Florence, and Benedick, a young lord of Padua, have done valiant military service with Don Pedro. From Beatrice's questions and comments, we also learn that there is a "merry war" between her and Benedick.

Don Pedro, Claudio, Benedick, Balthasar (Don Pedro's attendant), and John the Bastard (illegitimate brother of Don Pedro) now enter and greet Leonato and his family. Beatrice and Benedick engage in witty mockery of each other. After the others leave, Claudio tells Benedick that he has fallen for Hero and wants to make her his wife. Don Pedro now comes to find Claudio and Benedick, and Claudio reveals his love for Hero to Don Pedro. Benedick asserts that he himself will not be like Claudio; he will not fall in love. Don Pedro tells Claudio that he will disguise himself as Claudio in order to woo and win Hero for Claudio, and once he has done so, will obtain Leonato's approval for the marriage.

**Act I, Scene 2**

Leonato and his brother Antonio, an old man, are in a conversation. Antonio tells Leonato that he has overheard Don Pedro and Claudio speaking of Hero. Antonio mistakenly believes he hears Don Pedro reveal his love for Hero and that Don Pedro intends to tell Hero of his love at a dance that night, after which he will inform Leonato of his love. Leonato tells Antonio he will inform Hero so that she might be prepared.

**Act I, Scene 3**

John the Bastard and his companion Conrade are in a conversation. John reveals that he does what he wants, seeks no one else's regard, and, in his own words, is "a plain dealing villain." John seeks some way to express his discontent. Borachio,
another follower of John, enters the scene and tells John of Don Pedro's plan to woo Hero on behalf of Claudio. John sees an opportunity to vent his displeasure and thwart Claudio.

Act II, Scene 1

Leonato, Antonio, Hero, Beatrice and a "kinsman" (not identified) are at dinner. They first talk of John, who Hero notes has a "very melancholy disposition." Beatrice criticizes Benedick and husbands and marriage generally. Don Pedro, Claudio, Benedick, John, and Borachio enter the scene as revelers wearing masks. Don Pedro induces Hero to a private conversation. Beatrice and Benedick engage in witty criticisms of each other. The revelers all leave, except for John, Borachio, and Claudio, who is still wearing a mask. John, pretending to mistake Claudio for Benedick, tells him that his brother, Don Pedro, loves Hero and intends to marry her this night. John and Borachio then leave, leaving Claudio alone. Claudio believes what he has heard from John, so he thinks Don Pedro and Hero have betrayed him. Benedick then enters and realizes that Claudio is upset and unhappy; Claudio leaves. Benedick is himself unhappy because of the critical wit that Beatrice used on him at the masked party.

Don Pedro now enters. Benedick tells Don Pedro how Beatrice's words have hurt him. Claudio returns with Beatrice, Leonato, and Hero. Since Benedick cannot endure more criticism from Beatrice, he leaves. Don Pedro tells Beatrice she has lost Benedick's heart, and Beatrice responds that "once before he won it of me with false dice." Claudio, still believing John's false accusation, treats Don Pedro coldly. Don Pedro now tells Claudio that he has wooed and won Hero for him and has obtained the consent of Leonato, Hero's father. Claudio, now overjoyed, agrees to marry Hero. Don Pedro asks Beatrice if she will marry him, but Beatrice declines and leaves. Claudio sets the wedding for the next day. In the meantime, Don Pedro decides to find a way to bring Beatrice and Benedick to fall in love with each other. Claudio and Hero agree to help.

Act II, Scene 2

John and Borachio meet. John has found out that Claudio is to marry Hero; he seeks a way to thwart the marriage and bring discredit on his brother, Don Pedro, who has arranged it. Borachio tells John to tell Don Pedro and Claudio that Hero only pretends to be a maiden, and when they seek proof, to bring them near the outside of Hero's window that night. Borachio, who is having an affair with Hero's attendant, Margaret, will arrange for Hero to be absent and for Margaret, dressed in Hero's clothes, to come to the bedroom window, where Borachio will call her Hero and Margaret will call him Claudio. John agrees to the plan.

