

 **AQA GCSE English Literature**

## Much Ado About Nothing

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Your notes

## Much Ado About Nothing: Overview

The Much Ado About Nothing question is part of Paper 1, Section A of your GCSE. For this, you are required to write one essay-length answer to one set question. This can seem daunting at first, but this page contains some helpful information and links to more detailed revision note pages that will enable you to aim for the highest grade. This page includes:

- **A summary of Much Ado About Nothing**
- **A brief overview of what is required in the exam**
- **Much Ado About Nothing characters**
- **Much Ado About Nothing context**
- **Much Ado About Nothing themes**
- **Much Ado About Nothing quotes**
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### Much Ado About Nothing summary

Much Ado About Nothing is a romantic comedy written by Shakespeare in the late 1590s. It deals with love, deception and mistaken identity.

Returning from battle, Don Pedro arrives at the house of Leonato with his men, including Claudio and Benedick. Claudio falls in love with Hero, Leonato's daughter, and their marriage is agreed upon.

Benedick and Hero's cousin, Beatrice, both despise love and engage in witty banter with each other. The others plot to make them fall in love with each other. Don Pedro's illegitimate brother, Don John, contrives with his servant, Borachio, to spoil Claudio and Hero's wedding by arranging for Claudio and Don Pedro to witness Borachio seducing Hero's maid Margaret at Hero's bedroom window. Mistaking Margaret to be Hero, Claudio believes he has been betrayed.

Claudio rejects Hero at the altar, but Friar Francis is convinced of Hero's innocence and persuades Leonato to pretend that Hero is dead in order to give them time to clear her name. The nightwatchmen overhear a drunken Borachio confessing to the deception and the plot is exposed. When he hears of Hero's innocence, Claudio, believing her to be dead, promises to make amends by agreeing to marry a cousin of Hero's in her place. At the wedding, the bride is unmasked to be Hero herself. She and Claudio are married, and Beatrice and Benedick also confess their love for each other and agree to marry.

For a more detailed summary, please see the [Much Ado About Nothing: Plot Summary](#) page.

### How is Much Ado About Nothing assessed in the exam?



Your notes

- Your GCSE Paper 1 requires you to answer two questions in 1hr 45min. That means you have approximately 52 minutes to plan, write and check your Much Ado About Nothing essay
- Paper 1 is worth 64 marks and accounts for 40% of your overall GCSE grade
- The Much Ado About Nothing essay is worth 34 marks in total, because it also includes 4 marks for AO4 (spelling, punctuation and grammar)
- The Much Ado About Nothing question is in Section A of Paper 1 and you are required to answer the one available question on the play
- Your question will also include a printed extract of about 25 lines from the play
- It is a closed-book exam, which means you will not have access to a copy of the text (other than the printed extract) in your exam
- The question will require you to analyse and write in detail about an aspect of Much Ado About Nothing
- Your answer will need to address both the extract from the play that you will be given, and the play as a whole

For a much more detailed guide on answering the Much Ado About Nothing question, please see our revision notes on [How to Answer the Shakespeare Essay Question](#).

### Much Ado About Nothing characters

The characters you should focus on when revising Much Ado About Nothing are:

- Claudio
- Benedick
- Hero
- Beatrice
- Leonato
- Don John
- Don Pedro

When considering a Shakespeare play or any other text, it is crucial to remember that characters are intentionally crafted by the writer to serve a specific purpose. In many cases, these characters embody certain concepts or beliefs, and the writer, such as Shakespeare, uses them to reflect on and examine these ideas. For more details on how Shakespeare uses his characters in Much Ado About Nothing, please see the Much Ado About Nothing: Characters revision notes page. [insert link]

### Much Ado About Nothing context



Your notes

Understanding what context actually is can be tricky at GCSE. Examiners understand context not as historical information or biographical facts about a writer, but as the ideas and perspectives explored by a writer through their text. Therefore, the Much Ado About Nothing context you should explore in your essay response is not information about Messina, or facts about William Shakespeare, but ideas about:

- Gender Roles
- Honour and Virtue
- Harmony and Discord

Lots of these ideas and perspectives are universal, so your own opinions of them are valid and will be rewarded in an exam. For a detailed breakdown of the contextual topics listed above, see the [Much Ado About Nothing: Context](#) page

### Much Ado About Nothing themes

Understanding the themes that Shakespeare explores in Much Ado About Nothing is one of the best approaches any student can take when revising the play. This is because to get the highest mark on your exam, you need to take what examiners call a “conceptualised approach”: a detailed and perceptive exploration of Shakespeare’s ideas and intentions. The main themes explored by Shakespeare in Much Ado About Nothing are:

- Love
- Gender Roles and Attitudes
- Deception
- Honour and Virtue
- Wordplay

Shakespeare explores numerous other themes in Much Ado About Nothing beyond those mentioned above and you are encouraged to examine these themes as well. However, the above list makes a great place to start and detailed breakdowns of each of these themes can be found on the [Much Ado About Nothing: Themes](#) page

### Much Ado About Nothing quotes

Although you are given credit for including quotations from Much Ado About Nothing in your answer, it is not a requirement of the exam. In fact, examiners say that “references” to the rest of the play are just as valid as direct quotations: this is when students pinpoint individual moments in the play, rather than quoting what the characters say. In order to select references really successfully, it is extremely important that you know the play itself very well, including the order of the events that take place in the play. This detailed act-by-act breakdown [insert link] of the plot will help you to revise the chronology of Much Ado About Nothing.

However, it can also be useful to revise a few – very well selected – quotations from the play that can be used in a variety of essays on different themes and characters. Luckily, we have made that selection for

you! For a 'translation' and detailed analysis of each of these quotations, see the [Much Ado About Nothing: Key Quotations](#) page.



Your notes

### Top Tips for the Highest Grade

Please see our revision pages on the Shakespeare exam for guides on:

- [Structuring the Much Ado About Nothing essay](#)
- [Much Ado About Nothing methods and techniques](#)
- [How to include context in the Much Ado About Nothing essay](#)
- [Understanding the Much Ado About Nothing mark scheme](#)
- [A Shakespeare model answer](#)

## Much Ado About Nothing: Plot Summary



Your notes

### Plot Summary

One of the most important and helpful things you can do in preparation for the exam is to ‘know’ the plot of Much Ado About Nothing thoroughly. Once you know the text well, you should be familiar with key events that you can then link to larger ideas. Having an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the play will help you to gain confidence in finding the most relevant references to support your response.



Your notes



Claudio falls in love with Hero and Don Pedro arranges their marriage

## MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING PLOT STORYBOARD



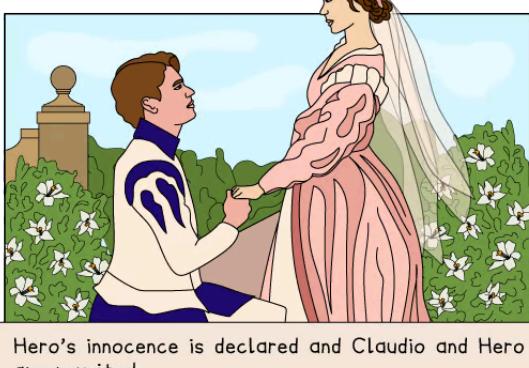
Don John sabotages Claudio and Hero's wedding



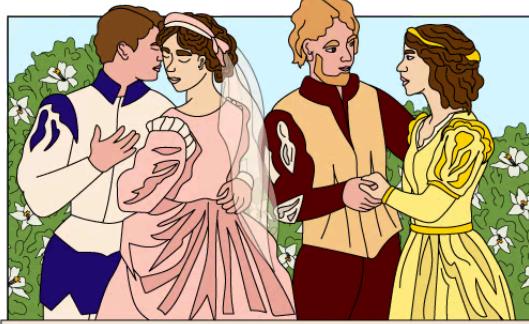
At their wedding, Claudio declares that Hero has been unfaithful



Beatrice and Benedick finally declare their love for each other



Hero's innocence is declared and Claudio and Hero are reunited



Both couples get married

## Overview

The governor of Messina, Leonato, is at home with his daughter, Hero, his brother, Antonio, and his niece, Beatrice, when a messenger arrives bringing news that an old friend, Duke Don Pedro, is on his way to Messina to celebrate his recent victory in battle. With him are a young **nobleman** called Claudio, and the clever and witty Benedick. Don Pedro's half-brother, Don John, is also a member of the party. He is bitter and has a strong dislike for his half-brother.

When the soldiers arrive, Claudio quickly falls in love with Hero. Benedick, a **bachelor** who has sworn off love and marriage, knows Beatrice, and the two engage in witty arguments with each other. Claudio confesses to Benedick and Don Pedro his love for Hero, and Don Pedro believes they will make a good match. He promises to help Claudio win Hero by talking to her and Leonato at that night's masked ball. Don John learns of this plan from his servant, Borachio, and sees this as an opportunity to make mischief. He suggests to Claudio that Don Pedro intends to ask Hero to marry him instead, rather than [popover id="F3G9OQLm2hnla99s" label="wooing" her on behalf of Claudio. Claudio feels betrayed, until Don Pedro is able to reassure him that Hero's love has been won on his behalf as arranged.

Don Pedro, Claudio and Leonato, along with Hero, hatch a plan to make Beatrice and Benedick realise that they are meant for each other and convince each of them of the other's love. The men arrange for Benedick to overhear them talking about how Beatrice loves him, but has sworn never to tell him because he would make fun of her. Hero and her gentlewomen play a similar trick on Beatrice. Each vow to return the other's love and marry.

Don John and Borachio hatch another plan to spoil Claudio and Hero's wedding. They arrange for Borachio to seduce Margaret, Hero's serving woman, at Hero's bedroom window at night. Don John arranges for Claudio and Don Pedro to witness this, and Claudio – mistakenly thinking Margaret is Hero – believes he has been betrayed by his love. Afterwards, Borachio is overheard by the nighwatchmen confessing his trickery to Don John's friend Conrad. The head of the local police, Dogberry, arrests both Borachio and Conrad and takes them for questioning.

At the altar, Claudio refuses to marry Hero, accusing her of having betrayed him. This is supported by Don Pedro, who had also been fooled. Leonato is enraged, but Benedick suspects a trick and supports Hero. The priest, Friar Francis, persuades Leonato to pretend that Hero is dead in order to give them time to clear her name.

Dogberry, the constable, brings Borachio to explain his trickery and Hero's innocence is revealed. Claudio, believing Hero to be dead, promises to build a monument to Hero, but Leonato tells him he would better honour her by marrying his niece, whom he says looks exactly like Hero. Claudio accepts.

Claudio arrives for the wedding, where Hero covers her face, only revealing herself to Claudio once he has agreed to marry her. They are overjoyed and are married. Benedick and Beatrice finally confess their love for each other, and Don John, who had fled, returns captured to face his crimes.



