



Search this site ▾

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE	KING LEAR	HAMLET	MACBETH	OTHELLO	ROMEO AND JULIET	JULIUS CAESAR	CORIOLANUS
CYMBELINE	TITUS ANDRONICUS	TIMON OF ATHENS	TROILUS AND CRESSIDA	ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA	KING JOHN		
HENRY IV, PART 1	HENRY IV, PART 2	HENRY V	HENRY VI, PART 1	HENRY VI, PART 2	HENRY VI, PART 3	RICHARD III	
HENRY VIII	ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL	AS YOU LIKE IT	THE COMEDY OF ERRORS	LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST			
MEASURE FOR MEASURE	THE MERCHANT OF VENICE	THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR	A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM				
<u>MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING</u>	PERICLES, PRINCE OF TYRE	THE TEMPEST	TWELFTH NIGHT	THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA			
THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN	THE WINTER'S TALE	LOVE'S LABOUR'S WON	THE HISTORY OF CARDENIO	A LOVER'S COMPLAINT			
THE RAPE OF LUCRECE	THE PASSIONATE PILGRIM	VENUS AND ADONIS	THE PHOENIX AND THE TURTLE	SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS			

[WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE](#)

[Comedies >](#)

[WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE](#)

[COMEDIES](#)

[A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM](#)

[ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL](#)[AS YOU LIKE IT](#)[LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST](#)[MEASURE FOR MEASURE](#)**[MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING](#)**[CHARACTERS](#)[MAJOR CHARACTERS](#)[MOTIFS](#)[PLOT OVERVIEW](#)[PLOT SUMMARY](#)[SUMMARY](#)[SYMBOLS](#)[THEMES](#)[PERICLES, PRINCE OF TYRE](#)[THE COMEDY OF ERRORS](#)[THE MERCHANT OF VENICE](#)[THE MERCHANT OF VENICE](#)[THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR](#)[THE TAMING OF THE SHREW](#)[THE TEMPEST](#)[THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF
VERONA](#)[THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN](#)[THE WINTER'S TALE](#)[TWELFTH NIGHT](#)

HISTORIES[HENRY IV, PART 1](#)

Much Ado About Nothing

 [Subscribe to posts](#)

Plot Overview

posted Aug 8, 2013, 12:11 PM by alaa hagag [**updated Aug 8, 2013, 12:11 PM**]

Leonato, a kindly, respectable nobleman, lives in the idyllic Italian town of Messina. Leonato shares his house with his lovely young daughter, Hero, his playful, clever niece, Beatrice, and his elderly brother, Antonio (who is Beatrice's father). As the play begins, Leonato prepares to welcome some friends home from a war. The friends include Don Pedro, a prince who is a close friend of Leonato, and two fellow soldiers: Claudio, a well-respected young nobleman, and Benedick, a clever man who constantly makes witty jokes, often at the expense of his friends. Don John, Don Pedro's illegitimate brother, is part of the crowd as well. Don John is sullen and bitter, and makes trouble for the others.

When the soldiers arrive at Leonato's home, Claudio quickly falls in love with Hero. Meanwhile, Benedick and Beatrice resume the war of witty insults that they have carried on with each other in the past. Claudio and Hero pledge their love to one another and decide to be married. To pass the time in the week before the wedding, the lovers and their friends decide to play a game. They want to get Beatrice and Benedick, who are clearly meant for each other, to stop arguing and fall in love. Their tricks prove successful, and Beatrice and Benedick soon fall secretly in love with each other.

But Don John has decided to disrupt everyone's happiness. He has his companion Borachio make love to Margaret, Hero's serving woman, at Hero's window in the darkness of the night, and he brings Don Pedro and Claudio to watch. Believing that he has seen Hero being unfaithful to him, the enraged Claudio humiliates Hero by suddenly accusing her of lechery on the day of their wedding and abandoning her at the altar. Hero's stricken family members

[HENRY IV, PART 2](#)[HENRY V](#)[HENRY VI, PART 1](#)[HENRY VI, PART 2](#)[HENRY VI, PART 3](#)[HENRY VIII](#)[KING JOHN](#)[RICHARD II](#)[RICHARD III](#)

HISTORIES

LOST PLAYS

[LOVE'S LABOUR'S WON](#)[LOVE'S LABOUR'S WON](#)[THE HISTORY OF CARDENIO](#)

POEMS

[A LOVER'S COMPLAINT](#)[SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS](#)[THE PASSIONATE PILGRIM](#)[THE PHOENIX AND THE TURTLE](#)[THE RAPE OF LUCRECE](#)[VENUS AND ADONIS](#)[VENUS AND ADONIS](#)

TRAGEDIES

[ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA](#)[CORIOLANUS](#)[CYMBELINE](#)[HAMLET](#)

decide to pretend that she died suddenly of shock and grief and to hide her away while they wait for the truth about her innocence to come to light. In the aftermath of the rejection, Benedick and Beatrice finally confess their love to one another. Fortunately, the night watchmen overhear Borachio bragging about his crime. Dogberry and Verges, the heads of the local police, ultimately arrest both Borachio and Conrad, another of Don John's followers. Everyone learns that Hero is really innocent, and Claudio, who believes she is dead, grieves for her.

Leonato tells Claudio that, as punishment, he wants Claudio to tell everybody in the city how innocent Hero was. He also wants Claudio to marry Leonato's "niece"—a girl who, he says, looks much like the dead Hero. Claudio goes to church with the others, preparing to marry the mysterious, masked woman he thinks is Hero's cousin. When Hero reveals herself as the masked woman, Claudio is overwhelmed with joy. Benedick then asks Beatrice if she will marry him, and after some arguing they agree. The joyful lovers all have a merry dance before they celebrate their double wedding.

