Much Ado About Nothing

Two Example Sections

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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 alter.

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 unmasks 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.
CLAUDIO AND THE PRINCE
LEFT HERO MORE OR LESS FOR
DEAD - SO, KEEP HER INDOORS
AND SAY SHE'S DEAD.

MAKE A BIG SHOW OF Mourning
FOR HER, PERFORM ALL THE FUNERAL
CEREMONIES AND HANG BAD EPITAPHS
ON YOUR FAMILY TOMB.

WAIT A MINUTE - AND LISTEN TO
MY ADVICE.

FOR WHAT REASON?
WHAT WILL THAT DO?
IF IT'S DONE
CORRECTLY IT'LL HAVE
THE EFFECT OF CHANGING
SLANDER INTO SORROW
AND THAT HAS GOTTEN
TO BE A GOOD THING.

BUT THERE'S AN EVEN BETTER REASON. IF WE SAY
SHE DIED THE VERY INSTANT SHE WAS ACCUSED,
EVERYONE WILL GRIEVE FOR HER,
PITY HER AND EXCUSE HER.

THAT'S HOW IT IS -
WE NEVER VALUE THE THINGS WE
HAVE, UNTIL WE LOSE THEM.
ONLY WHEN
WE LOSE SOMETHING
DO WE APPRECIATE
THEIR VALUE.

THAT'S HOW IT WILL BE WITH
CLAUDIO. WHEN HE HEARS THAT HIS
WORDS KILLED HERO, HE'LL THINK ABOUT
NOTHING ELSE BUT HER...

-- AND HE'LL REMEMBER HER
TO BE EVEN MORE BEAUTIFUL
THAN WHEN SHE WAS ALIVE.

THE IMAGE OF HER IN HIS
MIND WILL BE MORE DELICATE,
MORE MOVING AND MORE FULL
OF LIFE THAN THE REALITY
OF HER.

IF HE EVER TRULY
LOVED HER, HE'LL BE SO SORRY
HE ACCUSED HER, EVEN THOUGH
HE BELIEVED HIS ACCUSATION
TO BE TRUE.

FOLLOW MY PLAN - TRUST ME, THE OUTCOME
WILL BE EVEN BETTER THAN I'M ABLE TO DESCRIBE HERE;
AND IF IT DOESN'T GO WELL,
YOU CAN AVOID HER IN THE
BEST PLACE FOR SOMEONE WITH
A RUINED REPUTATION -
A NUNNERY, AVOIDING
PRYING EYES AND WAGGING TONGUES,
BAD MINDS AND INSULTING
COMMENTS.
Listen to the friar, Signore Leonato.
And even though I'm very good friends with the prince and Claudio, I swear I'll keep this secret as honourably as you would yourself.

I'm so full of sorrow, I'll clutch at even the smallest straw.

It's agreed, then. Now let's be off. A rare disease requires a rare cure.
Come, Hero, you have to die in order to live. Have patience, this wedding is only postponed.

Lady Beatrice, have you been crying?
Yes, and I'll cry some more.

It's my own choice.

I truly believe Hero was wrongly accused.
I'd give anything to the man who could put it right.

Could a friend do that for you?
Quite easily, if there was such a friend.

Could a man do it?
It is a man's job - but not yours.

I love you more than anything in the world - do you think that's strange?
As strange as something else I don't understand.
I could say I love you more than
anything in the world.
But don't believe me -
even though I'm not lying,
I neither confess nor deny anything.
I'm just so sorry for my cousin.

Don't swear; you may have to eat
your words.

I'll swear you love me - and I'll
make whoever says I don't love you
eat my sword.

Why, then, God forgive me!

For what, dear Beatrice?

You beat me to it -
I was about to say
that I loved you.

Then do it with all your
heart.

I love you with
so much of my heart
that there's nothing
left to tell you with.

Ask me to do anything
for you.

Kill Claudio, s

Hah! Not for
the whole world!
YOU KILL ME THEN, FOR DENYING ME. GOOD-BYE.

WAIT, DEAR BEATRICE!

I'VE LEFT YOU ALREADY, THOUGH IT LOOKS LIKE I'M STILL HERE. YOU DON'T LOVE ME, SO LET ME GO.

BEATRICE...

NO, I'M GOING.

NOW WE'RE FRIENDS AGAIN.

YOU CAN'T BE MY FRIEND IF YOU WON'T FIGHT MY ENEMY!

IS CLAUDIO YOUR ENEMY?

HE HAS PROVED HIMSELF TO BE A VILLAIN - BLASPHEMING AND DISRESPECTING MY COUNTRY.

I WISH I WAS A MAN! WHY HE HELD HER HAND RIGHT UP TO THE MOMENT TO EXCHANGE VOWS, THEN ACCUSED HER IN PUBLIC WITH MADE-UP LIES AND VICIOUS SPITE -

OH GOD, I WISH I WAS A MAN! I'D EAT HIS HEART IN PUBLIC!