Your notes

## Act-By-Act Plot Summary

### Act I



Your notes

- A messenger arrives at the house of Leonato, governor of Messina, with news that the Prince of Aragon, Don Pedro, and his soldiers are returning victorious from war
- Leonato's niece, Beatrice, knows one of the soldiers, Benedick
- Another soldier, Claudio, falls in love with Leonato's daughter, Hero
- Claudio tells Don Pedro of his feelings towards Hero, who offers to woo her on his friend's behalf that night at the masked ball
- Also among the soldiers is Don John, Don Pedro's **illegitimate** brother
- He is jealous and bitter, and hates being judged as inferior to Don Pedro
- Don John's servant, Borachio, enters with news of Claudio's love for Hero and Don Pedro's plan
- Don John dislikes Claudio, who is well-loved and respected, and decides to make trouble for him

### Act II

- At the ball, Benedick, in disguise, teases Beatrice, but she knows who he is and gets the better of him
- Claudio observes Don Pedro wooing Hero. However, Don John tells him that Don Pedro is wooing Hero for himself. Claudio thinks he has been betrayed, but Don Pedro quickly puts things right and Claudio and Hero agree to marry
- Don Pedro decides to trick Benedick and Beatrice into revealing their love for each other, with Hero, Claudio and Leonato agreeing to help
- Don John is still desperate to spoil Claudio's wedding, so his servant, Borachio, comes up with a plan
- He is friendly with Hero's maid, Margaret, and will seduce her at Hero's bedroom window
- Don John arranges for Claudio and Don Pedro to witness this
- Benedick is alone in the garden, but overhears Don Pedro, Leonato and Claudio discussing Beatrice's love for him
- Benedick is **dumbfounded** and vows to return Beatrice's love

### Act III

- In the orchard, Beatrice is also tricked by Hero and her waiting woman Ursula, into believing that Benedick loves her
- Beatrice is in shock and vows to change her nature and return Benedick's love
- Don John finds Don Pedro and Claudio, and tells them that he has proof that Hero is unfaithful
- The nightwatchmen overhear Borachio drunkenly confessing to the plan to spoil Claudio and Hero's wedding, and arrest him

- The constable, Dogberry, tries to tell Leonato before the wedding, but Leonato is too busy to listen

**Act IV**

- Claudio accuses Hero of being unfaithful at the wedding altar, which Hero denies and then faints
- Leonato is enraged, but others are convinced of Hero's innocence
- Friar Francis persuades Leonato to pretend that Hero is dead to give them more time to prove that the accusations against her are false
- Beatrice and Benedick admit their love for each other, and Beatrice requests that Benedick kill Claudio for rejecting Hero. Benedick agrees to challenge him
- Thinking Hero dead, Don John flees
- Dogberry orders Borachio to be taken to Leonato to confess his deceit

**Act V**

- Leonato accuses Claudio of killing Hero, and Benedick challenges Claudio to a duel, but Claudio refuses to be sorry
- Dogberry enters with Borachio, who confesses everything to Leonato, adding that Margaret was also innocent of the plan
- Claudio is wracked with guilt and begs Leonato for forgiveness
- Leonato orders him to make amends by marrying his niece, whom he says looks like Hero
- The news of Borachio's confession spreads, as well as the upcoming wedding of Claudio to Leonato's niece
- Leonato instructs Hero to wear a veil, and she is wed to Claudio in disguise
- She unveils her face and she and Claudio are reunited
- Benedick and Beatrice admit their love for each other, and Don John is arrested



Your notes

## Much Ado About Nothing: Themes

### Themes

Exam responses that are led by themes are more likely to reach the highest levels of the mark scheme. Exploring the ideas of the text, specifically in relation to the question being asked, will help to increase your fluency and assurance in writing about the play.

Your exam question could be on any topic. However, having a really good grasp of the following themes and, importantly, why Shakespeare explores these themes, will enable you to produce a “conceptualised response” in your exam. This list is not exhaustive and you are encouraged to identify other ideas within the novel.

- Love
- Gender Roles and Attitudes
- Deception
- Honour and Virtue
- Wordplay

### Love

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Much Ado About Nothing is fundamentally a romantic comedy, and the key theme of love is explored in the relationships between Claudio and Hero and Benedick and Beatrice. **Paternal** love is also demonstrated in Leonato's relationship with Hero and Beatrice.

#### Knowledge and evidence:



Your notes

- The majority of the plot in Much Ado About Nothing revolves around Hero and Claudio as romantic leads:
  - Claudio quickly falls in love with Hero, who is presented as innocent, pure and chaste
  - His love for Hero is often regarded as **superficial**, and possibly motivated by money, as he enquires whether Leonato also has a son (who would inherit)
  - Hero's love for Claudio seems to be based on duty, as she is obeying her father's wish for her to be married
- In Benedick and Beatrice, Shakespeare also presents us with two other romantic leads who love to hate each other:
  - That they are tricked into loving each other is arguably only possible because that love already exists in their hearts
  - They use their teasing and bickering to cover their true feelings
  - Due to its flaws, their love seems to be more realistic than the relationship between Claudio and Hero, as they are more compelling and **charismatic**
  - This is even though Benedick and Beatrice view love and marriage as a threat to freedom and free will
- Leonato demonstrates paternal love towards his daughter, Hero, and his niece, Beatrice:
  - He wants them both to find suitable husbands, so he shows his love via his desire for them to be secure
- The preparations for marriage made by Leonato for Hero also suggest the theatrical nature of love:
  - Like an actress, Hero has to be coached by Leonato before being proposed to
  - Claudio's dramatic decision to leave Hero at the altar is also overly theatrical, as is Leonato's over-reaction
- Sexual love is also indicated through the relationship between Margaret and Borachio:
  - However, this again appears to be superficial, as pretending Margaret to be Hero is more importantly a central plot device
- Throughout the play, love is linked to tricks, games and disguises:
  - Hero is won for Claudio by Don Pedro in disguise
  - Beatrice and Benedick are tricked into being together
  - This suggests that love is a game and can be manipulated
  - Individual characters are pieces in the game and can be moved and posed by others



Your notes

- Beatrice compares love to a dance, presenting love as a series of steps or poses:
  - This could explain why Beatrice eventually marries Benedick, as tricked or not, they have already gone through all the motions of the dance
- For Benedick, love is like war – a woman restricts a soldier’s freedom and adventure, and then cuckolds him for his efforts
- The metaphor of love as war is extended throughout the play:
  - In Act 1 Scene 1, Leonato explains to the messenger that there is a “merry war” of wits between Beatrice and Benedick
  - This sets up a metaphorical parallel between wars of weaponry and wars of wit and love that lasts throughout the play
  - The schemes the characters play on each other are like military operations
  - In Act 2 Scene 1, Beatrice uses a situation from naval warfare to ask why Benedick has not come to match wits with her
  - Benedick erupts with frustration at Beatrice’s insults
  - He complains that he feels like a man “with a whole army shooting at me” and that “every word stabs”
- In the final act, Benedick concludes that he and Beatrice are “too wise to woo peaceably”
- Don Pedro also speaks of love as though it is war, suggesting they are more similar in nature than Claudio thinks:
  - Claudio and Hero contrast with this metaphor, as war is rough, whereas their love is seen to be soft and delicate
- Love in the play also often comes through imitation:
  - Beatrice is inspired by Hero’s engagement
  - Benedick’s annoyance with Claudio for falling in love suggests he is starting to feel the pressure to do the same
- Friar Francis’s suggestion to pretend that Hero was dead indicates that he believes that Claudio will love Hero more after her return from the dead:
  - This suggests love is increased by overcoming obstacles
- Ultimately, love and hate are not that far apart, and love comes with great risk of shame

#### What is Shakespeare’s intention?

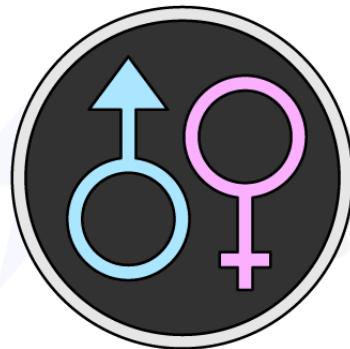
- Shakespeare appears to contrast a literary, romantic notion of love, via Hero and Claudio, with a more realistic version in the characters of Beatrice and Benedick



Your notes

- The play starts with Benedick's strong views about love and marriage, establishing the key theme and beginning the journey to the characters of Benedick and Beatrice changing their views
- Their relationship is shown in contrast to the speedy engagement of Claudio and Hero, who appear to have a lot to learn
- Claudio appears to fall in love with Hero because she fits an Elizabethan feminine ideal
- Therefore, Shakespeare may be suggesting that romantic love is blind, as Hero is quick to marry Claudio despite him publicly shaming her, and she never questions his motives
- The play also questions what people are prepared to do for love:
  - Beatrice tests Benedick by asking him to kill Claudio
- But the ultimate message is that people can be changed by love, which conquers all
- This is why, despite an obvious plot parallel with Romeo and Juliet, the play ends well rather than tragically

## Gender Roles and Attitudes

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Whilst Much Ado About Nothing ends happily, it both reinforces and challenges traditional gender roles in its presentation of the female characters and of the male characters' attitudes towards women

### Knowledge and evidence:

- The character of Hero represents a traditional portrayal of an Elizabethan feminine ideal, in which women are valued for their beauty and chastity, and rarely seen or heard in public:
  - She conforms to this ideal in most of the play, with Shakespeare even employing the dramatic device of her fainting when accused of infidelity by Claudio at the altar
- Hero is treated poorly by Claudio, Don Pedro and even her father, Leonato:



Your notes

- This is reflected in the bitterness and unpleasantness of the language used as Don John and Borachio plot against her and Claudio
- It is clear that she is expected to comply with her father's wishes:
  - She is treated as an object to be sold and lacks the voice to defend herself against incorrect accusations
  - At the end of the play, Hero even ignores the fact that Claudio was so ready to believe the charges against her to marry him still
  - She also never questions his motives for wanting to marry her, reinforcing both her innocence but also her complete submission to male authority
- Hero does not seem to be excited on her wedding day, as she states in Act 3 Scene 4 "God give me joy to wear it, for my heart is//exceeding heavy":
  - The fact of her gender and position means that she has been told what to do by her father her whole life, and now she will be told what to do by her husband for the rest of her life
- The society in the world of Messina is strongly patriarchal, in which the head of the household is expected to take care of the family:
  - Men hold positions of power and arguably have more freedom
  - This is evidenced when Leonato is so ready to believe the words of men over his own daughter's
- But the character of Beatrice challenges gender stereotypes, as she holds the more male characteristics of being outspoken, cynical and witty:
  - She acknowledges the gender inequality inherent in marriage, saying that "Adam's sons are my brethren" in Act 2 Scene 1
  - She believes men and women to be equal, made of the same material (earth and dust)
  - She is, therefore, unwilling to marry and have to be **subservient** to one of her equals
- Her frustration at her gender is most evident when Hero is abandoned at the altar, when she cries "O God, that I were a man!"
- Benedick also worries about giving up his independence and freedom by getting married:
  - Although Beatrice has more to lose, Shakespeare begins to draw parallels between the two characters
  - They are an equal match as their courtship is a "merry war" of wit
- In Act 2 Scene 3, Balthasar's song suggests that men should not have to change – women should just accept them as they are and should change themselves to accommodate them

### What is Shakespeare's intention?



Your notes

- The **subversion** of traditional gender stereotypes in the character of Beatrice, and in Benedick's eventual rejection of his male comrades in support of Hero, adds to the comedy of the play
- Elizabethan audiences would have been able to relate to both the literary models in the characters of Hero and Claudio, but also the more realistic Beatrice and Benedick
- Much of the comedy in the play results from the attitudes of the male characters
- The worthy attitudes of some of the male characters, such as Benedick and Dogberry, contrast with the objectification of Hero

## Deception

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Deception and disguise in *Much Ado About Nothing* are tools used for both good and bad, and Shakespeare even deceives his own characters through the use of dramatic irony, as the audience knows the truth throughout, even when the characters do not.