Symbols

posted Aug 8, 2013, 12:11 PM by alaa hagag [**updated Aug 8, 2013, 12:11 PM**]

The Taming of Wild Animals

The play is peppered with metaphors involving the taming of wild animals. In the case of the courtship between Beatrice and Benedick, the symbol of a tamed savage animal represents the social taming that must occur for both wild souls to be ready to submit themselves to the shackles of love and marriage. Beatrice's vow to submit to Benedick's love by "[t]aming my wild heart to thy loving hand" makes use of terms from falconry, suggesting that Benedick is to become Beatrice's master (III.i.113). In the opening act, Claudio and Don Pedro tease Benedick about his aversion to marriage, comparing him to a wild animal. Don Pedro quotes a common adage, "'In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke,'" meaning that in time even the savage Benedick will surrender to the taming of love and marriage (I.i.213). Benedick mocks this sentiment, professing that he will never submit to the will of a woman. At the very end, when Benedick and Beatrice agree to marry, Claudio pokes fun at Benedick's mortified countenance, suggesting that Benedick is reluctant to marry because he remembers the allusion to tamed bulls:

Tush, fear not, man, we'll tip thy horns with gold,

[JULIUS CAESAR](#)[KING LEAR](#)[MACBETH](#)[OTHELLO](#)[ROMEO AND JULIET](#)[SITEMAP.XML](#)[TIMON OF ATHENS](#)[TITUS ANDRONICUS](#)[TROILUS AND CRESSIDA](#)

RECENT SITE ACTIVITY

And all Europa shall rejoice at thee
As once Europa did at lusty Jove
When he would play the noble beast in love.
(V.iv.44–47)

Claudio changes Benedick from a laboring farm animal, a bull straining under a yoke, to a wild god, empowered by his bestial form to take sexual possession of his lady. While the bull of marriage is the sadly yoked, formerly savage creature, the bull that Claudio refers to comes from the classical myth in which Zeus took the form of a bull and carried off the mortal woman Europa. This second bull is supposed to represent the other side of the coin: the bull of bestial male sexuality.

War

Throughout the play, images of war frequently symbolize verbal arguments and confrontations. At the beginning of the play, Leonato relates to the other characters that there is a “merry war” between Beatrice and Benedick: “They never meet but there’s a skirmish of wit between them” (I.i.50–51). Beatrice carries on this martial imagery, describing how, when she won the last duel with Benedick, “four of his five wits went halting off” (I.i.53). When Benedick arrives, their witty exchange resembles the blows and parries of a well-executed fencing match. Leonato accuses Claudio of killing Hero with words: “Thy slander hath gone through and through her heart” (V.i.68). Later in the same scene, Benedick presents Claudio with a violent verbal challenge: to duel to the death over Hero’s honor. When Borachio confesses to staging the loss of Hero’s innocence, Don Pedro describes this spoken evidence as a sword that tears through Claudio’s heart: “Runs not this speech like iron through your blood?” (V.i.227), and Claudio responds that he has already figuratively committed suicide upon hearing these words: “I have drunk poison whiles he uttered it” (V.i.228).

Hero’s Death

Claudio’s powerful words accusing Hero of unchaste and disloyal acts cause her to fall down in apparent lifelessness. Leonato accentuates the direness of Hero’s state, pushing her further into seeming death by renouncing her, “Hence from her, let her die” (IV.i.153). When Friar Francis, Hero, and Beatrice convince Leonato of his daughter’s innocence, they maintain that she really has died, in order to punish Claudio and give Hero a respectable amount of time to regain her honor, which, although not lost, has been publicly savaged. Claudio performs all the actions of mourning Hero, paying a choir to sing a dirge at her tomb. In a symbolic sense, Hero has died, since, although she is pure, Claudio’s damning accusation has permanently besmirched her name. She must symbolically die and be reborn pure again in order for Claudio to marry her a second time. Hero’s false death is less a charade aimed to induce remorse in Claudio than it is a social ritual designed to cleanse her name and person of infamy.

Motifs

posted Aug 8, 2013, 12:09 PM by alaa hagag [**updated Aug 8, 2013, 12:09 PM**]

Public Shaming

Even though Hero is ultimately vindicated, her public shaming at the wedding ceremony is too terrible to be ignored. In a sense, this kind of humiliation incurs more damage to her honor and her family name than would an act of unchaste behavior—an transgression she never commits. The language that both Claudio and Leonato use to shame Hero is extremely strong. To Claudio she is a “rotten orange” (IV.i.30), and to Leonato a rotting carcass that cannot be preserved: “the wide sea / Hath . . . / . . . salt too little which may season give / To her foul tainted flesh!” (IV.i.139–142).

Shame is also what Don John hopes will cause Claudio to lose his place as Don Pedro’s favorite: once Claudio is discovered to be engaged to a loose woman, Don John believes that Don Pedro will reject Claudio as he rejected Don John long ago. Shame is a form of social punishment closely connected to loss of honor. A product of an illegitimate sexual coupling himself, Don John has grown up constantly reminded of his own social shame, and he will do anything to right the balance. Ironically, in the end Don John is shamed and threatened with torture to punish him for deceiving the company. Clearly, he will never gain a good place in courtly society.

Noting

In Shakespeare’s time, the “Nothing” of the title would have been pronounced “Noting.” Thus, the play’s title could read: “Much Ado About Noting.” Indeed, many of the players participate in the actions of observing, listening, and writing, or noting. In order for a plot hinged on instances of deceit to work, the characters must note one another constantly. When the women manipulate Beatrice into believing that Benedick adores her, they conceal themselves in the orchard so that Beatrice can better note their conversation. Since they know that Beatrice loves to eavesdrop, they are sure that their plot will succeed: “look where Beatrice like a lapwing runs / Close by the ground to hear our conference,” notes Hero (III.i.24–25). Each line the women speak is a carefully placed note for Beatrice to take up and ponder; the same is true of the scheme to convince Benedick of Beatrice’s passion.