Act II, Scene 3

Benedick contemplates the change in behavior of the soon-to-be married Claudio, who once thought only of war and now thinks only of love. Benedick moves off to the side, and Don Pedro, Leonato, and Claudio enter. They intend to carry out Don Pedro's scheme to get Benedick to fall in love with Beatrice. Balthasar enters and sings a song about men as deceivers of women. Don Pedro launches his scheme by talking with the others about how much Beatrice loves Benedick but is afraid to let him know that, knowing that Benedick overhears what they are saying. They "bait the hook" in order to get Benedick to "bite." Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato leave. Benedick comes forward and acknowledges he has acted badly toward Beatrice and intends to show his love to her. Beatrice then enters to invite Benedick to dinner; she rudely rebuffs his overture.

Act III, Scene 1

Hero, Margaret, and another attendant, Ursula, enter and plan their scheme to get Beatrice to love Benedick. Hero has Margaret tell Beatrice that Hero and Ursula are talking about her in the garden, and Margaret must arrange for Beatrice to hide in the bower in order to overhear what they are saying. They hope Beatrice will "devour the treacherous bait." With Beatrice listening from the bower, Hero and Ursula discuss Beatrice's pride, wounding wit, and inability to show affection. They praise Benedick and talk about his love for Beatrice. Hero and Ursula leave. Beatrice comes forward, admits her faults, and intends to show her love for Benedick.

Act III, Scene 2
Don Pedro, Claudio, Benedick, and Leonato engage in conversation and make fun of Benedick's love sickness. Benedick and Leonato leave, and John enters. He tells Don Pedro and Claudio that Hero has been "disloyal." John induces them to come to Hero's bedroom window that night to see for themselves. Claudio vows that if he sees anything improper, he will "shame" Hero at the wedding altar the next day, and Don Pedro agrees to do likewise.

Act III, Scene 3

Dogberry, the constable, Verges, a petty constable, and the Watchmen discuss how they will keep the peace that night. They overhear Borachio tell Conrade of the plot he has executed with John against Claudio and Don Pedro. Borachio recounts how he wooed Margaret, dressed as Hero, from her bedroom window, while John placed Don Pedro and Claudio in the orchard at a distance. Borachio recounts that Don Pedro and Claudio believe what they saw, and that Claudio went away "enrag'd," vowing to "shame" Hero before the congregation at the wedding altar. The Watchmen arrest Borachio and Conrade.

Act III, Scene 4

Hero, Margaret, and Ursula get ready for the wedding. Ursula is sent to get Beatrice, who then joins them. Beatrice, Margaret, and Hero exchange witticisms on the relations of men and women. Ursula reenters and notifies Hero that Don Pedro, Claudio, Benedick, John, and other townsfolk have come to bring Hero to the church for the wedding.

Act III, Scene 5

Dogberry and Verges meet Leonato and attempt to tell him of the treacherous plot they have uncovered, but their account is so convoluted and confused that Leonato tells them to examine the witnesses and come back to him tomorrow. Leonato hurries off to attend the wedding.

Act IV, Scene 1

The Friar, Don Pedro, John, Leonato, Claudio, Benedick, Hero, and Beatrice, with attendants, are at the altar for Hero and Claudio's wedding. When the Friar ask if there are any impediments to marriage, Claudio responds by accusing Hero of being false and wicked, charging she is not a maiden but rather "an approved wanton." Hero maintains her maidenly innocence. Don Pedro recounts what he and Claudio saw during the night outside Hero's window. Claudio again charges Hero with "impiety and impious purity." Don Pedro, John, and Claudio leave, while Hero faints at the altar. Leonato, believing the accusations, berates his daughter. Beatrice, Benedick, and the Friar are stunned by the turn of events. The Friar believes there must be some misunderstanding, and Beatrice sees the villainous hand of John in these events. The Friar suggests that a rumor be put out that Hero has died and that she should be taken away and hidden until the situation can be better understood and her true worth acknowledged. This is agreed upon by all.

Beatrice and Benedick are left alone. Benedick openly avows his love for Beatrice. Beatrice challenges Benedick to prove his love by killing Claudio for his treatment of Hero. Benedick at first refuses, then finally agrees to do so.

Act IV, Scene 2

Dogberry, Verges, the Town Clerk, and the Watchmen, with Borachio and Conrade, enter the prison. They have learned of the whole plot. The church sexton informs them that John has fled town. They decide to bring Borachio and Conrade to Leonato's house.

