

Much Ado About Nothing

Two Example Sections



NO-TEXT

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MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

(The Condensed Story)

Leonato is governor of the city of Messina in Italy. He lives with his beautiful daughter, Hero, his witty and abrasive niece, Beatrice and his elderly brother, Antonio.

Don Pedro is an Italian prince who's returning from a successful military campaign. He's accompanied by his deputies, Claudio and Benedick. Claudio is a handsome young Florentine and Benedick is a clever man who's been having an ongoing battle of wits with Beatrice. Don Pedro's bastard brother, Don John, is also a member of the group. He's a sullen, bitter man, who likes to make trouble for the others.

Leonato invites Don Pedro and his entourage to stay in Messina for at least a month. When the guests arrive, Claudio quickly falls in love with Hero and Benedick resumes his war of words with Beatrice. A masquerade ball is held in celebration. Don Pedro, in disguise, courts Hero on Claudio's behalf. Don John tries to cause trouble by telling Claudio that his brother wants Hero for himself. An argument ensues, but the misunderstanding is quickly resolved. Claudio and Hero pledge their love for each other and plan to get married.

To pass the time in the week before the wedding ceremony, they all decide to come up with a plan to get Benedick and Beatrice to fall in love, as the couple are clearly meant for each other, though both have said they'll never marry. The men talk about Beatrice's love for Benedick, while they know he's eavesdropping and the women do likewise with Beatrice. The plan works and the couple soon fall secretly in love.

Meanwhile, Don John is plotting to ruin the wedding. His follower, Borachio, courts Margaret, Hero's chambermaid. He calls her "Hero" at Hero's open bedroom window, while Don John has manoeuvred Don Pedro and Claudio to lurk below. Claudio mistakes Margaret for Hero and assumes she's being unfaithful to him. Next day, during the wedding ceremony, Claudio humiliates Hero by accusing her and abandoning her at the altar.

The presiding Friar believes Hero is innocent and convinces the family to feign Hero's death, until her innocence can be proven. Fortunately, the night watchmen overheard Borachio and his accomplice, Conrade, bragging about their evil deed. Borachio and Conrade are arrested and Hero's good name is restored. Meanwhile, Claudio is now full of remorse, believing Hero to have died because of him. Claudio, as a penance, agrees to marry a mysterious masked woman, who he believes to be Hero's cousin.

Benedick and Beatrice reluctantly admit their love for each other and, during the new wedding ceremony, Hero unmask herself to a surprised and delighted Claudio. Benedick asks Beatrice to marry him and, after some arguing and invective, she agrees. A messenger arrives to say that Don John has been arrested and a merry dance ensues, before the lovers celebrate a double wedding.

SECTION 1

Act 4, Scene 1, lines 196 to 325

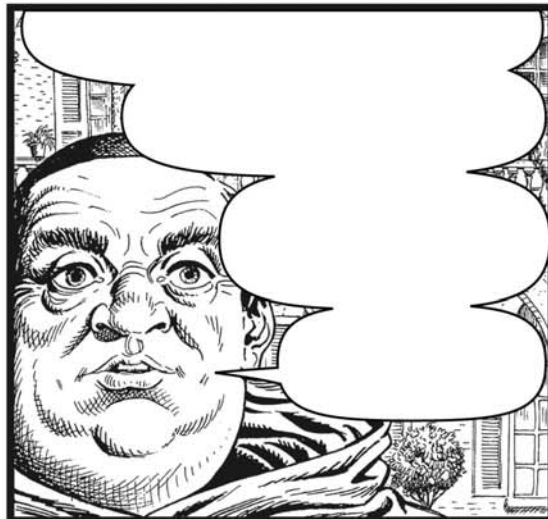
Background

Much Ado About Nothing combines two separate stories. The first is the plotting of Don John, which causes Claudio to mistakenly think that Hero has been unfaithful, leading to the false accusation of Hero. The second is the relationship between the ‘antagonists’ Benedick and Beatrice, and the plan to get them to declare their love for each other.

Prior to this section of Act 4 – Scene 1, Hero has already been wrongly accused by Claudio and been rebuked by her father, Leonato – also, Benedick and Beatrice have already been ‘told’ of each one’s love for the other. The section begins with the Friar outlining his plan to restore Hero’s good name, which is accepted by Leonato, then the rest of the section belongs to Benedick and Beatrice, and the interplay between these two ‘reluctant’ lovers.

Benedick is the seminal ‘young lord’ or ‘courtier’. The perfect man, who’s able to love and fight with equal passion – he can sing, dance, understand diplomacy and philosophy and be extremely witty. Benedick’s intellectual qualities have been challenged by an equally intellectual Beatrice throughout the play, but the couple come to an understanding of sorts here in Act 4 – Scene 1.