Don John’s plot to undo Claudio also hinges on noting: in order for Claudio to believe that Hero is unchaste and unfaithful, he must be brought to her window to witness, or note, Margaret

(whom he takes to be Hero) bidding farewell to Borachio in the semidarkness. Dogberry, Verges, and the rest of the comical night watch discover and arrest Don John because, although ill-equipped to express themselves linguistically, they overhear talk of the Margaret--Borachio staging. Despite their verbal deficiencies, they manage to capture Don John and bring him to Leonato, after having had the sexton (a church official) “note” the occurrences of the evening in writing. In the end, noting, in the sense of writing, unites Beatrice and Benedick for good: Hero and Claudio reveal love sonnets written by Beatrice and Benedick, textual evidence that notes and proves their love for one another.

Entertainment

From the witty yet plaintive song that Balthasar sings about the deceitfulness of men to the masked ball and the music and dancing at the end of the play, the characters of *Much Ado About Nothing* spend much of their time engaging in elaborate spectacles and entertainments. The play’s title encapsulates the sentiment of effervescent and light court entertainment: the two hours’ traffic onstage will be entertaining, comic, and absorbing. The characters who merrily spar and fall in love in the beginning will, of course, end up together in the conclusion. Beatrice compares courtship and marriage to delightful court dances: “wooing, wedding and repenting is as a Scotch jig, a measure, and a cinquepace” (II.i.60–61). By including a masquerade as court entertainment in the middle, as well as two songs and a dance at the end, the play presents itself as sheer entertainment, conscious of its own theatricality.

Counterfeiting

The idea of counterfeiting, in the sense of presenting a false face to the world, appears frequently throughout the play. A particularly rich and complex example of counterfeiting occurs as Leonato, Claudio, and Don Pedro pretend that Beatrice is head over heels in love with Benedick so that the eavesdropping Benedick will overhear it and believe it. Luring Benedick into this trap, Leonato ironically dismisses the idea that perhaps Beatrice counterfeits her desire for Benedick, as he and the others counterfeit this love themselves: “O God! Counterfeit? There was never counterfeit of passion came so near the life of passion as she discovers it” (II.iii.98–99).

Another, more serious reference to counterfeiting occurs at the wedding ceremony, as Claudio rhetorically paints a picture of Hero as a perfect counterfeit of innocence, unchaste and impure beneath a seemingly unblemished surface:

She’s but the sign and semblance of her honour.
Behold how like a maid she blushes here!
O, what authority and show of truth
Can cunning sin cover itself withal!
(IV.i.31–34)

Hero's supposed counterfeiting is of a grave nature, as it threatens her womanly reputation. It is not her emotions that are being misconstrued, as with Beatrice, but rather her character and integrity.

Themes

posted Aug 8, 2013, 12:08 PM by alaa hagag [**updated Aug 8, 2013, 12:08 PM**]

Maturity

Maturity operates in *Much Ado About Nothing* as a marker of age and veneration, but also of personal growth. The young characters – Claudio, Benedick, Beatrice, and Hero – are all immature in matters of love, because they have yet to figure out how to deal with it in a way that doesn't compromise them. The older characters, like Leonato and Don Pedro, have the respect that comes with age – they're wiser in the ways of the world – but they lose out because of their age too. When Claudio refuses to fight Leonato and Antonio, he says it's because they're old men without teeth.

Marriage

Marriage is the center of the *Much Ado About Nothing*. From the first scene in the first act, Claudio sets eyes on Hero and intends to marry her. The plot thickens as there's scheming to marry Beatrice and Benedick, to un-marry Hero and Claudio, and then to actually marry Hero and Claudio. Marriage, though it's the primary source of the drama, is treated like a necessary thing, otherwise the characters wouldn't go through all the trouble it takes to get hitched. Still, though marriage is foregone conclusion, it's also treated lightly as a constant source of jokes. Benedick only teases about marriage so much because it's such an ever-present part of life. Another central component of marriage is the issue of deception; the butt of the marriage jokes is how tied down or cuckolded married folks become. Deception (especially of a cheating wife) is the source of cuckoldry, and even to the last lines of the play, characters tease that adultery is an ever-present possibility.

The Ideal of Social Grace

The characters' dense, colorful manner of speaking represents the ideal that Renaissance courtiers strove for in their social interactions. The play's language is heavily laden with metaphor and ornamented by rhetoric. Benedick, Claudio, and Don Pedro all produce the kind of witty banter that courtiers used to attract attention and approval in noble households. Courtiers were expected to speak in highly contrived language but to make their clever performances seem effortless. The most famous model for this kind of behavior is Baldassare Castiglione's sixteenth-century manual *The Courtier*, translated into English by Thomas Hoby in 1561. According to this work, the ideal courtier masks his effort and appears to project elegance and natural grace by means of what Castiglione calls *sprezzatura*, the illusion of effortlessness. Benedick and his companions try to display their polished social graces both in their behavior and in their speech.

The play pokes fun at the fanciful language of love that courtiers used. When Claudio falls in love, he tries to be the perfect courtier by using intricate language. As Benedick notes: "His words are a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes" (II.iii.18–19). Although the young gallants in the play seem casual in their displays of wit, they constantly struggle to maintain their social positions. Benedick and Claudio must constantly strive to remain in Don Pedro's favor. When Claudio silently agrees to let Don Pedro take his place to woo Hero, it is quite possible that he does so not because he is too shy to woo the woman himself, but because he must accede to Don Pedro's authority in order to stay in Don Pedro's good favor. When Claudio believes that Don Pedro has deceived him and wooed Hero not for Claudio but for himself, he cannot drop his polite civility, even though he is full of despair. Beatrice jokes that Claudio is "civil as an orange," punning on the Seville orange, a bitter fruit (II.i.256). Claudio remains polite and nearly silent even though he is upset, telling Benedick of Don Pedro and Hero: "I wish him joy of her" (II.i.170). Clearly, Claudio chooses his obedience to Don Pedro over his love for Hero.