Act V, Scene 1

Leonato tells his brother Antonio of his unendurable anguish. Don Pedro and Claudio enter. They tell Leonato and Antonio that they are soon leaving Messina. Leonato and Antonio begin to berate Don Pedro and Claudio for what they have done; they soon work themselves into a fighting fever against Don Pedro and Claudio. Don Pedro and Claudio forbear from fighting Leonato and Antonio. Don Pedro maintains that although he is sorry for Hero's death, he believes that the charges against her were true and proven. Leonato and Antonio leave. Benedick enters and, finding Don Pedro and Claudio, berates Claudio and challenges him to a duel. Don Pedro and Claudio mock Beatrice's relationship with
Benedick and ask Benedick when they shall see him married. Benedick tells Don Pedro that John has fled from Messina and that he and Claudio have killed the innocent Hero. He then leaves, still seeking to duel with Claudio. Don Pedro and Claudio realize Benedick is in earnest.

Dogberry, Verges, and the Watchmen enter with Conrade and Borachio, who are under arrest. Dogberry reports how Borachio has made a false report and slandered Hero. Borachio discloses the whole of the plot hatched by John and himself. Borachio observes that what supposedly wise and educated men like Don Pedro and Claudio could not see, ignorant Watchmen were able to find out. Don Pedro is stricken by the revelation. Claudio now sees Hero in the light in which he first loved her. Leonato and Antonio return with the sexton and confront Borachio. Leonato charges Don Pedro and Claudio with his daughter's death. Claudio maintains he has sinned only in mistaking. He is willing to accept Leonato's punishment. Leonato commands that Don Pedro and Claudio inform the people of Messina of Hero's innocence. Leonato directs Claudio to sing a song at Hero's grave and to hang an epitaph on it. Leonato tells Claudio that his brother has a daughter nearly identical to Hero, and Claudio will take this daughter as his wife tomorrow. Leonato asks for Margaret to be brought to him for questioning; Borachio claims that Margaret did not know the plot. Claudio goes to mourn Hero.

Act V, Scene 2

Benedick meets Margaret and asks her help in calling Beatrice to him. Margaret and Benedick exchange double entendres and witticisms about men and women. Margaret leaves and Beatrice enters. Beatrice demands to know what happened between Benedick and Claudio. Benedick tells Beatrice he has challenged Claudio to a duel. Benedick asks Beatrice what she loves most about him. Beatrice tells Benedick that he has so many bad aspects that it is hard for any good ones to stand out. Beatrice asks Benedick the same question. Benedick tells Beatrice that he loves her against his will, which causes him to suffer. Benedick concludes that he and Beatrice know each other too well to love each other. Benedick asks how Hero is doing; Beatrice tells him she is very ill. Ursula enters and tells Beatrice and Benedick that it has been found out that Hero has been falsely accused, Don Pedro and Claudio tricked, and John, who is responsible for all of it, has fled town. They go to Leonato's house to hear the news.

Act V, Scene 3

Enter Claudio, Don Pedro, and attendants bearing lighted torches at Leonato's family tomb in the cemetery. Claudio, as he promised to Leonato, reads out an epitaph for Hero, recounting how Hero was slandered and died in shame but lives in memory for her true virtue. A song is sung. Daylight begins to break. The villains have done their worst; now a new day begins.

Act V, Scene 4

Enter Leonato, Benedick, Margaret, Ursula, Antonio, the Friar, and Hero. Leonato recounts that Don Pedro and Claudio have realized they were wrong in their accusations against Hero. Leonato notes that Margaret, after questioning, seemed unaware of the larger purpose of John's plot and participated against her will. Antonio is glad everything has worked out well, and Benedick is also relieved, as he will not have to duel Claudio. Leonato sends Hero and her attendants to another chamber and tells them to come back, masked, when he calls for them. Benedick tells Leonato and the Friar that he, too, hopes to be married this day. Antonio leaves.