Beatrice and Benedick, despite their carefree attitudes, are far more in touch with the social mores of the time than the other characters and their relationship is a microcosm of the underlying theme of the play – the men’s fears of being shamed, duped and/or outdone by the women. Beatrice indicates, when she says “O God, that I were a man!”, that she would make a *better* man than Benedick. The social illusions created for survival in this society are illustrated in two different, though similar, ways in the play – the first in the attitude of Claudio towards Hero and the second in the attitude of Benedick towards Beatrice.











SECTION 2

Act 5, Scene 4

Background

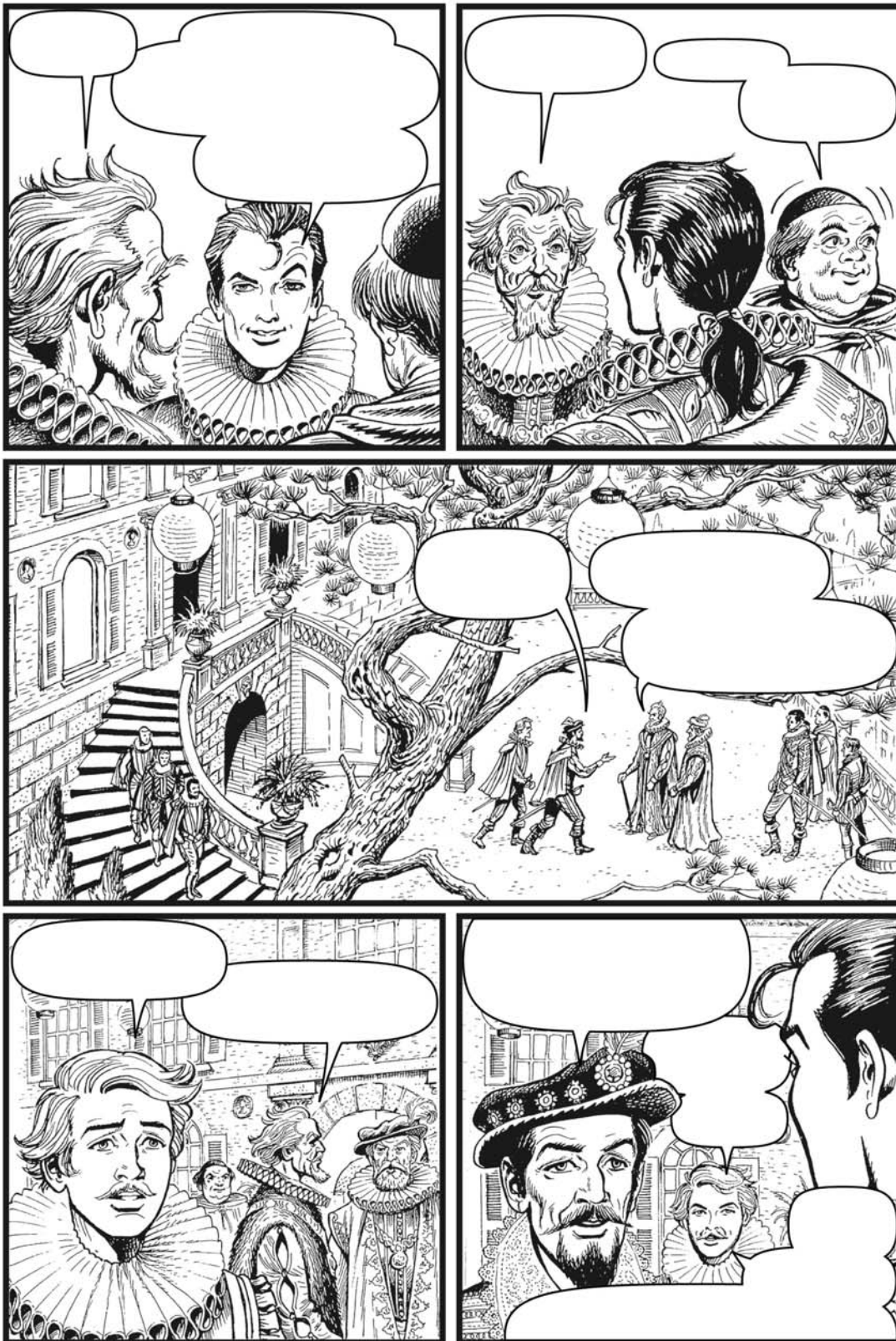
The climax of any play can be said to be (a) the turning point at which the conflict begins to resolve itself, or (b) the final resolution. If we go with the first definition, then the climax is when the Friar proposes his plan to restore Hero's good name in the first section [Act 4 – Scene 1]. According to the second definition, the climax occurs in the final scene: Act 5 – Scene 4.