Claudio displays social grace, but his strict adherence to social propriety eventually leads him into a trap. He abandons Hero at the wedding because Don John leads him to believe that she is unchaste (marriage to an unchaste woman would be socially unacceptable). But Don John's plan to unseat Claudio does not succeed, of course, as Claudio remains Don Pedro's favorite, and it is Hero who has to suffer until her good reputation is restored.

Deception as a Means to an End

The plot of *Much Ado About Nothing* is based upon deliberate deceptions, some malevolent and others benign. The duping of Claudio and Don Pedro results in Hero's disgrace, while the ruse of her death prepares the way for her redemption and reconciliation with Claudio. In a more lighthearted vein, Beatrice and Benedick are fooled into thinking that each loves the other, and

they actually do fall in love as a result. *Much Ado About Nothing* shows that deceit is not inherently evil, but something that can be used as a means to good or bad ends.

In the play, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between good and bad deception. When Claudio announces his desire to woo Hero, Don Pedro takes it upon himself to woo her for Claudio. Then, at the instigation of Don John, Claudio begins to mistrust Don Pedro, thinking he has been deceived. Just as the play's audience comes to believe, temporarily, in the illusions of the theater, so the play's characters become caught up in the illusions that they help to create for one another. Benedick and Beatrice flirt caustically at the masked ball, each possibly aware of the other's presence yet pretending not to know the person hiding behind the mask. Likewise, when Claudio has shamed and rejected Hero, Leonato and his household "publish" that Hero has died in order to punish Claudio for his mistake. When Claudio returns, penitent, to accept the hand of Leonato's "niece" (actually Hero), a group of masked women enters and Claudio must wed blindly. The masking of Hero and the other women reveals that the social institution of marriage has little to do with love. When Claudio flounders and asks, "Which is the lady I must seize upon?" he is ready and willing to commit the rest of his life to one of a group of unknowns (V.iv.53). His willingness stems not only from his guilt about slandering an innocent woman but also from the fact that he may care more about rising in Leonato's favor than in marrying for love. In the end, deceit is neither purely positive nor purely negative: it is a means to an end, a way to create an illusion that helps one succeed socially.

The Importance of Honor

The aborted wedding ceremony, in which Claudio rejects Hero, accusing her of infidelity and violated chastity and publicly shaming her in front of her father, is the climax of the play. In Shakespeare's time, a woman's honor was based upon her virginity and chaste behavior. For a woman to lose her honor by having sexual relations before marriage meant that she would lose all social standing, a disaster from which she could never recover. Moreover, this loss of honor would poison the woman's whole family. Thus, when Leonato rashly believes Claudio's shaming of Hero at the wedding ceremony, he tries to obliterate her entirely: "Hence from her, let her die" (IV.i.153). Furthermore, he speaks of her loss of honor as an indelible stain from which he cannot distance himself, no matter how hard he tries: "O she is fallen / Into a pit of ink, that the wide sea / Hath drops too few to wash her clean again" (IV.i.138–140). For women in that era, the loss of honor was a form of annihilation.

For men, on the other hand, honor depended on male friendship alliances and was more military in nature. Unlike a woman, a man could defend his honor, and that of his family, by fighting in a battle or a duel. Beatrice urges Benedick to avenge Hero's honor by dueling to the death with Claudio. As a woman, Hero cannot seize back her honor, but Benedick can do it for her via physical combat.

Major Characters

posted Aug 8, 2013, 12:05 PM by alaa hagag [**updated Aug 8, 2013, 12:06 PM**]

Beatrice

Beatrice is the niece of Leonato, a wealthy governor of Messina. Though she is close friends with her cousin Hero, Leonato's daughter, the two could not be less alike. Whereas Hero is polite, quiet, respectful, and gentle, Beatrice is feisty, cynical, witty, and sharp. Beatrice keeps up a "merry war" of wits with Benedick, a lord and soldier from Padua. The play suggests that she was once in love with Benedick but that he led her on and their relationship ended. Now when they meet, the two constantly compete to outdo one another with clever insults.

Although she appears hardened and sharp, Beatrice is really vulnerable. Once she overhears Hero describing that Benedick is in love with her (Beatrice), she opens herself to the sensitivities and weaknesses of love. Beatrice is a prime example of one of Shakespeare's strong female characters. She refuses to marry because she has not discovered the perfect, equal partner and because she is unwilling to eschew her liberty and submit to the will of a controlling husband. When Hero has been humiliated and accused of violating her chastity, Beatrice explodes with fury at Claudio for mistreating her cousin. In her frustration and rage about Hero's mistreatment, Beatrice rebels against the unequal status of women in Renaissance society. "O that I were a man for his sake! Or that I had any friend would be a man for my sake!" she passionately exclaims. "I cannot be a man with wishing, therefore I will die a woman with grieving" (IV.i.312-318).