Don Pedro and Claudio now enter, thinking Claudio is to marry Leonato's "niece," as Leonato has made Claudio promise. Antonio reenters with Hero, Beatrice, Margaret, and Ursula, all in masks. Claudio agrees to marry the woman Leonato has selected for him, and he takes her hand. Hero takes off her mask and agrees to marry Claudio, who is amazed. As the Friar explains, the old Hero "died" while slander blamed her, but she has been reborn now that she has been vindicated. Benedick asks for Beatrice, and Beatrice unmask. Benedick asks her if she loves him. Beatrice tells him that she loves him "no more than reason." Beatrice asks Benedick the same question and receives the same answer. They each exclaim that what others had told them must have been wrong, for each was led to believe that the other loved them. Claudio produces a paper in which Benedick declares his love for Beatrice, and Hero produces another paper stolen from Beatrice's pocket in which Beatrice declares her love for Benedick. Benedick tells Beatrice he will take her out of pity, while Beatrice tells Benedick she will take him to save his life. Benedick tells Beatrice he "will stop your mouth" and kisses her. Benedick declares witticisms and jokes will not stop him from marrying, as he is intent on doing so. Benedick and Claudio assert their friendship again. Benedick calls for a dance before the marriage. Benedick notes that Don Pedro
looks sad and advises him to get a wife. A messenger arrives with news that John has been caught and is being brought back to Messina under armed guard. Benedick says he will think up suitable punishments for John, but for now, it is time to dance, and the pipers strike up a tune.

Character List

**Don Pedro**  Prince of Arragon, who has led a group of other noblemen to war and is returning victorious with only minor losses. An "alpha male," he takes control of Claudio's wooing of Hero, is tricked by his half brother John's plot, and, despite his authority, is lonely and without a mate at the end of the play.

**Don John**  The "bastard," i.e., the illegitimate brother of Don Pedro. Perhaps because of his illegitimate status, or due to his own personality, he is a man of few words, goes his own way, respects no one, and seeks to do harm where possible, in order to thwart the happiness of others. He considers himself a "plain-dealing villain" and implements a plot that nearly destroys the happiness of the other characters.

**Claudio**  A straightforward young lord of Florence who has acquitted himself well in the war as part of Don Pedro's entourage. His thoughts turn to love, not war, when he falls in love with Hero; however, he is quick to believe John's slander about her and shames her publicly, although they are quickly reconciled when the truth becomes known.

**Benedick**  A witty and humorous young lord of Padua, brother in arms to Claudio. Benedick is caught in a "love-hate" relationship with the equally witty and humorous Beatrice, who, after much mocking and some rebuffs, agrees to marry him.

**Leonato**  Governor of Messina, the site of the play's action, father to the lady Hero, and uncle to Beatrice. Like most fathers, he is proud and protective of his daughter and distraught when Hero is nearly ruined by John's plot.

**Antonio**  Leonato's brother, he exhibits some of the signs of a somewhat senile older man—for example, foolishly challenging Don Pedro and Claudio to fight as a result of their treatment of Hero.

**Hero**  Daughter to Leonato, she is lovely, mild, and willing to follow the wishes of her father, suitor, and society. She agrees to marry Claudio, even after he publicly and falsely accuses her of shameful conduct.

**Beatrice**  Niece to Leonato, she is spirited, witty, humorous, and independent, and she follows her own wishes in matters of personal happiness. She is engaged in a war of words with Benedick, which we realize masks deeper feelings for him.

**Balthasar**  An attendant to Don Pedro who, although often called upon to sing to the other characters, is not a very skillful singer.

**Borachio**  An attendant to Don John, he furthers his employer's malicious intentions by devising the plot that will trick Don Pedro and Claudio into believing that Hero is not virtuous, using his illicit relationship with Hero's attendant, Margaret, to accomplish the trickery.

**Conrade**  Another attendant to Don John, a reflection of his master, who encourages his misanthropy and mischief making.

**Margaret**  An attendant to Hero, Margaret is witty and humorous. She is complicit in her lover Borachio's plot against Hero, although unaware of its deeper purposes.

**Ursula**  Another attendant to Hero, Ursula mirrors her mistress's personality.

**Dogberry**  A constable and a self-made man, with a propensity for using the wrong word at the right time, to unintentionally humorous effect. Although something of a bumbler, he and his colleagues manage to uncover the plot hatched by John and Borachio, and they bring the truth to light, which better-educated and higher-ranking characters fail to do.

**Verges**  Chief officer under the constable, he shares Dogberry's bumbling and humorous ways but helps bring Borachio and John to justice.
Friar was to marry Hero and Claudio; he comes up with a stratagem to hide Hero until the truth of Claudio's accusations can be determined.

Further Information


**Film and Video Productions:**


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