### Knowledge and evidence:

- This is a play full of falling for other people's lies
- Don Pedro decides to help out Claudio by tricking Hero, telling him that "I will assume thy part in some disguise//And tell fair Hero I am Claudio":
  - But this mistaken identity at the masked ball causes confusion and upset, fuelled by Don John lying to Claudio that Don Pedro actually loves Hero and wants her for himself
  - This is a failing on Claudio's part, as being so easily manipulated into suspicion leaves him wide open to being deceived
- To get Benedick and Beatrice to fall in love, their friends and family deceive them into thinking they each have feelings for the other:
  - The apparent enemies are actually in love



Your notes

- Therefore, appearance and reality in the play are not always the same thing
- Eavesdropping is used as a dominant plot device, as almost everything happens because an eavesdropper heard about it:
  - Borachio gives Don John a lot of information that he has overheard, but this is ironic as it is his own boasts that are overheard by the watchmen, leading to the plot being revealed
- Don John's scheme to ruin Claudio and Hero's wedding is based on deceiving Claudio and Don Pedro into believing that Hero has been unfaithful
- There is deception in the play right until the end, as Leonato's "niece" is actually Hero in disguise
- Even the play's title suggests a lot of fuss about empty rumours and deception
- Ironically, Don John initially says that he is not capable of deception, as he "cannot hide what I am" in Act 1 Scene 3, meaning that he cannot hide his hatred of Don Pedro or that he is a villain
- It is only the Friar who trusts what he knows about Hero and what he can see with his eyes, which do not deceive him:
  - Instead, he calls into question the judgement of her accusers

#### What is Shakespeare's intention?

- Deception, disguise and mistaken identity are common themes in many of Shakespeare's plays, as are the plot devices of dramatic irony and eavesdropping
- This allows for comic elements arising from situations, as well as giving the villain of the play ample opportunity to make mischief

## Honour and Virtue

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Shame and dishonour, or the fear of it, is a central theme in Much Ado About Nothing, as it drives much of the action in the play

**Knowledge and evidence:**

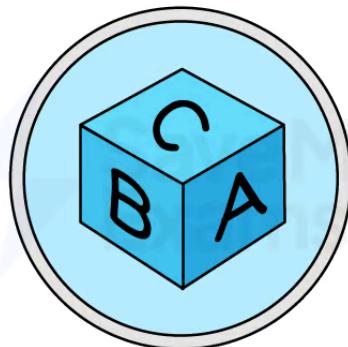
Your notes

- The fear of shame appears to be stronger than love in parts of the play:
  - Claudio is terrified that marrying Hero will dishonour him, so he publicly shames her
  - Leonato also makes it clear that his reputation is more important than his loyalty to his daughter
  - His rejection of her is absolute, as he wishes that she were not his daughter
- Leonato, Claudio and Don Pedro are all well-respected figures at the start of the play, but all three men have their reputation damaged by Don John:
  - Important relationships in the play are torn apart when characters lose respect for each other
- Hero's reputation does not come from her actions, but is based on her position as Leonato's daughter and what other people say about her:
  - Don Pedro grants Hero a positive reputation by saying that she is her father's daughter
  - But this can just as easily be taken away, as Leonato, the source of her reputation, denounces her, destroying her reputation
  - Claudio's reputation precedes him, and Hero's bad reputation results from what he thinks of her as a result of Don John's deception
- Don John's plot also threatens Margaret's reputation, although she is also cleared as innocent in the end:
  - This adds a dark tone as the women have little power to clear their own names and have to rely on others
- In Act 5 Scene 1, Leonato refers to Don Pedro and Claudio as "honourable men", which might be interpreted as ironic, as he says they should add the murder of his innocent daughter to their list of praiseworthy deeds:
  - Their honour is undermined by their willingness to believe others

**What is Shakespeare's intention?**

- Having a good reputation was important in Elizabethan England for both men and women
- Don John's poor reputation is associated with him being illegitimate, as he is a symbol of infidelity
- In addition, a woman's virginity was central to making her marriageable in Shakespeare's day
- If this was lost, a man could reject her as worthless, no matter how beautiful or worthy she was

**Wordplay**



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Your notes

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, reality is defined by language, and the **pun** of the play is that many things that are “nothing”, such as events that have not really happened, are nonetheless “noted” by the characters and treated as something

#### Knowledge and evidence:

- In Elizabethan **dialect**, the word “nothing” was pronounced “noting”, so “nothing” could mean nothing much or noting, as in observing and overhearing:
  - All elements of plot and subplot are intertwined with instances of noting
  - Ultimately the events of the play are trivial
  - “Nothing” was also a **euphemism** in Elizabethan times, referring to female genitalia
- So tricks of language and wordplay are fundamental to both the plot and the humour of the play
- The play begins with Benedick and Beatrice engaging in their “merry war” of words and trading insults:
  - Benedick calls Beatrice a “parrot teacher”, accusing her of copying him
  - This is ironic as, it turns out, they are both imitators of each other
- Benedick also makes Claudio’s language mean something other than what he intended:
  - Claudio uses “jewel” to mean a rare and unique beauty, but Benedick uses it to mean something easily bought and ornamental
- The equal nature of Beatrice and Benedick’s relationship is clear as the plot unfolds:
  - The two are well suited in terms of wit and **temperament**
  - They both use wordplay in similar ways, such as the use of nature imagery, demonstrating their similar natures
- Tricks of language alone change entire situations in the play:



Your notes

- For example, the sonnets Benedick and Beatrice have written to each other stop them from separating once the trick to bring them together is revealed
- Benedick and Beatrice use humour and words as both armour and weapons to hide their true feelings
- Hero's language reflects her sweetness and gentleness, just as Beatrice's and Benedick's reflect their sharp tongues
- Ironically, Dogberry is the only person with the knowledge to replace false language with the truth, but he is too incompetent and inarticulate to do so:
  - His inability to use language coherently causes the other characters to misperceive reality
  - He tries to be overly formal in his speech, whereas if he had just spoken plainly, the confusion leading to Hero's demise could have been avoided
- Finally, in a play full of words, Don John is a man "not of many words" (Act 1 Scene 1), making him dangerous because he does not engage in wordplay:
  - The suggestion is that he is concealing something and is not to be trusted

#### What is Shakespeare's intention?

- Shakespeare explores how language and communication affect our perception of reality, such as the perception that Hero is no longer a virgin, or that she is dead
- He also uses wordplay and humour to outweigh the potentially tragic nature of the play, as the audience knows the truth throughout



Your notes

## Much Ado About Nothing: Characters

It is vital that you understand that characters are often used symbolically to express ideas. Shakespeare uses all of his characters to symbolise various ideas prevalent in his society, and the differences between characters reflect contemporary debates. Therefore, it is very useful not only to learn about each character individually, but how they compare and contrast to other characters in the play.

It is important to consider the range of strategies used by Shakespeare to create and develop characters within Much Ado About Nothing. These include:

- how characters are established
- how characters are presented:
  - physical appearance or suggestions about this
  - actions and motives for them
  - what they say and think
  - how they interact with others
  - what others say and think about them
- how far the characters conform to or subvert stereotypes

### Major Characters

- **Benedick**
- **Beatrice**
- **Claudio**
- **Hero**
- **Don Pedro**
- **Don John**
- **Leonato**

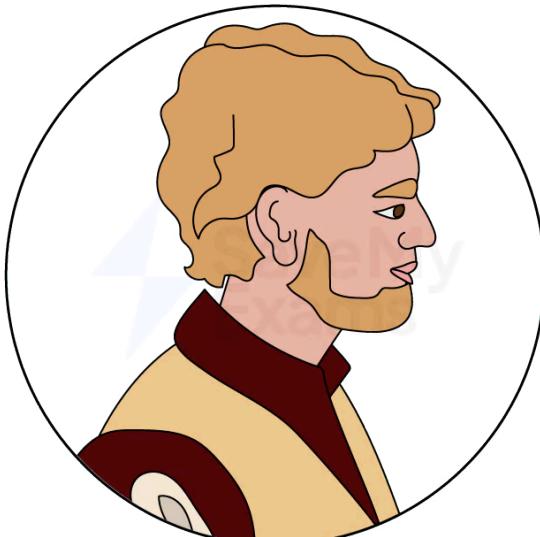
### Minor Characters

- **Borachio**
- **Conrad**

- Antonio
- Dogberry and Verges
- Friar Francis
- Margaret
- Ursula



## Benedick



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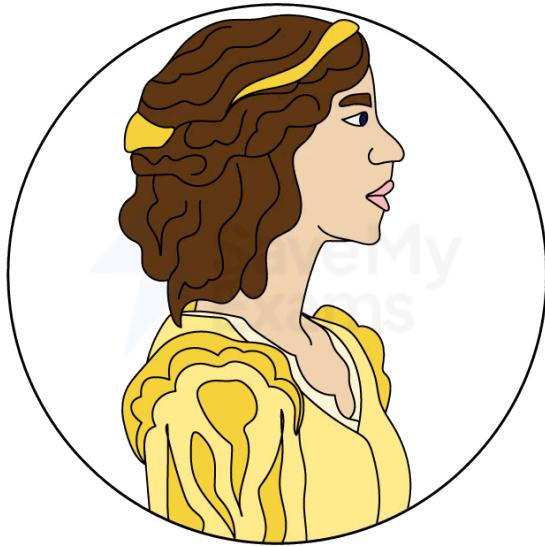
- Benedick is a character who reflects the idea of male insecurity and mistrust of exposing himself to being seen as vulnerable
- He is a soldier in Don Pedro's **regiment** and a close friend
- He is older than Claudio and a self-declared **bachelor**
- He is known as a bit of a ladies' man, but swears never to marry as he believes women are incapable of remaining faithful to their husbands
  - Therefore, he mocks anyone he thinks foolish enough to marry
  - He believes that young men are too quick to want to marry
  - He is horrified when he finds out that Claudio has fallen for Hero – almost as though Claudio has betrayed men
- He is well-liked among his friends, who find him entertaining company



