

Much Ado About Nothing

Character Breakdown

Primary Characters

Beatrice: Leonata's niece and Hero's cousin. Beatrice is "a pleasant-spirited lady" with a very sharp tongue. She is generous and loving, but, like Benedick, continually mocks other people with elaborately tooled jokes and puns. She wages a war of wits against Benedick and often wins the battles. At the outset of the play, she appears content never to marry.

Benedick: An aristocratic soldier who has recently been fighting under Don Pedro, and a friend of Don Pedro and Claudio. Benedick is very witty, always making jokes and puns. He carries on a "merry war" of wits with Beatrice, but at the beginning of the play he swears he will never fall in love or marry.

Claudio: A young soldier who has won great acclaim fighting under Don Pedro during the recent wars. Claudio falls in love with Hero upon his return to Messina. His unfortunately suspicious nature makes him quick to believe evil rumors and hasty to despair and take revenge.

Hero: The beautiful young daughter of Leonata and the cousin of Beatrice. Hero is lovely, gentle, and kind. She falls in love with Claudio when he falls for her, but when Don John slanders her and Claudio rashly takes revenge she suffers terribly.

Don Pedro: An important nobleman from Aragon, sometimes referred to as "Prince." Don Pedro is a longtime friend of Leonata, Hero's mother, and is also close to the soldiers who have been fighting under him—the younger Benedick and the very young Claudio. Don Pedro is generous, courteous, intelligent, and loving to his friends, but he is also quick to believe evil of others and hasty to take revenge. He is the most politically and socially powerful character in the play.

Leonata: A respected, well-to-do, elderly noble at whose home, in Messina, Italy, the action is set. Leonata is the mother of Hero and the aunt of Beatrice. As governor of Messina, she is second in social power only to Don Pedro.

Don John: The illegitimate brother of Don Pedro; sometimes called "the Bastard." Don John is melancholy and sullen by nature, and he creates a dark scheme to ruin the happiness of Hero and Claudio. He is the villain of the play; his evil actions are motivated by his envy of his brother's social authority.

Secondary Characters

Margaret: Hero's serving woman, who unwittingly helps Borachio and Don John deceive Claudio into thinking that Hero is unfaithful. Unlike Ursula, Hero's other lady-in-waiting, Margaret is lower class. Though she is honest, she does have some dealings with the villainous world of Don John: her lover is the mistrustful and easily bribed Borachio. Also unlike Ursula, Margaret loves to break decorum, especially with bawdy jokes and teases.

Borachio: An associate of Don John. Borachio is the lover of Margaret, Hero's serving woman. He conspires with Don John to trick Claudio and Don Pedro into thinking that Hero is unfaithful to Claudio. His name means "drunkard" in Italian, which might serve as a subtle direction to the actor playing him.

Conrad: One of Don John's more intimate associates, entirely devoted to Don John. Several recent productions have staged Conrad as Don John's potential male lover, possibly to intensify Don John's feelings of being a social outcast and therefore motivate his desire for revenge.

Dogberry: (male or female role) The constable in charge of the Watch, or chief policeman, of Messina. Dogberry is very sincere and takes his job seriously, but he has a habit of using exactly the wrong word to convey his meaning. Dogberry is one of the few "middling sort," or middle-class characters, in the play, though his desire to speak formally and elaborately like the noblemen becomes an occasion for parody.

Ursula: One of Hero's waiting women.

Cameos

Verges: (male or female role) The deputy to Dogberry, chief policeman of Messina.

Antonio: (male or female role) Leonata's elderly brother, and Hero and Beatrice's uncle.

Balthasar: A waiting man in Leonata's household and a musician. Balthasar flirts with Margaret at the masked party and helps Leonata, Claudio, and Don Pedro trick Benedick into falling in love with Beatrice. Balthasar sings the song, "Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more" about accepting men's infidelity as natural.

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Friar Francis: (male or female role) Devises the plan to redeem Hero's reputation.

Messenger: (male or female role) delivers news to Leonata about Don Pedro and Claudio.

Sexton: (male or female role) Leads the trial against Borachio and Conrad.

Watchmen (X3): (male or female roles) They overhear Borachio and Conrad and discover Don John's plot.

Chorus

Lords and Ladies of Leonata's house
Musicians