Benedick

Benedick is the willful lord, recently returned from fighting in the wars, who vows that he will never marry. He engages with Beatrice in a competition to outwit, outsmart, and out-insult the other, but to his observant friends, he seems to feel some deeper emotion below the surface. Upon hearing Claudio and Don Pedro discussing Beatrice's desire for him, Benedick vows to be "horribly in love with her," in effect continuing the competition by outdoing her in love and courtship (II.iii.207). Benedick is one of the most histrionic characters in the play, as he constantly performs for the benefit of others. He is the entertainer, indulging in witty hyperbole to express his feelings. He delivers a perfect example of his inflated rhetoric when Beatrice enters during the masked ball. Turning to his companions, Benedick grossly

exaggerates how Beatrice has misused him, bidding his friends to send him to the farthest corners of the earth rather than let him spend one more minute with his nemesis: "Will your grace command me any service to the world's end? I will go on the slightest errand now to the Antipodes that you can devise to send me on. I will fetch you a toothpicker from the furthest inch of Asia . . . do you any embassy to the pigmies, rather than hold three words' conference with this harpy" (II.i.229–235).

Of course, since Benedick is so invested in performing for the others, it is not easy for us to tell whether he has been in love with Beatrice all along or falls in love with her suddenly during the play. Benedick's adamant refusal to marry does appear to change over the course of the play, once he decides to fall in love with Beatrice. He attempts to conceal this transformation from his friends but really might enjoy shocking them by shaving off his beard and professing undying love to Beatrice. This change in attitude seems most evident when Benedick challenges Claudio, previously his closest friend in the world, to duel to the death over Claudio's accusation as to Hero's unchaste behavior. There can be no doubt at this point that Benedick has switched his allegiances entirely over to Beatrice.

Don Pedro, Prince of Aragon

Of all the main characters in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Don Pedro seems the most elusive. He is the noblest character in the social hierarchy of the play, and his friends Benedick and Claudio, though equals in wit, must always defer to him because their positions depend upon his favor. Don Pedro has power, and he is well aware of it; whether or not he abuses this power is open to question. Unlike his bastard brother, the villain Don John, Don Pedro most often uses his power and authority toward positive ends. But like his half-brother, Don Pedro manipulates other characters as much as he likes. For instance, he insists on wooing Hero for Claudio himself, while masked, rather than allowing Claudio to profess his love to Hero first. Of course, everything turns out for the best—Don Pedro's motives are purely in the interest of his friend. But we are left wondering why Don Pedro feels the need for such an elaborate dissimulation merely to inform Hero of Claudio's romantic interest. It seems simply that it is Don Pedro's royal prerogative to do exactly as he wishes, and no one can question it. Despite his cloudy motives, Don Pedro does work to bring about happiness. It is his idea, for instance, to convince Beatrice and Benedick that each is in love with the other and by doing so bring the two competitors together. He orchestrates the whole plot and plays the role of director in this comedy of wit and manners.

Don Pedro is the only one of the three gallants not to end up with a wife at the end. Benedick

laughingly jokes in the final scene that the melancholy prince must “get thee a wife” in order to enjoy true happiness (V.iv.117). The question necessarily arises as to why Don Pedro is sad at the end of a joyous comedy. Perhaps his exchange with Beatrice at the masked ball—in which he proposes marriage to her and she jokingly refuses him, taking his proposal as mere sport—pains him; perhaps he is truly in love with Beatrice. The text does not give us a conclusive explanation for his melancholy, nor for his fascination with dissembling. This uncertainty about his character helps to make him one of the most thought-provoking characters in the play.

Summary

posted Aug 8, 2013, 12:04 PM by alaa hagag [**updated Aug 8, 2013, 12:04 PM**]

Leonato, Governor of [Messina](#), has just gotten word that he's to be visited by his great friend Don Pedro of Arragon, who's on his way back from battle. Beatrice, Leonato's niece, asks the messenger whether Benedick is returning. We learn that Beatrice and Benedick have been engaged in a war of wits for as long as they've known each other, and she seems to be full of scorn and mockery for the man.

Don Pedro, Benedick, Claudio, and Don Pedro's illegitimate brother, Don John, arrive. Benedick and Beatrice exchange some barbs, and the sum of their interaction is that they both hate love and will never get married. (Unless they fall in love with each other and get married. Ahem.) After all the welcoming, Claudio pulls Benedick aside and reveals that he's fallen for Leonato's daughter, Hero. Benedick is full of jokes, and thinks marriage and women are bad news, especially the two combined.

Benedick reveals Claudio's love to Don Pedro, who's more sympathetic. Left alone, Claudio confirms to Don Pedro that he'd like to have Hero for his bride. Don Pedro is hyped about the idea, and says that tonight at the scheduled masquerade ball, he'll pretend to be Claudio and woo Hero on Claudio's behalf. He's certain he'll be able to secure a marriage for Claudio and Hero.

Meanwhile, news of the secret conversation is traveling fast around Leonato's house. Leonato's brother, Antonio, has a servant who heard some of the conversation between Don Pedro and Claudio. The servant misunderstood or misheard some of it though, so Antonio's

report to Leonato is that Don Pedro intends to woo Hero for himself. Leonato goes off to prepare his daughter, Hero, for what he assumes will be a proposal of marriage from Don Pedro.

The scene moves to Don John. He's a jerk, and he likes being a jerk. Don John's attendant, Borachio, enters with a newsy opportunity for Don John to practice some villainy while he's at Leonato's house. Borachio properly heard that Don Pedro plans to woo Hero on Claudio's behalf. The men all agree that this has great potential for their evil attentions, so they're off to flirt with some ideas for a while.

Leonato, Hero, Beatrice, and company are getting ready for the masquerade ball after dinner. Talk turns to how Beatrice will never find a man to suit her. Beatrice teases that she's happy to be a bachelor (a gender neutral term in Shakespeare's day) for life, and even into death. Meanwhile, Hero is reminded that her father instructed her on how to return Don Pedro's affections, and we learn that Hero is generally a pliable and obedient girl. As the men enter in their masks, everyone pairs off with partners. Don Pedro woos Hero privately. Meanwhile, Beatrice rails about Benedick to her disguised partner (who happens to be Benedick). Don John and his crew are still up to villainy, and they corner Claudio, pretending to think he's Benedick. They suggest that Don Pedro has wooed Hero for himself. Hearing this news, Claudio declares that he should never have trusted the affairs of love to anyone else. Like a wet towel, he says goodbye to his love for Hero.