Your notes

- He constantly performs for the benefit of others, and he indulges in exaggeration to express his feelings
- At the masked ball, he bids his friends to send him to the farthest corners of the earth rather than let him spend one more minute with Beatrice
- He has a quick **wit** and enjoys a constant war of words with Beatrice
- Despite his declaration never to marry, he finds himself falling in love with Beatrice after hearing that she is in love with him
  - He was once attracted to her but refuses to admit he still has feelings for her, until he is tricked by Don Pedro, Claudio and Leonato
  - Given his tendency to perform, it is not easy to tell whether he has been in love with Beatrice all along
  - It could be that he decides to love Beatrice just to prove his comrades wrong
  - He embodies the idea of using humour as a shield to protect himself from emotional hurt at the hands of a woman
- He does prove his love for Beatrice by siding with Hero after Claudio abandons her for her supposed infidelity
  - Whilst he cannot obey Beatrice's request to kill Claudio for what he did to Hero, he does challenge him to a **duel**
  - This demonstrates that he has turned his back on his male comrades and his **allegiance** is now with Beatrice, who herself embodies more typically male characteristics
- His character's progression is, therefore, ironic, as he becomes the very thing he mocked at the start of the play

## Beatrice

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Your notes

- Beatrice is Leonato's niece and is close friends with his daughter, Hero
- The two women are very different
  - Hero is polite, quiet, respectful and gentle
  - Beatrice is **feisty, cynical**, witty and independent
- She is a woman with an independent mind living in a world where women have few rights and little to say
- Shakespeare establishes her strength in her first appearance, with her **barbed** comments about Benedick as "Signor Montanto"
- She appears to be frustrated at her status as a woman
  - She is the first to defend Hero from Claudio's accusations at the altar and feels anger that she is unable to take action or revenge
- She does not conform to the literary model of a traditional Elizabethan woman; she is opinionated, outspoken and stubborn
- She controls conversations, interrupts Benedick and gives him a direct command to "Kill Claudio"
- Indeed, Leonato worries that her outspoken nature will mean that she will never find a husband
- Her conversation with Leonato in Act 2, Scene 1, demonstrates her strength and intelligence in exchanges with men
- However, she refuses to marry because she has not discovered an equal partner



Your notes

- She also refuses to give up her liberty and submit to the will of a controlling husband
- She has a low opinion of most men and does not wish to be trapped in marriage
- She keeps up a war of words and wit with Benedick throughout the play
  - Whenever they meet, they compete to outdo each other with clever insults
  - She sees everyday sexism around her and turns Benedick's insults back on him, often out-doing him
  - The audience later find out that she has been hurt by Benedick in the past and is possibly protecting herself from further emotional vulnerability
- Although outwardly she appears tough, her history with Benedick reveals her vulnerable side
- She is a woman of strong emotions, but she tries very hard to bury emotions that might hurt her
- When she overhears the women describing that Benedick is in love with her, she opens herself up again to the possibility of love
- She is quick to be tricked by Hero and Ursula into believing that Benedick loves her, revealing that she does really want to be loved
  - Some may see this as ironic and a betrayal of the female empowerment that she represents
  - This is especially the case as Beatrice joked about Benedick changing friends as quickly as he changes the fashion of his hats in Act 1, Scene 1, and here it is her own feelings that end up changing just as quickly
  - However, here it is important to remember the historical context the play was written in, in which someone of Beatrice's status would need to marry in order to safeguard her future
  - It could be that she decides to love Benedick just to prove her friends wrong about her
- Ultimately, she decides to marry Benedick on her own terms

## Claudio

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Your notes

- Claudio embodies the character of the Shakespearean romantic lead
- He is full of optimism, but naive, which leads to conflict and complications
- His youth means that he is both **rash** and insecure
  - He is quick to fall in love and want to marry Hero, but even quicker to cast her aside, believing rumours from untrustworthy sources
  - It is this naivety that gives Don John the opportunity to make such mischief
  - Not only does Claudio quickly believe the worst, but he also neglects any opportunity to find out the truth and immediately believes Hero to be unfaithful
  - This suggests that he is easily manipulated and possibly unable to form an opinion for himself
- When Don John stages Hero's alleged infidelity using Borachio and Margaret, Claudio does not just call off the wedding, but publicly humiliates Hero at the altar, making himself feel morally superior
  - It does not even enter his head that Don John might be lying, possibly because Don John is a man and his insecurities mean he is too quick to believe the stereotype of women being insincere
- Claudio is extremely concerned with ideas of purity and virtue
  - He describes Hero in **pious** terms, such as "In mine eye she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on"
  - But once he believes that she has been unfaithful to him, he shows no remorse, even upon hearing of Hero's "death", until her purity and innocence have been restored

- In Claudio's eyes, Hero lost her worth to him when she allegedly engaged with another man
  - This reflects the time of writing where it was men who generally quantified the worth of women
- He is even manipulated by Leonato, readily agreeing to wed a niece he has never met, even in his supposed grief at the apparent death of Hero
- It could be suggested that as a character, Claudio lacks any sense of depth, critical thinking or moral convictions



## Hero

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- Hero embodies the classic literary traits of the feminine ideal
- She is modest, reserved, chaste and happy to defer to her father's guidance
  - Her duty as a daughter is to obey her father, especially over who she will marry
- It could be argued that she is used as a pawn in the play, as she serves as a **catalyst** for the play's action
- A lot is said about her, but she says very little herself
- In Act 1 Scene 1, Claudio asks "Can the world buy such a jewel?", setting Hero up as an object to be bought and sold
- She is initially prepared to accept a proposal from Don Pedro, but seems just as happy to be engaged to Claudio instead
- Just as Beatrice and Benedick mirror each other, so do Hero and Claudio, both falling in love immediately



Your notes

- They are both equally naive and earnest, with Hero often being referred to using language of purity and piousness, such as "maid"
- She is unable to prove her innocence when wrongfully accused, and is seemingly unable to speak for herself
  - Instead of fighting back, she lets others take the lead in restoring her reputation
  - We might wonder at Hero's willingness still to marry Claudio, but it is indicative of her acceptance of letting men run her life
- She is not totally without voice, however, as she takes the lead in the plan to trick Beatrice into thinking Benedick is in love with her
  - Here she reveals herself to be clever and witty in how she manipulates Beatrice
- However, ultimately she is treated as an object to be bartered, and little more than a passive onlooker in her own love story
- So little is she valued as a person that when Claudio shames her at the altar, hardly anybody genuinely asks for her side of the story
  - She faints with the humiliation, allowing the other characters to argue amongst themselves
  - Even Leonato says that he'd prefer her to be dead than disgraced, indicating that she is only useful to him while she is of marriageable status
- At the end of the play, she is only permitted to re-enter the action once her character of innocence, purity and chastity is re-established

## Don Pedro



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Your notes

- Don Pedro is the Prince of Aragon and the highest ranking character in the play
- He is a noble man who inspires respect from his men, apart from his illegitimate brother, Don John
  - He is also fair and recognises people's strengths, giving rewards and compliments where earned
  - He is quick to admit when he is wrong and attempts to make things right
- He is attempting to **reconcile** with Don John, despite Don John's betrayal and attempt to overthrow him
  - This may explain why he was so quick to believe Don John over Hero's claims of her innocence
- He enjoys witty banter and admires Beatrice's character. He even offers her his hand, which she gently declines
  - He is the first to realise that she and Benedick are made for each other
- He mostly uses his power for positive ends, unlike Don John, but he does also manipulate other characters, just like his half-brother
- Although he ends the play alone, he considers himself to be something of an expert in love, offering to woo Hero for Claudio
  - His elaborate plan during the masquerade ball seems to be somewhat over-the-top, when he could in fact just speak on Claudio's behalf
  - It could be that his status means that he can amuse himself as he pleases
- At the end of the play, he appears **melancholy**, and Benedick laughingly instructs him to "get thee a wife" in order to enjoy true happiness
  - The cause of his melancholy is never fully explained, although it may be that whilst he was ultimately able to direct the play's ev

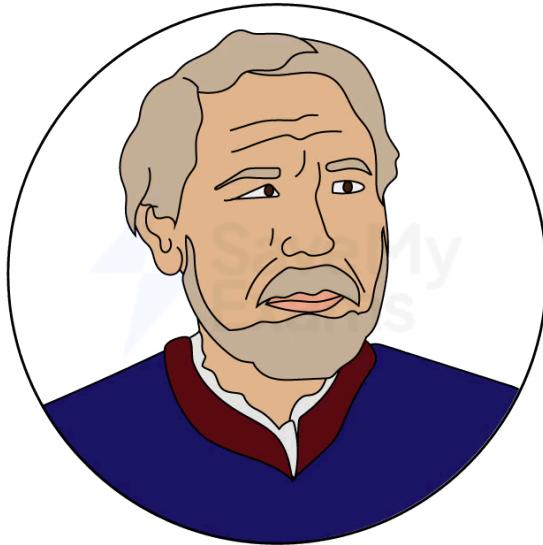
## Don John

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Your notes

- Don John is the illegitimate brother of Don Pedro
  - As he is illegitimate, he does not enjoy the same power or position as Don Pedro
- As the play begins, Don John and Don Pedro have only recently mended their broken relationship, after Don Pedro defeated Don John in battle
  - However, it is clear that Don John still harbours bitterness and resentment towards Don Pedro
  - He is jealous of Claudio, whom Don Pedro recently rewarded, thinking the glory should be his
  - His plots are even more devious as he pretends to be a close friend and have Claudio's best interests at heart
- He knows he will never be as good as his half-brother, or enjoy the same status, so he decides to not even try and instead becomes a self-proclaimed villain
  - He does not even pretend that his actions are motivated by anything other than pure spite
- His melancholic nature contrasts with the other lively and fun characters in the play
- However, he relies on Borachio to come up with the plan to ruin Claudio and Hero's wedding
- When the plot is exposed, he flees, although he is caught and arrested
- His fate is ultimately unknown, reinforcing his insignificance and lack of status, being the illegitimate half-brother

## Leonato

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Your notes

- Leonato is the governor of the city of Messina, father to Hero and uncle to Beatrice
- He is friends with Don Pedro and welcomes him and his men as guests when they return from war
- He is very protective of his daughter and expects her to be obedient, especially when it comes to marriage
- He is used to being the **patriarch** and being obeyed
- However, the arrival of Don Pedro changes the hierarchy of power and Leonato often defers to him out of respect for his title
- When Hero's virtue is called into question at the wedding altar, Leonato's overreaction is common in both Shakespearian comedies and tragedies
- He is quick to **denounce** her, declaring her better off dead due to her dishonouring him by her alleged actions
- But his loyalty ultimately is to his family, as when he hears of Hero's innocence, he breaks with social norms and supports his daughter rather than the high-ranking prince (Don Pedro)

## Minor characters

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Your notes

## Borachio

- Borachio is Don John's companion
- He comes up with the plot to trick Claudio and Don Pedro into believing Hero to be unfaithful
- He is friendly with Margaret and seduces her at Hero's bedroom window

## Conrad

- Another of Don John's companions
- He is extremely loyal to Don John

## Antonio

- Antonio is Leonato's elder brother and Beatrice's father

## Dogberry and Verges

- Dogberry is Messina's dim-witted constable, with Verges being his second in command
- They both take their jobs extremely seriously
- Dogberry has a habit of using **malapropisms** – using the wrong word to convey his meaning
- His desire to speak in an elaborate, formal manner, like the nobleman, becomes a source of humour in the play
- They are central to the play's action, as it is they who ultimately reveal Hero's innocence

- Shakespeare employs them as a pair of trademark fools, enabling him to criticise **bureaucracy** and institutions of power

**Friar Francis**

Your notes

- This character is meant to wed Hero and Claudio
- He is in no doubt of Hero's innocence and persuades Leonato to **feign** her death in order to give them more time to clear her name

**Margaret**

- Hero's gentlewoman and unknowingly part of the plot to break up Claudio and Hero
- Her innocence of the plot is confirmed at the end of the play

**Ursula**

- Another of Hero's waiting women, who engages with Hero in the trick to deceive Beatrice into believing Benedick's love for her



Your notes

## Much Ado About Nothing: Context

Shakespeare plays dating from before April 1603 are considered Elizabethan as they were written and performed at the time Elizabeth I was on the English throne. Much Ado About Nothing was written around 1598 and is therefore an Elizabethan play.

