Much Ado About Nothing

Two Example Sections

Quick 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 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.
WAIT! TAKE MY ADVICE AND PRETEND THAT HERO IS DEAD!

IF WE SAY SHE DIED WHEN CLAUDIO ACCUSED HER, HE’LL FEEL RESPONSIBLE FOR HER DEATH.

WE ONLY EVER SEE THE TRUE WORTH OF SOMETHING WHEN IT’S GONE.

WHY?

SO IT IS WITH CLAUDIO: HE’LL VALUE HER MEMORY EVEN MORE THAN HE VALUED THE LIVING HERO.

TRUST ME, THE OUTCOME WILL BE GOOD FOR EVERYBODY.

AND IF THE PLAN FAILS, YOU CAN ALWAYS SEND HER AWAY TO BECOME A NUN.
LISTEN TO THE PRIEST, LEONATO. I'LL KEEP THE SECRET.

ALRIGHT. IT'S AGREED, THEN, SO LET'S BE OFF.

HAVE PATIENCE, HERO. YOUR WEDDING WILL TAKE PLACE LATER.

HAVE YOU BEEN CRYING, BEATRICE?

YES.

PLEASE DON'T.

IT'S MY CHOICE.

HERO WAS WRONGED.

SOMEONE SHOULD PUT IT RIGHT!

COULD A FRIEND DO IT?

IF THERE WAS SUCH A FRIEND.

A MAN?

IT'S A MAN'S JOB.

I LOVE YOU SO MUCH IS THAT STRANGE?

A LITTLE...
I COULD SAY I LOVE YOU TOO, BUT I DON'T WANT TO.
I'M JUST SO SORRY FOR MY COUSIN.

YOU MAY HAVE TO EAT YOUR WORDS.

I THINK YOU LOVE ME.

I KNOW YOU LOVE ME!
YOU MIGHT BE SORRY.

NEVER!

I'M SORRY.
FOR WHAT?

FOR NOT SAYING IT FIRST.

THEN SAY IT NOW!

I CAN'T - I LOVE YOU TOO MUCH.

ASK ME TO DO ANYTHING FOR YOU.

KILL CLAUDIO.

NEVER!
THEN GOOD-BYE.

WAIT -

I'M GOING.
YOU DON'T LOVE ME.

THEN FRIENDS.

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

IS CLAUDIO YOUR ENEMY?

YES - HE HURT MY COUSIN.

HE WAS SO SPITEFUL.
I WISH I WAS A MAN!
I'D KILL HIM!

LISTEN -

THE LIES!

BUT -

POOR HERO! SHE'S RUINED!
"Nobly-men indeed! I wish I was a man, or I had a friend who was a man to take him on! But, there are no real men these days!"

BEATRICE: I do love you, Claudio. Prove it!

CLAUDIO: I know he did!

BEATRICE: Then I'll fight him.

CLAUDIO: Go and comfort your cousin. 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!
So is the prince - and Claudio, too.
Margaret was tricked.

I'm glad it's all sorted out.
Me too - I didn't want to fight Claudio.

Ladies, please go inside. When I send for you, come back wearing masks.
Antonio, you have to pretend to be Hero's father.
I'll do it.

I need a favour, Friar. What is it?
Your niece likes me, Leonato. That was my daughter's doing.
And I really like her. Which was my doing.
WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?
TO MARRY HER, WITH YOUR HELP, FRIAR.

YOU HAVE MY BLESSING.

AND MY HELP.
HERE COMES THE PRINCE AND CLAUDIO.

GREETINGS!
HELLO TO YOU BOTH.
ARE YOU READY TO MARRY MY NIECE?

I AM.
BROTHER, BRING HER OUT.

WHAT'S WRONG, BENEDICK?

HE'S A WILD BULL WHO'S BEEN TAMED!
WELL, YOU BLEAT JUST LIKE A Calf.

YOU'LL PAY FOR THAT.

AH, HERE COME THE LADIES.

 WHICH ONE AM I TO MARRY?

THIS ONE.

LET ME SEE YOUR FACE.

NO! NOT UNTIL YOU SWEAR TO MARRY HER.

WE WERE ALMOST MARRIED A WHILE AGO.

I SWEAR - IF YOU WANT ME.

ANOTHER HERO!
I'm alive.

You're the dead hero!

She was only dead while the lies about her lived.

I'll explain everything later.

Let's go to the chapel.

Wait - which one is Beatrice?

I am, what do you want?

Don't you love me?

No.

Your uncle, the prince and Claudio swore you did.

Don't you love me?

No.

Hero, Margaret and Ursula swore you did.

They said you were lovesick.

They said you were dying for me.

You don't love me, then?

Only as a friend.
You do love him, Beatrice.

And he loves her!

Here's a love-poem he wrote for her.

And here's one she wrote for him!

Alright, I will marry you - but only out of pity.

I only accept after all this proof - and to cure your love-sickness.

Enough talk!

What's it like to be married?

Wonderful!
I've changed my mind about marriage.

As to you, Claudio, I was going to fight you -- but not now. We're going to be related.

I was hoping you'd say no to Beatrice.

Now she'll need to keep a close eye on you.

Let's dance before we get married.

Later.

No, now! Music, play!

Prince, you look sad. Get yourself a wife!
DRAMATIS PERSONAE
(in alphabetical order)
**ANTONIO**  
*Brother to Leonato*

Antonio is Leonato’s older brother, and is Uncle to Hero and Beatrice (he is therefore not Beatrice’s father).

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**BALTHAZAR**  
*Attendant on Don Pedro*

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.

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**BEATRICE**  
*Niece to Leonato*

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.

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**BENEDICK**  
*A young lord of Padua*

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.

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**BORACHIO**  
*Follower of Don John*

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.

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**CLAUDIO**  
*A young lord of Florence*

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.
<table>
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<th>Character</th>
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| **CONRADE**       | *Follower of Don John*  
An intimate friend of Don John, who is totally devoted to him. |
| **DOGBERRY**      | *A constable*  
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. |
| **DON JOHN**      | *Don Pedro’s illegitimate brother*  
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. |
| **DON PEDRO**     | *Prince of Arragon*  
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. |
| **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. |
| **HERO**          | *Daughter to Leonato*  
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  
membership to Claudio – her one true love. |
**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.

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**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.