The first part of Don John's dastardly plan is foiled when Don Pedro announces that Hero and Claudio can now get together, as he's done his job and wooed Hero on Claudio's behalf. He's explained all of this to Benedick, but Benedick is too busy being hurt by Beatrice's mean words to appreciate that Disaster Part 1 has been averted. As Beatrice approaches with Leonato, Hero, and Claudio, Benedick runs away to avoid further criticism from the lady. Claudio enters, sulking, and he's immediately transformed from being a taciturn emo kid into a joyous puppy when he hears the good news: Don Pedro did exactly as he promised, and a marriage is being set up between Hero and Claudio. Claudio finds out that he won't be able to marry Hero for a week, and now everyone has to figure out how to have fun during a week with no wedding and no weird courting conflicts. The answer: create weird courting conflicts. Don Pedro decides he's going to hatch a plan to get Benedick and Beatrice together, which should be entertaining (or a disaster).

Back to the scheming Don John. Though he couldn't destroy Hero and Claudio's courtship, he's sure he can destroy their wedding. Borachio suggests that Don John convince Claudio and Don Pedro to stand in the orchard outside Hero's window on the night before the wedding. There, Borachio will be making love-talk with Hero's servant, Margaret, who he'll have dressed in Hero's clothes. From far off, the men will think the girl engaged in inappropriate window activity is Hero, and they'll write Hero off as disloyal.

Later, Benedick is in the orchard, lamenting that one more brave soldier has fallen to the petticoats of love. Benedick notes that Claudio is changed from being a brave, straight-speaking soldier into a milquetoast (pronounced like "milk-toast," and basically means what it sounds like), concerned with romantic music, fashion, and poetry. Benedick thinks he'll *never* undergo such a ridiculous transformation.

Benedick hides when Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato approach. They see him hide, so they put their plan (to coerce him into loving Beatrice) into action. They launch into a loud, supposedly secret conversation about how Beatrice is tearing her hair out over her love for Benedick. They say Beatrice can't make her love known because she's certain that Benedick will scorn and mock her. They all leave. Benedick jumps out of the shrubbery, declaring that he can love Beatrice, and he'll prove it. Beatrice has been sent out to invite Benedick to dinner, and Benedick dotes on her, already exhibiting the dullard signs of love.

Hero is in on the plan to get Beatrice and Benedick together. While Beatrice is within listening range, Hero and her attendant Ursula play the same old trick on Beatrice. They announce that they can't tell Beatrice of Benedick's love because no man can ever please Beatrice, she's such a proud and scornful woman. Once they leave, Beatrice (surprise!) has the same reaction as Benedick, and promises she'll leave her scorn behind. She'll love and marry Benedick, if he'll have her.

Later, Don Pedro and Claudio are with Leonato and Benedick, and they launch into teasing Benedick, who's seeming much changed by his crush – with a shaven beard, a nice smell, and a dulled wit – he's already a milquetoast. Benedick can't handle the teasing, and scampers off, leaving Don Pedro and Claudio to be approached by Don John. Don John claims Hero is disloyal, and he can show them proof. Claudio says if he finds Hero is disloyal, he'll disgrace her in front of the whole congregation, which is a tad overly dramatic in our opinion.

Later that night, Dogberry, a constable, and his man Verges give muddled instructions to an incompetent group of watchmen, who plan to sleep through their duties. In spite of their incompetence, they hear Borachio recount to Conrade (another of Don John's evil cronies) how Don John's scheme went off without a hitch. Margaret appeared to be Hero and flirted with Borachio, while Don Pedro, Claudio, and Don John witnessed "Hero's" disloyalty. Claudio has decided that he'll renounce Hero tomorrow morning at the chapel. The watch then comes forth and arrests Borachio and Conrade for their wickedness.

It's the morning, and Hero is getting ready for her wedding. Beatrice is helping her, though Beatrice is not acting like her usual jovial self. Margaret teases that Beatrice looks like she's in love. Just before the wedding can take place, Dogberry comes to Leonato, trying to get him to come to the examination of the captured prisoners, Borachio and Conrade. Leonato is in a rush to get to his daughter's wedding, so he tells Dogberry to do the examination himself.

Finally, everyone's ready for the wedding, except Claudio, who proceeds to call Hero a disloyal, deceptive, and faithless whore in front of the entire group that's come to watch her get married. Hero denies Claudio's claims that she was flirting with another man at her window, but Don Pedro says he definitely saw her too, as did Don John. Hero faints. The men stalk out, leaving the girl for dead, and everyone else tries to sort out just what in the world is going on.

Beatrice and the Friar are certain there's some treachery afoot, and Benedick realizes Don John must be at the bottom of this. The Friar then comes up with a strategy – they'll let word get out that Hero actually did die. People will then pity the girl, and forget this bad little groomzilla episode. Claudio will once again remember Hero fondly (once she's dead) and in the meantime, some proof will probably surface that will clear her good name. If nothing shakes out, they can always send Hero off to a convent to be cloistered away.