- Queen Elizabeth's court was the centre of English imperial political manoeuvring, diplomatic negotiations and the pursuit of alliances to maintain or expand power:
  - Within the court, alliances would be forged, not only through formal treaties but also through personal connections and patronage
- The **Renaissance**, a cultural movement that began in Italy in the 14th century, had spread to England by the late 16th century:
  - It was characterised by a revival of classical learning and **humanistic** ideals
  - This cultural exchange and rediscovery of ancient texts influenced literature, art and philosophy
- The storyline of Hero and Claudio likely came directly from a story by Italian poet Ludovico Ariosto

### How this links to the play Much Ado About Nothing

Courtly politics	The play's themes of deception and manipulation reflect the strategies used in courtly politics, where appearances and perceptions were used to achieve political goals.
Individualism	Influenced by <b>Renaissance humanism</b> , which celebrated the potential and dignity of the individual, the play also demonstrates the importance of individual character and autonomy. Beatrice and Benedick, through their wit and refusal to adhere strictly to societal expectations of courtship and marriage, epitomise the spirit of individualism and intellectual freedom. They are depicted as independent thinkers who prioritise personal integrity over conformity.

## Much Ado About Nothing social context

### Gender roles

- The stereotype of Elizabethan women as **chaste**, modest, **subservient** and wholly dependent on men, whether a father or a husband, is taken mainly from how women were portrayed in literature:
  - Shakespeare, like other playwrights, borrowed plots from classic literature

- This is not how most people lived their lives, but there were great differences between men's and women's roles in Elizabethan England:
  - These differences were mostly rooted in schooling
  - Boys were able to attend grammar school from the ages of six or seven, whereas girls were mainly home-schooled (except for the poor, who would receive no formal education)
  - The lack of formal education for women led to a disparity between what men and women were thought to be capable of
- Women were allowed to own property, but the law dictated that ownership of any property transferred to a woman's husband upon marriage



#### How this links to the play Much Ado About Nothing

<b>Portrayal of women</b>	The story of Beatrice and Benedick was original and popular in Shakespeare's time. Beatrice challenges everyday sexism by turning men's insults back on them, particularly Benedick's, showcasing her assertiveness and humour. Her outspoken nature contrasts with the idealised femininity of Hero, and Leonato's comment about her outspokenness hindering her marriage prospects demonstrates her unconventional character in Elizabethan England.
<b>Gender inequality</b>	Beatrice highlights gender disparities when she cries "O God, that I were a man!" She expresses a desire to possess the qualities that men are celebrated for, such as the ability to seek personal revenge like challenging Claudio, yet as a woman, she must rely on Benedick to act on her behalf.
<b>Female solidarity</b>	The theme of female solidarity is shown as Beatrice defends Hero's innocence to Leonato, but their pleas are dismissed because of their gender.
<b>Male sexism</b>	The play also explores male friendship and bonding through <b>banter</b> , which cements friendships and excludes women, often using sexual <b>innuendo</b> . Here humour acts as both a weapon and a shield, as sexist jokes demean women while also revealing men's insecurities and fear of emotional vulnerability.

## Honour and virtue

- In Elizabethan times, it was important for a woman to maintain her virginity until she was engaged:
  - Any rumours that a woman was not a virgin would not only harm the woman's reputation, but also that of her father and future husband
- Although women were expected to remain virgins until marriage, it was generally thought acceptable if an engaged couple had sex between the agreement to marry and the actual wedding ceremony:



Your notes

- The same expectations of virginity were not in place for men
- It was a father's duty to protect his daughter's **chastity** at all costs:
  - If a daughter engaged in any form of sexual activity before marriage, this would dishonour her father and her family
  - This explains Leonato's extreme reaction at the altar when Claudio refuses Hero
- In addition, a wife's faithfulness was a reflection of her husband's status and ability to control her
- A **cuckold** is a man depicted with animal horns as a shameful sign that their wives had been unfaithful:
  - Cuckolds became a running joke in Elizabethan plays
- After marriage, any expression of female sexuality or feminine desire was considered to be deeply disturbing:
  - Many people thought that women could not control their lustful urges, so it was quite common for men to have fears over their wives' fidelity and the prospect of being "cuckolded"

#### How this links to the play Much Ado About Nothing

<b>Female chastity</b>	Concerns about Hero's fidelity and virginity before marriage is a key plot point in the play. The shaming of Hero is an example of male hypocrisy, as it was seen as acceptable for men, but not women, to engage in <b>promiscuous</b> behaviour.
<b>Infidelity</b>	The character of Don John is also a symbol of infidelity. As he is Don Pedro's illegitimate brother, he is proof that some women do have sexual relations with men who are not their husbands. His existence confirms the worst fears of characters like Claudio and Leonato. The social anxiety around his illegitimate birth automatically makes him the "villain". In Elizabethan society, the fact that he is illegitimate makes him "evil".

## Discord and harmony

- **Discord** is evident in the play, as Shakespeare combines humour with more serious themes such as honour, shame and social conventions
- It is ultimately a comedy that ends with multiple marriages and no deaths:
  - The play shares some plot elements with tragedies such as Romeo and Juliet
- The word "nothing" in Shakespeare's time had contradictory meanings:
  - It could mean the absence of anything, but it was also pronounced as "noting", meaning observing or taking note
- Messina is a large port city on the Italian island of Sicily:



Your notes

- It could be a place of play and restoration, yet the society was strictly bound by custom and convention
- Before the formation of a professional police force, each area of a city was policed by ordinary citizens:
  - They were called the “watch” and arrested wrongdoers
  - They were often mocked in Shakespeare’s day for their sense of self-importance and pomposity

#### How this links to the play **Much Ado About Nothing**

<b>Restoration of harmony</b>	Claudio's public shaming of Hero at their wedding combines themes of honour and social conventions and leads to Hero's temporary disgrace. After the truth is revealed and Don John's plot is exposed, the subsequent reconciliation through Hero's forgiveness restores harmony.
<b>The “merry war”</b>	Throughout much of the play, Beatrice and Benedick engage in a “merry war”, though their eventual confession of love brings further harmony.
<b>Restoration or order</b>	The play also ends with a dance, like several other Shakespearean comedies, which signals harmony and restored order.

## Much Ado About Nothing literary context

Much Ado About Nothing is known as a Shakespearean comedy. Knowing this – and that an audience would also have certain expectations when watching a comedy – can help to elevate your analysis of Shakespeare's choices as a playwright.

## The structure of a comedy

Many of Shakespeare's comedies follow the same five-part structure:

Part	Definition	In <b>Much Ado About Nothing</b>
1: Exposition	The introduction to the play for the audience, and an introduction to the themes and atmosphere	In <b>Much Ado About Nothing</b> , the setting of Messina is introduced, as well as all of the major characters. The “merry war” of wits is revealed early on between Benedick and Beatrice. Furthermore, purity and naivety in love as represented by Claudio and Hero, and a hint of menace with the introduction of Don John in the soldiers' party, introduce the other major themes of the play



Your notes

2: Rising action	When complications in the main plot are exposed and an inevitable chain of events starts	In Much Ado About Nothing, schemes, misunderstandings and eavesdropping begin, with Don Pedro wooing Hero on Claudio's behalf, the trick to fool Benedick and Beatrice into falling in love with each other, and Don John's plans to ruin Claudio's happiness
3: Climax	The point in the play where the tension and excitement reach the highest level	Here, the climax of the play is the wedding that wasn't, with Claudio publicly rejecting Hero at the altar for her alleged infidelity
4. Falling action	The events that occur immediately after the climax has taken place and the action shifts towards resolution, instead of escalation	Friar Francis comes up with the plan to pretend that Hero died of humiliation to enable time for her name to be cleared, and the watchmen overhear Borachio confessing to his part in the deception, leading to his arrest and the eventual revelation of Hero's innocence by Dogberry
5. Denouement	Normality and the natural order is restored	With Hero's innocence established, but Claudio still thinking her dead, he is lured back to the altar to wed Leonato's supposed niece. However, Hero reveals herself to be the bride and they are married. In addition, Benedick and Beatrice admit their love for each other, and the play ends with dancing



Your notes

## Much Ado About Nothing: Writer's Methods and Techniques

### Writer's Methods and Techniques

"Methods" is an umbrella term for anything the writer does on purpose to create meaning. Using the writer's name in your response will help you to think about the text as a conscious construct and will keep reminding you that Shakespeare purposely put the text together.

The best responses at GCSE don't limit their analysis to individual words and phrases. Examiners are really looking for analysis of Shakespeare's overall aims, so try to take a "whole-text" approach to writer's methods and techniques. Each of the below topics do just that:

- **Form**
- **Structure**
- **Poetry and Prose**
- **Literary Devices**

### Form

Much Ado About Nothing is a Shakespearean comedy, and a joyous one at that. It is full of love, music, trickery and merry-making. However, all Shakespearean comedies also have an element of tragedy, or the potential to turn into one. It is important that the examiner knows from your essays that you understand the conventions of comedy, as this is a valuable – and sophisticated – understanding of the writer's craft and methods.