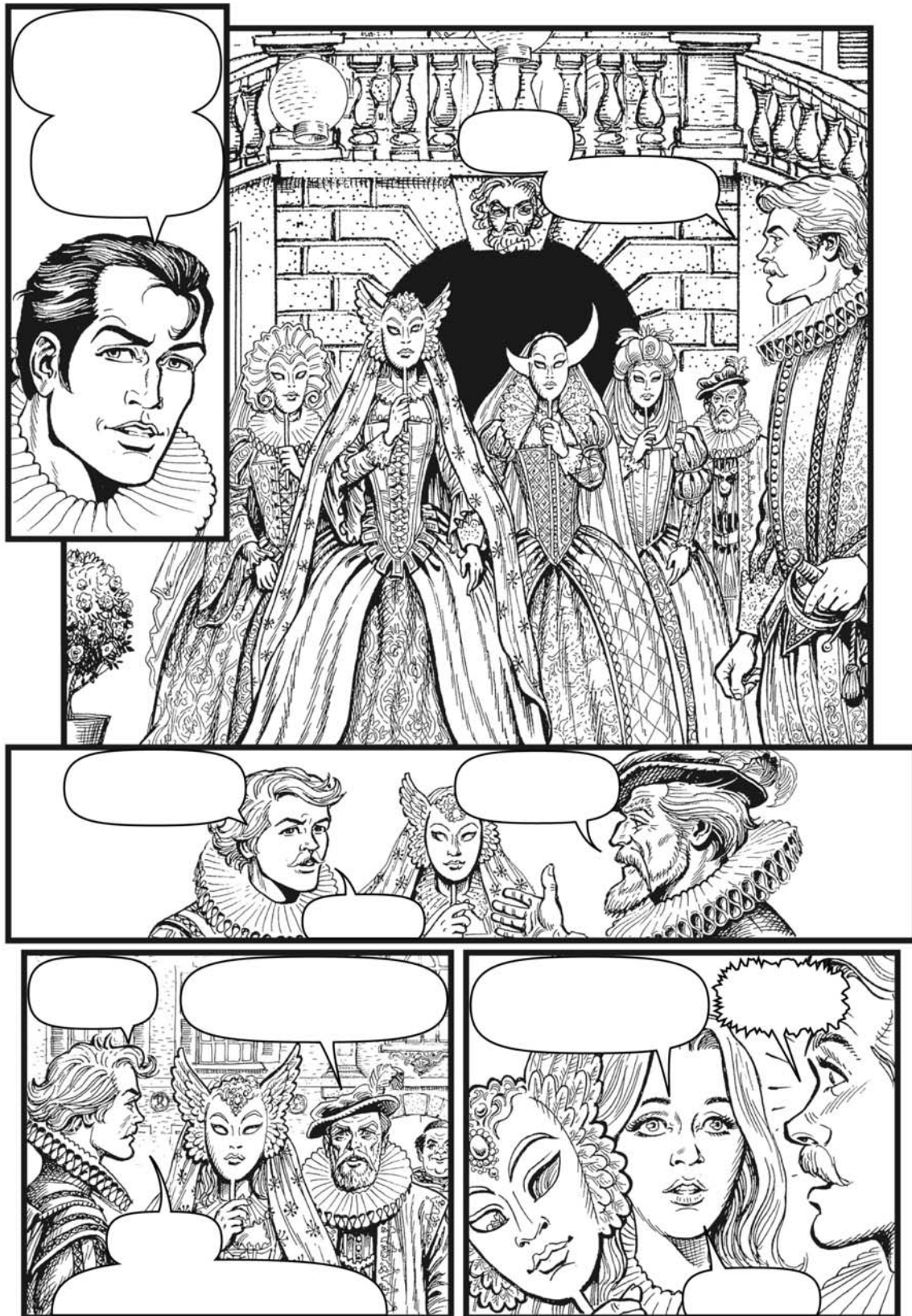
Everything is resolved here in this final Scene. The Friar's plan to restore Hero's good name has succeeded. The third element introduced by Shakespeare, evil [in the form of Don John], has been defeated. This defeat of evil has been treated in a comic way, with the Watchmen easily uncovering Don John's plot, despite the ineptitude of Dogberry. It could, of course, have worked out a lot worse, as in Romeo and Juliet and Othello.