Everyone leaves except Benedick and Beatrice. Benedick takes advantage of this really awkward moment to profess his love for Beatrice. She's stoked, and says she loves him too, but she's pretty preoccupied with her cousin's ruin. However, if Benedick wants to prove his love to her, he should kill Claudio for slandering Hero. At first, Benedick tries to backtrack out of it, but Beatrice threatens to leave. Benedick comes around to thinking Claudio really has wronged Hero, and he goes off to challenge Claudio.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch (just kidding, the prison), Dogberry is interrogating Borachio and

Conrade. He trips up the investigation, but the Sexton (the guy who's documenting the whole process) manages to piece together that they've found the source of Hero's ills. The Sexton is off to report the news to Leonato, with the prisoners in tow. Leonato and Antonio confront Don Pedro and Claudio, saying they've killed an innocent girl by wronging Hero. Claudio and Don Pedro, however, stick to their guns; they maintain they've done nothing wrong, they only exposed Hero as a harlot – it's not their fault that she's now a dead one. Next, Don Pedro and Claudio then into Benedick. Benedick challenges Claudio to a duel for causing the wrongful death of an innocent girl. He calls Claudio a young punk, saying he's waiting for the challenge whenever Claudio is ready.

Claudio and Don Pedro joke about Benedick until Dogberry comes in with Borachio and Conrade in tow. Borachio admits that he and Don John are responsible for framing Hero, and now the innocent girl is dead. Claudio and Don Pedro are shocked, and we're all "who has egg on their face, now, eggfaces?" So Claudio and Don Pedro are sorry they killed a girl by calling her a harlot, and Leonato enters having heard the same news. Claudio says he and Don Pedro are to blame as much as Borachio and Don John because they believed the slander against Hero.

Leonato says Claudio can make it up to him by going to Hero's grave and mourning her with an epitaph (a statement in memory of a deceased person), to be hung on the family tomb. That should clear Hero's name to the public. After that, Claudio is to meet Leonato at the house, and marry Antonio's daughter, who is apparently the spitting image of Hero.

During this time, Benedick and Beatrice have been flirting around in the orchard. Beatrice hears that Benedick challenged Claudio and is waiting for an answer, and she won't make out with Benedick until he's got some blood on his hands. Thankfully, before anyone can get their hands into some flesh, Ursula rushes in to announce that Hero's name has been cleared.

That night, Don Pedro and Claudio go to Hero's tomb, where they hang an epitaph and mourn. Claudio promises he'll do this ritual once a year on the anniversary of Hero's death. Thankfully, it's a new day, and they can get over all this sadness about Hero and get to Claudio's new wedding. At Leonato's house, everyone's stoked that things worked out so nicely. The newly exonerated Hero and all the girls are sent off to cover their faces, and Benedick pulls the Friar aside to ask for his services in marrying him to Beatrice after the whole "Hero's risen from the dead" hubbub.

Don Pedro and Claudio enter. Claudio agrees to marry Leonato's niece before he's even seen her. Then, he sees her, and realizes she's actually Hero!

As everyone is about to head off to the chapel, Benedick makes a big public show of calling out Beatrice, asking if she loves him, maybe. Beatrice, embarrassed, is like, "Um, I love you in a friendly, non-sexual manner. Of course I don't want to marry you, because that would make me a hypocrite for saying all the time how stupid marriage is." Benedick is like, "Oh, friends are fun, I like having more friends." Then Claudio and Hero blow Beatrice and Benedick's cover by revealing love notes the two had written to each other, and Benedick and Beatrice are all, "Aw shucks, guess we'll have to get married after all, but it's only because we pity each other and don't want to die old and alone." Then Benedick declares he doesn't mind getting married after all, as people change their minds all the time about who they really are. Further, Benedick announces that he and Claudio are friends again, and everyone takes to dancing before they're even married. The end.

Characters

posted Aug 8, 2013, 12:03 PM by alaa hagag [**updated Aug 8, 2013, 12:03 PM**]

The Lovers

Benedick:

Young, funny and locked into a love-hate relationship with Beatrice. He has been away fighting under Don Pedro, and upon his return to Messina, he vows never to marry. This slowly changes throughout the play – by the time he agrees to kill Claudio at the request of Beatrice, we know that he is **committed to her. His sharpest weapon is his wit, but he meets his match with Beatrice.**

Beatrice:

In many ways, she is very similar to her lover, Benedick; she is locked into the same love-hate relationship, is quick witted and never wants to marry. The events of the play soon reveal the vulnerable side beneath her “hardened” exterior. Once she is tricked into thinking that Benedick is in love with her, she soon reveals her sweet, sensitive side. However, it is hinted throughout the play that Beatrice was once in love with Benedick, but their relationship went sour: “I

know you of old,” she scorns.

Claudio:

One of Don Pedro’s men and a young lord of Florence. Although commended for his bravery in battle, Claudio is presented as young and naive. He is a difficult character to sympathize with because he is led purely by his courtly sense of honor. Throughout the play he swings from love to despair to revenge too easily. In the first scene, he falls hopelessly in love with Hero (without even speaking to her!), and quickly takes revenge when he thinks he has been wronged by her. It is this character trait that enables the play’s central plot.

Hero:

As the beautiful daughter of Leonato, she soon attracts the attention of Claudio, who instantly falls in love with her. She is the innocent victim in the play when she is slandered by Don John as part of his plan to crush Claudio. Her sweet, gentle nature highlights her piety and contrasts nicely with Beatrice.

The Brothers

Don Pedro:

As the Prince of Aragon, Don Pedro is the most powerful character in the play, and he is happy to use his power to manipulate events – but only for the good of his soldiers and friends. Don Pedro takes it upon himself to get Benedick and Beatrice together and set up the marriage between Claudio and Hero. Although he is a force for good in the play, he is too quick to believe his villainous brother about Hero’s infidelity and is too quick to help Claudio to seek revenge. Interestingly, Don Pedro makes half-advances on both Hero and Beatrice in the play – perhaps this explains his sadness in the final scene when he is the only nobleman without a wife.