**Shakespearean comedies usually consist of:**

- **Love and Marriage:** Comedies generally tend to have love and marriage as a central theme:
  - Typically, weddings are seen as symbols of happiness and new beginnings, which Shakespeare deemed crucial enough to represent in multiple marriages in some of his plays
- **Mistaken Identity and Misconception:** Shakespearean comedies often derive humour from the misunderstandings and misinterpretations of characters:
  - Shakespeare uses **dramatic irony** – in which the audience is aware of things that the characters are not – for comic effect
  - Characters often impersonate someone, or are mistaken for someone else
  - In addition, wordplay adds to the confusions and misunderstandings
- **Fools:** The presence of "fools" in Shakespeare's comedies allows for **parody**, further misunderstandings or, in the case of Much Ado About Nothing, inadvertent resolution

- **Happy Ending:** All Shakespearean comedies have happy endings, with at least one marriage:
  - The happy resolution in Much Ado About Nothing is represented by dancing



Your notes

## Structure

### The structure of a comedy

Many of Shakespeare's comedies follow the same five-part structure:

1. **Exposition:** this is the introduction to the play for the audience, and an introduction to the themes and atmosphere. In Much Ado About Nothing, the setting of Messina is introduced, as well as all of the major characters. The "merry war" of wits is revealed early on between Benedick and Beatrice, purity and naivety in love as represented by Claudio and Hero, and a hint of menace with the introduction of Don John in the soldiers' party
2. **Rising Action:** here is when complications in the main plot are exposed and an inevitable chain of events starts. In Much Ado About Nothing, schemes, misunderstandings and eavesdropping begin, with Don Pedro wooing Hero on Claudio's behalf, the trick to fool Benedick and Beatrice into falling in love with each other, and Don John's plans to ruin Claudio's happiness
3. **Climax:** this is the point in the play where the tension and excitement reach the highest level. Here, the climax of the play is the wedding that wasn't, with Claudio publicly rejecting Hero at the altar for her alleged infidelity
4. **Falling Action:** this is the event that occurs immediately after the climax has taken place and the action shifts towards resolution instead of escalation. Friar Francis comes up with the plan to pretend that Hero died of humiliation to enable time for her name to be cleared, and the watchmen overhear Borachio confessing to his part in the deception, leading to his arrest and the eventual revelation of Hero's innocence by Dogberry
5. **Denouement:** normality and the natural order is restored. With Hero's innocence established, but Claudio still thinking her dead, he is lured back to the altar to wed Leonato's supposed niece. However, Hero reveals herself to be the bride and they are married. In addition, Benedick and Beatrice admit their love for each other, and the play ends with dancing

## Comedic Conventions

- Although both tragic and comedic elements can be found in Much Ado About Nothing, it is primarily a romantic comedy
- While the darker elements of the play involve Hero's public humiliation and "death", it includes many classical comedic elements, such as misunderstandings, wit, wordplay and foolery
- In addition, nobody actually dies, and the play ends with marriages, making it a comedy as the theme of love is prevalent:



Your notes

- We are presented with a pair of lovers in Claudio and Hero, who overcome the obstacles in their relationship ultimately to be united
- It could be argued that Beatrice and Benedick also overcome the barriers to love they have both placed around themselves in order to finally admit their feelings in the end
- The play employs comedy through language:
  - Beatrice and Benedick engage in clever wordplay, metaphors and insults throughout the play
  - In addition, Dogberry's use of **malapropisms** gives the audience a character to both mock and admire, as he does the right thing in arresting Borachio and ensuring his confession to Leonato
  - He and Verges also play the parts of fools, another common comedic device
- The plot of a Shakespearean comedy is often driven by mistaken identity:
  - In Much Ado About Nothing, this is an intentional part of Don John's plot
- In many Shakespearian comedies, it was also common for women to disguise themselves as men as a plot device:
  - This does not happen overtly in Much Ado About Nothing, but it could be argued that Beatrice's more masculine, outspoken qualities are a form of disguise

## Poetry and Prose

- Shakespeare used three forms of poetic language when he wrote his plays:
  - Blank verse
  - Rhymed verse
  - Prose
- Much Ado About Nothing is unusual in that very little of it is actually written in verse – most of it is written in prose
- Shakespeare used these different forms of language for dramatic purposes to perform different functions:
  - To distinguish characters from one another
  - To reveal the psychology of characters
  - To show character development

### Blank verse

- Blank verse consists of unrhymed lines of ten syllables, although it does not always exactly fit that pattern



Your notes

- Typically in Shakespeare plays, blank verse represents human feelings in speeches and soliloquies, as well as the everyday ordinariness of life
- In Much Ado About Nothing, Beatrice's soliloquy in Act 3, Scene 1, is written in blank verse, reflecting her emotional vulnerability in this scene

### Rhymed verse

- Rhymed verse consists of sets of rhyming couplets: two successive lines that rhyme with each other at the end of the line
- Shakespeare frequently used rhyming couplets to end a scene or a character's dialogue
- In Act 3, Scene 1, Hero uses a rhyming couplet as she exits after tricking Beatrice when she says "If it prove so, then loving goes by haps// Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps."

### Prose

- Prose is unrhymed lines with no pattern or rhythm
- Shakespeare used prose for serious episodes, letters or when characters appear to be losing their minds (when it would be unrealistic for them to speak poetically)
- In Much Ado About Nothing, Benedick's speech in Act 2, Scene 3, after he has overheard Don Pedro, Leonato and Claudio in the garden, is spoken in prose, as his response to what he has heard seems to be based on a sort of logic
- He makes a set of observations and finds evidence to back up his deductions
- Benedick employs witty prose as a defence mechanism

## Literary Devices

- Shakespeare uses dramatic irony throughout the play:
  - For example, the audience knows that Don John still despises Don Pedro, even though he has supposedly made peace with him
- **Hyperbole** is also used as a form of wordplay, as in when Benedick tells Don Pedro that he will perform any service for him rather than be made to speak with Beatrice in Act 2, Scene 1:
  - The "merry war" itself between Beatrice and Benedick is an **oxymoron**
- Shakespeare uses the imagery of fire to demonstrate characters' passion, such as when Beatrice overhears Hero and Ursula's conversation in Act 3, Scene 1, she asks "What fire is in mine ears?"
- Shakespeare also employs animal imagery in the exchanges between Beatrice and Benedick, and in references to them made by other characters, perhaps to suggest the wildness of their love/hate relationship:
  - Benedick declares that if he ever succumbs to the pangs of love, he will be like a trapped animal

- When Beatrice finally acknowledges her love for Benedick, she implies that she is like an animal which needs to be tamed: "Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand," (Act 3, Scene 1)
- Shakespeare's characters in Much Ado About Nothing often play on the different meanings of words:
  - Dogberry, for example, uses his words incorrectly
  - This shows that language is open to interpretation and nothing is as it seems
- Shakespeare positions the immature Claudio and Hero as **foils** for Benedick and Beatrice, making the eventual marriage between the latter two characters even more surprising:
  - Dogberry, with his pretentious officiousness, also acts as a foil for the more intellectual characters in the play, highlighting the cleverness of the main characters
  - This also creates **situational irony** when Dogberry unmasks Don John's schemes



Your notes



Your notes

## Much Ado About Nothing: Key Quotations

Remember, the assessment objectives explicitly state that you should be able to “use textual references, *including* quotations”. This means summarising, paraphrasing, referencing single words and referencing plot events are all as valid as direct quotations in demonstrating that you understand the text. It is important to remember that you can evidence your knowledge of the text in these two equally valid ways: both through references to it and direct quotations from it.

Overall, you should aim to secure a strong knowledge of the text, rather than rehearsed quotations, as this will enable you to respond to the question. It is the quality of your knowledge of the text which will enable you to select references effectively.

If you are going to revise quotations, the best way is to group them by character or theme. Below you will find definitions and analysis of the best quotations, arranged by the following themes:

- Love
- Gender Roles and Attitudes
- Deception
- Honour and Virtue
- Wordplay

### Love

Love is a prevalent theme in Much Ado About Nothing, with the relationship between Claudio and Hero being a key plot driver, and the relationship between Beatrice and Benedick providing much of the comedy and wit in the play.



Beatrice

“I had rather hear a dog bark  
at a crow than hear a man  
say he loves me.”



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“I had rather hear a dog bark at a crow than hear a man say he loves me.” - Beatrice, Act I Scene 1

#### Meaning and context

- This quote appears in Act 1, Scene 1, when Beatrice and Benedick first exchange insults

#### Analysis

- Here, Shakespeare demonstrates Beatrice's attitude towards love and marriage
- She would rather be subjected to a repeatedly annoying sound than bear the annoyance of a man declaring his love to her
- The audience are aware that Beatrice and Benedick are known to each other
- Their insults continue, establishing that their wit is equal and they are actually well suited



Claudio



“ Sweet, Hero, now thy image doth appear in the rare semblance that I loved it first.”

  
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“Sweet, Hero, now thy image doth appear in the rare semblance that I loved it first.” - Claudio, Act V, Scene I

#### Meaning and context

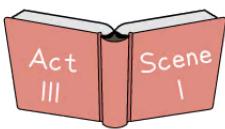
- At the end of the play, Claudio learns the truth about Hero when Borachio confesses to the **treachery**

#### Analysis

- He is essentially saying that her image has returned to the beautiful one he experienced when he first met her, now she is proved as innocent again
- This suggests Claudio’s love for Hero is perhaps not as true as it could be, as it is dependent on Hero’s reputation and the image that others have of her
- This further reinforces the idea of Hero as an object to be looked upon rather than heard



Hero



“It it prove so, then loving goes by haps;  
Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps”

  
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“It it prove so, then loving goes by haps; Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps” - Hero, Act III, Scene 1

#### Meaning and context

- This line is spoken by Hero to Ursula while tricking Beatrice into believing that Benedick loves her

#### Analysis

- The first clause relates to Hero and Claudio, and the second to Beatrice and Benedick, who are tricked into revealing their love for each other
- However, the line is also ironic, as Claudio is tricked at the end into believing that Hero is actually Leonato's niece

## Gender Roles and Attitudes

Much Ado About Nothing both reinforces and challenges traditional gender roles in its presentation of the female characters and male attitudes towards women.



“Oh God! That I were a man,  
I would eat his heart in the  
marketplace.”

  
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“Oh God! That I were a man, I would eat his heart in the marketplace.” - Beatrice, Act IV, Scene I

#### Meaning and context

- This line is exclaimed by Beatrice when Claudio publicly shames Hero at the altar, accusing her of being unfaithful

#### Analysis

- Here, Shakespeare acknowledges the limitations of Beatrice's gender, as she is unable to tackle Claudio's accusations as a man would if another man's honour had been called into question
- She wishes that she were entitled to the qualities that men are not only allowed to have, but are celebrated for, such as the ability to take revenge
- Because she is a woman, she has to ask Benedick to do this on her behalf



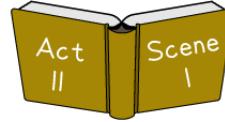
Antonio



“Well, niece, I trust you will be ruled by your father.”



Beatrice



“Yes, faith, it is my cousin's duty to make curtsy and say 'Father, as it pleases you.'”