BEATRICE, LISTEN TO ME!

TALKING TO A MAN AT HER WINDOW? A LIKELY STORY!

NO, BUT BEATRICE -

POOR HERO! HER REPUTATION'S BEEN RUINED.

BEAT.

PRINCE AND COUNTS!
That Claudio is a KINE nobleman - him and Prince Susamplin! They gave such a great account or what they saw! I wish I was a man - or that I had a friend who'd be a man for me! But, manliness is nothing more than fancy manners these days, and bravery's only talk.

The man who lies and swears it's the truth is now thought to be as brave as Hercules. But I can't wish myself into being a man, so I'll die a weeping woman.

Do you honestly believe, in your soul, that Claudio has treated Hero badly?

Yes - as sure as I have a thought or a soul.

That's good enough for me. I'm ready to answer him for you. I'll kiss your hand and go. Claudio will have to deal with me for this, I swear!

Think well of me and comfort your cousin. I'll tell everyone that she is dead. Farewell.
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.
I told you she was innocent.

As are the Prince and Claudio too - you heard what happened.

Margaret is somewhat to blame, but she didn't realize what she was doing.

Well, I'm glad it's all sorted out.

So am I; otherwise I would have had to fight young Claudio.

Hero, you and the other women kindly go into a room by yourselves. When I send for you, come back wearing masks.

The Prince and Claudio will soon be here. Antonio, you know what to do - you have to pretend to be Hero's father and give her away to Claudio.

I need a favour from you, Friar.

What is it, sir?

To rein me in or let me go - one or the other.

The truth is, Signor Leonato, your niece likes me.

That's just the way that's doing.

The truth is, that's doing.

And I really like her.

Which you got from me, Claudio and the Prince.
BUT WHAT DO YOU INTEND TO DO?

I DON'T REALLY UNDERSTAND YOUR ANSWER - BUT I'D LIKE YOUR PERMISSION TO TAKE HER HAND IN MARRIAGE. AND THAT'S WHY I NEED YOUR HELP, FRAR.

YOU HAVE MY BLESSING.

AND MY HELP.

HERE COMES THE PRINCE AND CLAUDIO.

GREETINGS, EVERYBODY.

GREETINGS, PRINCE. AND TO YOU, CLAUDIO. WE'RE WAITING HERE, READY TO SERVE YOU. ARE YOU READY TO MARRY MY BROTHER'S DAUGHTER?

I'LL KEEP MY WORD, EVEN IF SHE'S ETHIOPIAN.

GOOD MORNING BENEDICK. WHAT'S THE MATTER? YOU HAVE A FACE LIKE A COLD, DARK DAY IN FEBRUARY.

BRING HER OUT, BROTHER, THE PRIEST'S READY.

HE'S A WILD BULL WHO'S BEEN TAMER. DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, MAN.

GOOD MORNING BENEDICK. WHAT'S THE MATTER?

WE'LL PAINT YOUR HORSES GOLD, AND ALL EUROPE WILL BE DELIGHTED, JUST LIKE WHEN LUSTY JOVE MADE LOVE LIKE A BULL.
Jove the bull had a pleasant bellow, but some similar bull jumped upon your mother, who gave birth to a calf like you. You bleat just like him.

I'll pay you back for that, but here's comes another matter.

Which one is the lady I have to marry?

This one, I give her to you.

Then, she is mine.

No! not until you hold her hand in front of the friar and swear to marry her.

When I lived, I was your other wife -- and when you loved, you were my other husband.

Another hero!

Give me your hand, as the friar is my witness, I am your husband, if you want me.

For certain.
THE FIRST HERO DIED IN DISGRACE, BUT I'M ALIVE AND, AS SURE AS I'M ALIVE, I AM PURE.

YOU'RE THE FIRST HERO! THE DEAD HERO!

SHE WAS ONLY DEAD WHILE HER SLANDER WAS ALIVE.

I CAN EXPLAIN EVERYTHING, AFTER THE WEDDING CEREMONY. I'LL TELL YOU THE WHOLE STORY OF LOVELY HERO'S DEATH.

IN THE MEANTIME, JUST ACCEPT ALL THIS AND LET'S GO TO THE CHAPEL.

WHAT A MOMENT, FRAY, WHICH ONE IS BEATRICE?

THAT'S MY NAME. WHAT DO YOU WANT?

DON'T LOVE ME!

NO, NO MORE THAN IS USUAL.

THEN, YOUR UNCLE AND THE PRINCE AND CLAUDIO WERE MISLED; THEY SWORE YOU DID.

DON'T LOVE ME!

TO BE HONEST, NO - NO MORE THAN IS USUAL.

THEN, HERO AND MARGARET AND URSULA WERE ALSO MISLED. THEY SWORE YOU DID.