Don John:

Referred to as “the bastard,” Don John is the illegitimate half-brother of Don Pedro. He is the villain of the play and needs little motivation to ruin the marriage of Claudio and Hero – in his own words, “I cannot be said to be a flattering honest man, it must not be denied but I am a plain-dealing villain.” Before the play begins, Don John had been leading a rebellion against his brother – which is the battle Don Pedro and his men return triumphant from in the opening scene of the play. Although he claims to be “reconciled” to his brother, he secretly wants revenge for his defeat.

Leonato:

He is the governor of Messina, father to Hero, uncle to Beatrice and host to Don Pedro and his

men. His long friendship with Don Pedro doesn't stop him from lambasting him when he sides with Claudio over his claims on Hero's infidelity – he is probably the only character in the play with enough authority to give Don Pedro a piece of his mind. The honor of his family is very important to him, and he suffers greatly when Don John's plan destroys this.

Antonio:

Leonato's brother and father figure to Beatrice. Although elderly, he is loyal to his brother no matter what the cost.

Margaret and Ursula: Attendants on Hero.

Balthasar: An attendant on Don Pedro.

Borachio and Conrad: Don John's henchmen.

Friar Francis: Devises the plan to redeem Hero's reputation.

Dogberry: a bumbling constable.

Verges: Dogberry's second in command.

The Watch: They overhear Borachio and Conrad and discover Don John's plot.

The Sexton: Leads the trial against Borachio and Conrad.

Plot Summary

posted Aug 8, 2013, 11:58 AM by alaa hagag [**updated Aug 8, 2013, 11:58 AM**]

Act 1

Scene 1: Don Pedro, the Prince of Aragon, returns triumphant from battle and seeks refuge in Messina. Leonato, the Governor of Messina, welcomes Pedro and his soldiers with open arms, and the sudden influx of men into the town soon stirs up some romance. Claudio instantly falls in love with Hero, and Beatrice is reunited with her old flame, Benedick – the man she loves to hate.

Scene 2: Leonato is busily preparing a great supper to welcome the war heroes to Messina when his brother brings him news: Antonio explains that he overheard Claudio confessing his love for Hero.

Scene 3: The villainous Don John has also learned of Claudio's love for Hero and vows to thwart their happiness. Don John is the "bastard" brother of Don Pedro – and he wants revenge

for being defeated in battle.

Act 2

Scene 1: After supper, Leonato invites his guests to a great masked ball where Beatrice and Benedick continue to provide some light comedy – although they love each other, they can't stop mocking each other long enough to admit it. Leonato gives permission for his daughter to marry Claudio in seven days time. Don Pedro and Hero decide to play cupid and plan to finally get Beatrice and Benedick to declare their love for each other.

Scene 2: Hearing that they only have one week to ruin the wedding, Don John and his henchmen soon devise a plan – they intend to trick Claudio with false evidence into thinking that Hero has been unfaithful to him the night before their wedding.

Scene 3: Meanwhile, Don Pedro tricks Benedick into thinking that Beatrice is head-over-heels in love with him, but dare not admit it in case Benedick mocks her. Benedick, who overhears this staged conversation, is completely fooled and starts musing on his love for Beatrice.

Act 3

Scene 1: Hero keeps her end of the bargain and manages to fool Beatrice into thinking that Benedick loves her, but dare not admit it to her. She, too, overhears Hero's staged conversation and starts musing on her love for Benedick.

Scene 2: It is the night before the wedding and Don John prepares to execute his plan. He finds Claudio and tells him of Hero's impurity. At first disbelieving, Claudio eventually agrees to go with Don John and see for himself.

Scene 3: Dogberry, a bumbling constable, instructs his watchmen to be extra vigilant because of the important wedding in the morning. The watchmen later overhear Don John's henchmen drunkenly bragging about how they successfully tricked Claudio – they are promptly arrested.

Scene 4: It is the morning of the wedding and Hero is nervously preparing before the wedding party arrive and take her to church.

Scene 5: Leonato is hastily making his way to the wedding, when he is stopped by Dogberry. Dogberry is a bumbling idiot and fails to communicate what his watch have discovered. Frustrated, Leonato tells him to interview the suspects and speak to him after the wedding ceremony.

Act 4

Scene 1: Claudio publicly reveals Hero's infidelity halfway through the marriage ceremony. Hero is stunned by the accusation and soon faints in the chaos that follows. Once the wedding

party disbands, the Friar becomes suspicious and convinces Leonato, Beatrice and Benedick to pretend that Hero died from shock until they discover who has slandered her – Benedick immediately suspects Don John. Left alone, Beatrice and Benedick finally declare their love for each other. Beatrice asks Benedick to kill Claudio to avenge the shame he has brought on her family.

Scene 2: The trail of Don John's henchmen happens after the wedding – too late to save the day. By now, the whole town thinks that Hero has died and they go to inform Leonato that his daughter died in vain.

Act 5

Scene 1: People are beginning to turn against Claudio; both Leonato and Benedick accuse him of wronging Hero, and then Dogberry reveals Don John's henchmen. Claudio realizes that he was tricked by Don John and tries to apologize to Leonato. Leonato is surprisingly forgiving (because he knows that his daughter didn't actually die). He says that he will forgive Claudio if he marries his cousin the following day.

Scene 2: Beatrice and Benedick still can't stop insulting each other. They soon talk themselves out of having ever admitted love for one another at all.

Scene 3: By night, Claudio visits Hero's tomb to mourn and hangs an epitaph – as Leonato requested.

Scene 4: At the wedding, Claudio is amazed when Hero is revealed to be alive and as virtuous as ever. Benedick and Beatrice finally admit their love for each other in public. Moments before the celebrations begins, a messenger arrives and reports that Don John has been captured.

1-8 of 8