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“Well, niece, I trust you will be ruled by your father.” - Antonio

“Yes, faith, it is my cousin's duty to make curtsy and say 'Father, as it pleases you.'” - Beatrice, Act II, Scene 1

### Meaning and context

- Antonio, Hero's uncle, reminds Hero that she is to obey her father and agree when she is proposed to by Don Pedro

### Analysis

- Antonio mistakenly believes that it is Don Pedro who means to propose for himself, rather than on behalf of Claudio
- However, as Hero embodies the Elizabethan feminine ideal, her duty is to obey her father without question and marry

- It does not actually seem to matter to Leonato whether it is Don Pedro or Claudio whom she marries
- Beatrice reinforces this by confirming that this is her cousin's role – to do as her father pleases, but this is not a role she wishes for herself



Your notes



Beatrice



“Adam's sons are my brethren,  
and truly I hold it a sin to match  
in my kindred.”

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"Adam's sons are my brethren, and truly I hold it a sin to match in my kindred." - Beatrice, Act II, Scene I

#### Meaning and context

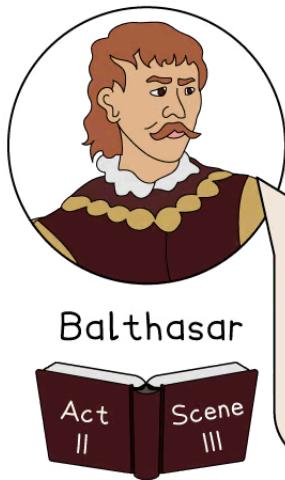
- This quote is part of Beatrice's response to Leonato wishing that she would one day be married

#### Analysis

- Here, Beatrice is saying that we are all born of Adam and Eve and, therefore, made of the same earth and dust
- Unusually, the character is commenting that men and women are born equal, challenging the prevailing gender associations and stereotypes of the day
- Beatrice is also acknowledging that, in marriage, men have more power, but because she thinks herself equal, she refuses to marry and have to be subservient to someone whom she regards as on an equal power footing to herself

## Deception

Deception and disguise are tools used for both good and bad in Much Ado About Nothing, with both the tragic elements and the happy ending coming about through trickery.



“Sign no more, ladies, sigh no more,  
Men were deceivers ever.  
One foot in sea and one on shore,  
To one thing constant never.”

  
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“Sign no more, ladies, sigh no more,  
Men were deceivers ever.  
One foot in sea and one on shore,  
To one thing constant never.”  
- Balthasar, Act II, Scene III

### Meaning and context

- This song is sung by Balthasar just before Don Pedro and Claudio's conversation about Beatrice loving Benedick, which they engineer to be deliberately overheard by Benedick himself

### Analysis

- This suggests that men's very nature mean that they cannot be constant or faithful
- It is a sign of hypocrisy that it is deemed acceptable for men to sleep with women before marriage (or even within marriage), but not for women to sleep around before marriage
- The song suggests that this is just the way things are, so they should just put up with it
- It is also ironic, as in this scene Claudio and Don Pedro are engaged in the act of deceiving Benedick

### Paired Quotation:



Your notes



Don John



“I cannot hide what I am.”



Conrad



“Yes, but you must not make the full show of this till you may do it without controlment.”

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“I cannot hide what I am.” - Don John

“Yes, but you must not make the full show of this till you may do it without controlment.” - Conrad, Act I, Scene III

### Meaning and context

- In this quote, Don John is admitting that he is a villain and that he despises Don Pedro, but Conrad advises him to hide this rather than being open about it until he can control his emotions

### Analysis

- Don John’s line may have a double meaning, as he is Don Pedro’s illegitimate half-brother
- In Shakespeare’s time, illegitimate children lacked status and were thought of as inferior or evil
- Therefore, Don John is saying he must be a villain by nature of his birth, which everyone is aware of so why hide it

- However, he is advised that he could make more mischief by pretending to be a friend to Don Pedro and Claudio, and then going behind their backs



Your notes

## Honour and Virtue

Shame and dishonour, or the fear of it, is a central theme in Much Ado About Nothing, as it drives much of the action in the play



Claudio



“ Give not this rotten orange to your friend. She's but the sign and semblance of her honour.”

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“Give not this rotten orange to your friend. She's but the sign and semblance of her honour.” - Claudio, Act IV, Scene I

### Meaning and context

- This line is uttered as Claudio rejects Hero at the altar and hands her back to Leonato

### Analysis

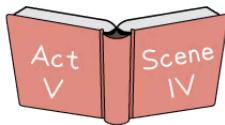
- Claudio's turn of language reflects just how much dishonour is bestowed upon a young woman believed to have been unfaithful to her betrothed, as he describes her as “rotten”, as in gone off or bad
- It reveals that Hero's honour and worth is dependent on appearance, but appearances can be deceiving



Your notes



Hero



“ One Hero died defied, but I do live.  
And surely as I live, I am a maid.”



Don Pedro

“ The former Hero! Hero that is dead!”



Leonato



“ She died, my lord, but whiles her  
slander lived”



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“One Hero died defied, but I do live. And surely as I live, I am a maid.” - Hero

“The former Hero! Hero that is dead!” - Don Pedro

"She died, my lord, but whiles her slander lived" - Leonato, Act V, Scene IV



Your notes

## Meaning and context

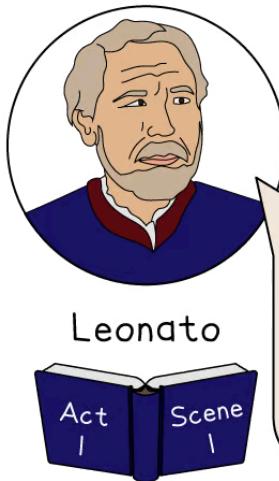
- Hero has just revealed herself to Claudio at the altar to be alive

## Analysis

- The former Hero here is the one who Claudio fell in love with – the Hero that was innocent, pure and a virgin
- Leonato reveals that she died metaphorically while her honour had been called into question
- This is reinforced by Leonato also wishing her dead at the altar when he also believed that she had been unfaithful
- Once her innocence had been established, she was deemed worthy to "live" again

## Wordplay

The pun of the play is that a lot happens due to nothing actually happening. Hero was not really unfaithful to Claudio, and Beatrice and Benedick did not really speak of their love for each other.



“There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signor Benedick and her. They never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them.”



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"There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signor Benedick and her. They never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them." - Leonato, Act I, Scene I

## Meaning and context

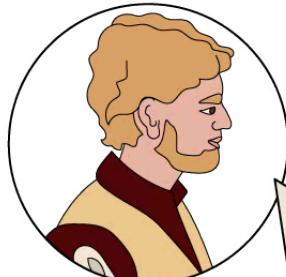
- Here, Leonato is giving the messenger some context that explains why Beatrice is speaking so confusingly of Benedick at the start of the play

## Analysis

- This line sets up the extended metaphor of love being compared to war throughout the play
- Beatrice and Benedick's teasing and insults are compared to military skirmishes, each digging a little at each other
- It also sets up Beatrice and Benedick as equals, **foreshadowing** their eventual union



Your notes



Benedick



“There's a double meaning in that.”

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“There's a double meaning in that.” - Benedick, Act II, Scene III

## Meaning and context

- Benedick has just eavesdropped on Claudio and Don Pedro's conversation and believes that Beatrice loves him. Beatrice then appears and calls him in for dinner

## Analysis

- This is ironic as the play is full of double meaning and puns
- It is also comic, as all Beatrice has done is to be sent to ask Benedick to come in for dinner, which is quite a straightforward request
- Benedick reads things into this that are not there



Dogberry



“Marry, sir, they have committed false report; moreover, they have spoken untruths; secondarily, they are slanders; sixth and lastly, they have belied a lady; thirdly, they have verified unjust things and, to conclude, they are lying knaves.”

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“Marry, sir, they have committed false report; moreover, they have spoken untruths; secondarily, they are slanders; sixth and lastly, they have belied a lady; thirdly, they have verified unjust things and, to conclude, they are lying knaves.” -  
Dogberry, Act V, Scene I

#### Meaning and context

- In the final act, Dogberry brings Borachio and Conrad to Leonato, Claudio and Don Pedro to confess to their deceit with Hero
- They have only confessed to one crime, but Dogberry lists many, which are all essentially the same (they have lied to ruin Hero's reputation)

#### Analysis

- This is an example of Dogberry's misuse of language to make himself seem important and refined
- He is actually doing a noble thing by bringing Borachio and Conrad to confess their crimes, but the honour of his actions is undermined by his confusing language
- He is, therefore, a source of mockery, rather than respect



Your notes

## Much Ado About Nothing: Character Quotations

GCSE English Literature exam questions usually focus on a theme, a character or a relationship between two or more characters. Examiners reward responses that track the development of characters or themes through the play.

When revising, try to consider quotes in terms of their narrative effects — how characters are presented, what attitudes or relationships are presented and why these ideas have been shown to the reader.

- Benedick
- Beatrice
- Claudio
- Hero



### Examiner Tips and Tricks

Examiners recommend that you use the extract as a starting point before exploring how ideas are presented elsewhere in the play. It is useful to examine the extract in terms of the mood of the scene and the dynamic of the dialogue. It is important to understand where the characters are, and with whom they are talking, as it can be confusing in a play like Much Ado About Nothing. Then, think about what the scene illustrates in terms of Shakespeare's ideas, and discuss the way this is presented across the play.

Examiners want you to use precise, well chosen references or quotes as support for your ideas. That's why we've included a "key word or phrase" from our longer quotations to help you remember important references from across the play.