All the loose ends are tied up in this scene – Claudio agrees to marry who he believes is Hero's cousin, without seeing her face. He is delighted when he finds out it is, in fact, Hero, who isn't dead at all. Benedick and Beatrice agree to marry, albeit without declarations of undying love – their commitments are more sarcastic and self-preserving, each saying they'll have the other for other reasons than pure love, although the audience knows that these are just excuses and a further extension of the verbal sparring that's been going on between them throughout the play; and that they really, deep down, love each other.

A messenger arrives to say Don John has been arrested, but his punishment is left for another day, so that the play can end on a happy, carefree note.



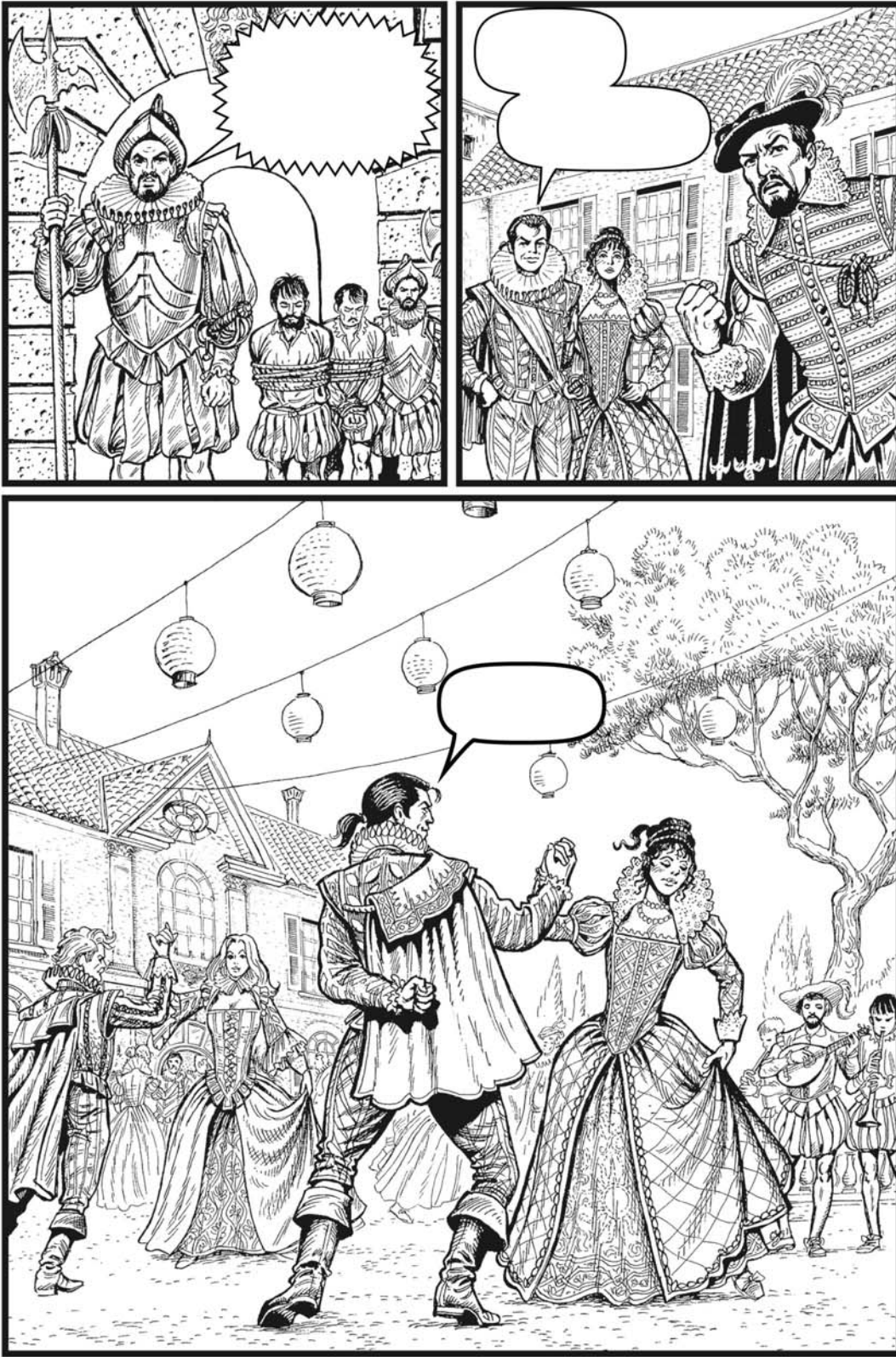




















DRAMATIS PERSONAE

(in alphabetical order)