THEN SPOKE LOVESICK FOR ME.

THEY SWORE YOU WERE DYING FOR ME.

IT DOESN'T MATTER. YOU DON'T LOVE ME, THEN!

NOT REALLY, EXCEPT AS A FRIEND.
COME ON, BEATRICE. I KNOW YOU LOVE HIM.

AND I CAN PROVE THAT HE LOVES HER. HERE'S A CRUDELY WRITTEN LOVE POEM, IN HIS OWN HANDWRITING, DEDICATED TO BEATRICE.

AND HERE'S ANOTHER, IN BEATRICE'S HANDWRITING, WHICH WAS STOLEN FROM HER POCKET. IT'S ABOUT HER LOVE FOR BENEDICK. INCREDIBLE! OUR HANDWRITING HAS SAVED AWAY OUR HEARTS.

I WILL MARRY YOU - BUT ONLY OUT OF PITY.

I ACCEPT - BUT MAINLY BECAUSE OF ALL THIS PERSUASION, AND PARTLY TO SAVE YOUR LIFE, BECAUSE I WAS TOLD THAT YOU WERE WASTING AWAY WITHOUT ME.

QUIET! I'LL STOP YOU FROM TALKING!

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A MARRIED MAN, BENEDICK?

I'LL TELL YOU WHAT, PRINCE. A SCHOOL FULL OF SMART-ALECS COULDN'T CHANGE MY GOOD MOOD. DO I CARE WHAT PEOPLE THINK?

NO. THERE'S NOTHING NICE ABOUT A MAN WHO'S AFRAID OF OPINION.
IN SHORT, SINCE I'M GONNA BE MARRIED, I DON'T CARE WHAT THE WORLD SAYS ABOUT IT. SO FORGET EVERYTHING I SAID IN THE PAST ABOUT MARRIAGE - MEN ARE WHIMSICAL, THAT'S THE CONCLUSION I'VE COME TO.

AS FOR YOU, CLAUDIO, I WAS GONNA FIGHT YOU - BUT, SINCE WE'RE GONNA BE RELATED, I'LL LET YOU PASS UNHURT. TO LOVE MY COUSIN.

I WAS Hoping YOU'D SAY NO TO BEATRICE.

SO I COULD BEAT THE BACHELOR OUT OF YOU AND MAKE YOU INTO AN ADULTERER, WHICH YOU NO-DUBT WILL BE, IF MY COUSIN BEATRICE DOESN'T KEEP A CLOSE EYE ON YOU.

COME ON, WE'RE FRIENDS!

LET'S DANCE BEFORE WE GET MARRIED - IT'LL LIGHTEN OUR SPIRITS AND LOOSEN UP OUR WIVES. WE'LL HAVE THE DANCING AFTER THE WEDDING.

NO, BEFORE! MUSICIANS, PLAY!

PRINCE, YOU LOOK SAD, GET YOURSELF A WIFE. YOUR ROYAL STAFF WOULD BE MORE ADMIRERED IF IT WAS TOPPED BY A HORN.
MY LORD,
YOUR BROTHER JOHN HAS BEEN CAPTURED
AND BROUGHT BACK TO KENTISH UPLAND
ARMED GUARD.

FORGET ABOUT HIM UNTIL TOMORROW.
I'LL THINK OF SOME APPROPRIATE
PUNISHMENT FOR HIM.

PLAY ON, MUSICIANS!
### DRAMATIS PERSONAE

(in alphabetical order)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role and Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANTONIO</td>
<td>Brother to Leonato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Antonio is Leonato’s older brother, and is Uncle to Hero and Beatrice (he is therefore not Beatrice’s father).</td>
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<tr>
<td>BALTHAZAR</td>
<td>Attendant on Don Pedro</td>
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<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BEATRICE</td>
<td>Niece to Leonato</td>
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<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BENEDICK</td>
<td>A young lord of Padua</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>BORACHIO</td>
<td>Follower of Don John</td>
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<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLAUDIO</td>
<td>A young lord of Florence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CONRADE</strong> &lt;br&gt; <em>Follower of Don John</em></td>
<td>An intimate friend of Don John, who is totally devoted to him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DOGBERRY</strong> &lt;br&gt; <em>A constable</em></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DON JOHN</strong> &lt;br&gt; <em>Don Pedro’s illegitimate brother</em></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DON PEDRO</strong> &lt;br&gt; <em>Prince of Arragon</em></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FRIAR FRANCIS</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>HERO</strong> &lt;br&gt; <em>Daughter to Leonato</em></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **LEONATO**  
*Governor of Messina*  
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. |
| **MARGARET**  
*Gentlewoman attending Hero*  
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. |
| **URSULA**  
*Gentlewoman attending Hero*  
Another servant to Hero – though true to her, unlike Margaret. |
| **VERGES**  
*A headborough*  
Deputy to Dogberry in the police force of Messina. |

**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.