## Benedick

“

**“I would not marry her, though she were endowed with all that Adam had left him before he transgressed”** — Benedick, Act 2, Scene 1

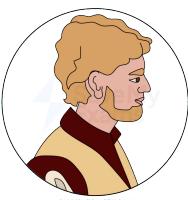
 <b>Benedick</b>	<b>Key word or phrase to memorise:</b> "I would not marry her" and "all that Adam had"	<b>What the quotation means:</b> Benedick insists that he would never marry Beatrice, even if she were able to offer him paradise like Adam (in the biblical story) had before he and Eve were cast out	<b>Theme:</b> Gender Roles and Attitudes
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- Shakespeare presents Benedick as strongly opposed to, and critical of, marriage:
  - His emphatic statement, "I would not", portrays him as rigid in his stance
- Benedick's cynical attitude to love, and his **hyperbolic** criticism of Beatrice is humorous:
  - He draws on biblical **allusions** to insist he would refuse "all" offer of paradise rather than marry Beatrice
  - His reference to Adam who "transgressed" (sinned) in the Garden of Eden alludes to the idea that a female first tempted man, and was responsible for the downfall of humanity

”

**“but doth not the appetite alter? A man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age”** — Benedick, Act 2, Scene 2

 <b>Benedick</b>	<b>Key word or phrase to memorise:</b> "appetite" and "in his youth"	<b>What the quotation means:</b> Benedick reflects on the overheard and set-up conversation that Beatrice is in love with him. He considers why his earlier opinions on love and marriage may be changing, and puts it down to age and maturity	<b>Theme:</b> Love
--	--	---	-----------------------

- This line, spoken in an aside, is humorous as it illustrates Benedick's arrogance:
  - Benedick also exposes his vulnerabilities here
  - He is only able to speak of his love once he believes it is safe to do so because Beatrice loves him

- The **metaphor** of food and eating is often used by Benedick and Beatrice:
  - It may connote to the idea of physical needs and desire
  - Here, Benedick's **rhetorical question** implies love is an "appetite"
- The **oxymoronic** "youth" and "age" implies Benedick's need to justify his feelings as a natural part of ageing



Your notes

"

"Thou and I are too wise to woo peaceably" — Benedick, Act 5, Scene 2

 Beatrice	<b>Key word or phrase to memorise:</b> "too wise to woo"	<b>What the quotation means:</b> Benedick tells Beatrice that they are similar, in that their intelligence makes it difficult to fall in love without having arguments (suggesting that this makes their standards high)	<b>Theme:</b> Honour and virtue
--	--	---	------------------------------------

- Shakespeare presents the consequences of prideful nature when it comes to love:
  - Benedick and Beatrice, challenge each other throughout the play
  - Their sophisticated wit and cynicism creates barriers between one another
  - The **alliterative** "wise" and "woo" emphasises Benedick's point that wisdom impedes love
  - Benedick, **ironically**, is unaware that his words sound arrogant, which Beatrice is keen to point out

## Beatrice

"

"Not till God make men of some other metal than earth. Would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a pierce of valiant dust?" — Beatrice, Act 2, Scene 1

 <b>Beatrice</b>	<p><b>Key word or phrase to memorise:</b> “Not till God make men of some other metal” and “overmastered”</p>	<p><b>What the quotation means:</b> Beatrice is insistent that she will not marry until men are somehow less flawed (implying that she will never marry a man), and asks why women would allow themselves to be ruled by mortals who are made of earth and whose only redeeming feature is bravery</p>	<p><b>Theme:</b> Gender Roles and Attitudes</p>
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- Shakespeare portrays Beatrice as similar in attitude and wit to Benedick (in fact, at times her wit far exceeds his!):
  - Shakespeare, perhaps, makes gender their only difference to challenge stereotypes
  - Her strong opposition to marriage and emphatic “Not till” mirrors Benedick’s exaggerated refusal to marry in Act 2, Scene 1
- In contrast to Hero, Beatrice’s **rhetorical question** asks why any woman would want to be “overmastered” by a man:
  - Her **metaphor** alludes to men being mortal, made of dust
  - Beatrice defies Elizabethan social norms by speaking of her love for single life

“ ”

**“he lent it me awhile; and I gave him use for it, a double heart for his single one: marry, once before he won it of me with false dice” — Beatrice, Act 2, Scene 1**

 <b>Beatrice</b>	<p><b>Key word or phrase to memorise:</b> “double heart for his single one” and “false dice”</p>	<p><b>What the quotation means:</b> Beatrice explains her criticism of Benedick to Don Pedro, saying that he cheated her by making her fall in love with him while he was unable to love anyone but himself</p>	<p><b>Theme:</b> Deception</p>
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- Shakespeare’s comedy explores deception in matters of love:


**Your notes**

- Beatrice's **metaphor** alludes to being cheated by a "false dice"
- This suggests that love is a gamble in which there are winners and losers
- Shakespeare illustrates how Beatrice's decision to avoid relationships gains her **autonomy**:
- It is portrayed as self-preservation
- Her **metaphor** contrasts her "double heart" (big-heartedness) with his "single" love for himself

“

**"Stand I condemn'd for pride and scorn so much?**

**Contempt, farewell! and maiden pride, adieu!" — Beatrice, Act 3 Scene 1**

 <b>Beatrice</b>	<b>Key word or phrase to memorise:</b> "Contempt, farewell" and "maiden pride"	<b>What the quotation means:</b> From her hiding place, Beatrice expresses her shock at what she has heard, that Benedick loves her and that Hero disapproves of her "scorn", and, at this, Beatrice decides conclusively to stop being so proud and cynical	<b>Theme:</b> Love
---	---	--	-----------------------

- While Hero is presented as the most virtuous character, Beatrice is the character who develops the most over the course of the play:
  - Beatrice's use of "condemn'd" indicates the judgement that she feels as a result of Hero's tricks
  - Despite her independence, it is clear that the opinions of others do affect her
  - Although she is tricked into making some of these changes, her love for Benedick is shown to be genuine
  - The implication is that love has the power to transform a person if they allow it to
- Beatrice reflects on her attitude to love in a **rhetorical question** that brings clarity:
  - Her dramatic change is signalled by the exclamatory "farewell"
  - Beatrice implies that her "maiden pride" has judged men unfairly, with "scorn" and "Contempt"

## Claudio

“

“And trust no agent; for beauty is a witch

Against whose charms faith melteth into blood” — Claudio, Act 2, Scene 1



Your notes

 <b>Claudio</b>	<b>Key word or phrase to memorise:</b> “beauty is a witch” and “charms”	<b>What the quotation means:</b> Claudio tells himself in an aside that a beautiful woman has “charms” that can cast a spell on a man, against which he will become powerless as his trust melts into “blood”	<b>Theme:</b> Love
---	--	--	-----------------------

- Claudio is presented as foolish and **hypocritical**:
  - He tells himself to “trust no agent” as he pretends to be Benedick
  - He lacks self-awareness, though, and is both victim to a deceitful prank and involved in one
- Shakespeare portrays his love for Hero as superficial through his hyperbolic language:
  - His love is based on her purity and beauty
  - Yet he says that beauty is a “witch”, attributing it with supernatural “charms” and implying its danger

“

“But you are more intemperate in your blood

Than Venus, or those pamper’d animals

That rage in savage sensuality” — Claudio, Act 4, Scene 1

 <b>Claudio</b>	<p><b>Key word or phrase to memorise:</b> “more intemperate in your blood” and “savage sensuality”</p>	<p><b>What the quotation means:</b> Claudio tells Hero that she has deceived him and that, in reality, her true nature is wild and undisciplined, and that she is like a spoilt animal who enjoys unabandoned pleasure</p>	<p><b>Theme:</b> Gender Roles and Attitudes</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Using <b>dramatic irony</b>, Shakespeare presents Claudio as cruel and unfairly judgemental: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ He is easily convinced that Hero has spent the night with another man</li> <li>▪ This shows his poor judgement</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Shakespeare challenges contemporary attitudes to female sexuality via Claudio: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Sibilance</b> stresses his criticism of her “savage sensuality”, creating a sound as though he is spitting the words out</li> <li>▪ He compares Hero to “Venus”, an erratic, lustful goddess</li> <li>▪ He describes her as “intemperate” implying she is excessive and primal</li> <li>▪ This is <b>ironic</b> because his own behaviour here is clearly excessive and unthinking</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			



“ ”

**“Done to death by slanderous tongues**

**Was the Hero that here lies” — Claudio, Act 5, Scene 3**

 <b>Claudio</b>	<p><b>Key word or phrase to memorise:</b> “slanderous tongues”</p>	<p><b>What the quotation means:</b> Claudio is horrified to find out that Hero, now dead, is innocent and did not spend the night with another man so, in remorse, he reads a tribute to her from a scroll, calling her a “Hero” who was killed by gossip</p>	<p><b>Theme:</b> Deception</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Shakespeare’s comedies use deception to expose hypocritical characters:</li> </ul>			



Your notes

- Claudio's sudden remorse and love for Hero once her purity is confirmed raises questions about gender norms
- The deceptive prank on Claudio, while malicious, exposes his love for Hero as flawed and imbalanced
- Claudio's speech draws attention to the tragic consequences of lies or gossip:
  - **Alliteration** in "Done to death" highlights the danger of "slanderous tongues"
- His passive tone emphasises his hypocritical nature:
  - He subtly removes himself from the crimes against Hero by speaking as though his was not the most slanderous tongue of them all

## Hero

“

“and her wit

Values itself so highly that to her

All matter else seems weak: she cannot love” — Hero, Act 3, Scene 1

 Hero	<b>Key word or phrase to memorise:</b> “All matter else seems weak” and “she cannot love”	<b>What the quotation means:</b> Hero tricks Beatrice by pretending to have a conversation about her prideful behaviour towards Benedick: she says that Beatrice values her intelligence above all else, and this means she is unable to love	<b>Theme:</b> Deception
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- Shakespeare presents Hero as a compliant female who values her modesty and virtue:
  - She prioritises marriage and love, presenting a stereotypical female foil to the unconventionally assertive and independent Beatrice
  - Her prank is “Cupid’s crafty arrow”
  - She is a foil to the defiant Beatrice
- This scene depicts Hero’s prank and, while it is comedic, it presents key ideas about love:

- While Hero's conversation is under false pretences, she presents a genuine challenge to Beatrice
- Her extreme language that "All matter else" is "weak" paints Beatrice as arrogant and prideful
- The emphatic "she cannot love" seems intended to provoke Beatrice



Your notes

"

**"Is it not Hero? Who can blot that name**

**With any just reproach?" — Hero, Act 4, Scene 1**



**Hero**

**Key word or phrase to memorise:**  
"blot that name"

**What the quotation means:** Hero pleads her innocence to Claudio, asking him to remember who she is, and that her reputation ("name") is so clean that anyone trying to smear or stain it must be doing so unfairly

**Theme:**  
Gender Roles and Attitudes

- Shakespeare's presentation of Hero highlights the importance of reputation for females in his society:
  - Hero's horror at having her virtue questioned conveys its value
  - Her response is shown as justifiable as Claudio refuses to marry her as a result of the rumour
- Shakespeare conveys Hero's pride in her pure name and virtuous nature:
  - Her rhetorical questions convey distress at this being challenged
  - The metaphorical "blot" implies the value of being unstained (virginal)
  - But **third person** references ("that name") suggest a detached identity, as though the shock of these events has unmoored her from reality

"

**"And when I lived, I was your other wife: And when you loved, you were my other husband" —**

Hero, Act 5 Scene 4



Your notes

 Hero	<b>Key word or phrase to memorise:</b> “lived” and “loved”	<b>What the quotation means:</b> When Hero unmasks herself and reveals that she is alive to Claudio, she appears to want to start their relationship anew, as if they are different people — a charitable and noble act, given how Claudio mistreated her	<b>Theme:</b> Love
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Shakespeare's comedy typically ends with a happy resolution that includes a marriage (and sometimes more than one!):<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Hero's dramatic reveal is portrayed as romantic and restorative</li><li>▪ The <b>alliterative</b> lines, connecting “lived” with “loved”, perhaps implies the necessity of love to life, and reflects the connection between Hero and Claudio</li><li>▪ Hero's hopeful suggestion, that they are new people, suggests forgiveness and the possibility of moving beyond Claudio's mistakes</li></ul></li></ul>			

## Source

William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, OUP (2008)