	<p>ANTONIO <i>Brother to Leonato</i> Antonio is Leonato's older brother, and is Uncle to Hero and Beatrice (he is therefore not Beatrice's father).</p>
<p>(no picture – not featured in set sections)</p>	<p>BALTHAZAR <i>Attendant on Don Pedro</i> Balthazar is a musician who works within Leonato's household. He helps Leonato, Claudio and Don Pedro to trick Benedick into falling in love with Beatrice.</p>
	<p>BEATRICE <i>Niece to Leonato</i> Hero's cousin, Beatrice, is very quick-witted; often amusing those around her with jokes and quips. Although kindly in nature, her wit can force her into teasing and mocking others – particularly Benedick, who is her "arch-wit-rival". But this hides her affection for him, from those who know her, and from her own self.</p>
	<p>BENEDICK <i>A young lord of Padua</i> A high-ranking soldier, who is also a good friend of Don Pedro and Claudio. He likes to mock those around him with his wit, particularly the quick-witted Beatrice. He is determined never to marry, and is very critical of women. Despite that, he falls in love with Beatrice and changes his opinions.</p>
<p>(no picture – not featured in set sections)</p>	<p>BORACHIO <i>Follower of Don John</i> It is Borachio who conspires with Don John to bring about the end to the relationship between Hero and Claudio. He achieves this with the help of his lover, Margaret, who is one of Hero's servants.</p>
	<p>CLAUDIO <i>A young lord of Florence</i> Claudio falls in love with Hero, but is tricked into believing that Hero is unfaithful to him, and so the love affair is ended. Of course, he doesn't stop loving Hero, and the resolution of the tale is completed with him marrying his love – who he thought was dead.</p>

<p>(no picture – not featured in set sections)</p>	<p>CONRADE <i>Follower of Don John</i> An intimate friend of Don John, who is totally devoted to him.</p>
<p>(no picture – not featured in set sections)</p>	<p>DOGBERRY <i>A constable</i> The chief policeman in Messina. He is the focus of some word humour within the play, as although he is middle class, he acts upper class – but without the education to back it up. Consequently he is in the habit of using inappropriate and incorrect words – which betrays his upper-class appearance.</p>
	<p>DON JOHN <i>Don Pedro's illegitimate brother</i> Don John is the play's "nasty man". He is deeply jealous of his brother's power, and his sourness forces him to destroy even the happiness of Hero and Claudio.</p>
	<p>DON PEDRO <i>Prince of Arragon</i> Throughout the play, Don Pedro is often referred to as "The Prince". He is an old friend of Leonato, the Governor of Messina (and Hero's father). He is also close friends to the high-ranking soldiers who fight under him – Benedick and Claudio. He is a good natured prince, but has a tendency towards suspicion of others.</p>
	<p>FRIAR FRANCIS The Friar serves as a righteous advisor to the cast, and concocts the ploy of feigning Hero's death in order to reinstate her good name when her reputation is tarnished by Borachio and Don John.</p>
	<p>HERO <i>Daughter to Leonato</i> Beautiful and virtuous Hero, cousin of Beatrice, is manipulated throughout. She is lied about, besmirched, has her heart broken by Claudio, is reported as dead, and only at the end has her reward in the marriage to Claudio – her one true love.</p>

	<p>LEONATO <i>Governor of Messina</i> Hero's father, and Beatrice's uncle, Leonato is a respected nobleman of the highest position in Messina. Don Pedro and he are old friends.</p>
<p>(no picture – not featured in set sections)</p>	<p>MARGARET <i>Gentlewoman attending Hero</i> Margaret unwittingly helps Don John and Borachio destroy Hero's character by making her look unfaithful to her love, Claudio. She is the lover of Borachio.</p>
<p>(no picture – not featured in set sections)</p>	<p>URSULA <i>Gentlewoman attending Hero</i> Another servant to Hero – though true to her, unlike Margaret.</p>
<p>(no picture – not featured in set sections)</p>	<p>VERGES <i>A headborough</i> Deputy to Dogberry in the police force of Messina.</p>

POSTSCRIPT

Much Ado About Nothing is unusual insofar as most of it is written in ordinary prose rather than the blank verse favoured by Shakespeare. However, this prose is still full of Shakespeare's rich, colourful imagery and his brilliant plays on words.

Those exchanges which are in blank verse are usually between Claudio and Hero, perhaps to express – or even mock – their exalted feelings of love – and between Leonato and the Friar, perhaps to express the formality of their roles as Governor and Priest.