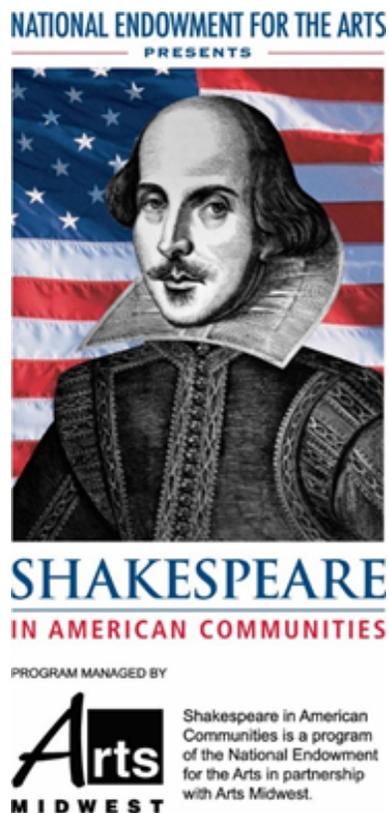


# Much Ado about Nothing

STUDY GUIDE

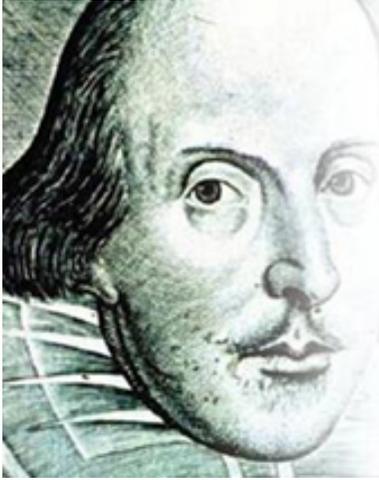
# Much Ado about Nothing

Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival's production is part of Shakespeare for a New Generation, a national program of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest.



The National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest presents Shakespeare for a New Generation. The Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival is one of 40 professional theater companies elected to participate in Shakespeare for a New Generation, bringing the finest productions of Shakespeare to middle- and high-school students in communities across the United States. This is the eleventh year of Shakespeare for a New Generation, the largest tour of Shakespeare in American history.

# William Shakespeare



## Who was he?

Our knowledge of William Shakespeare's life is pieced together from limited primary sources for information: his own works, various legal and church documents, and references to him, his plays, and his genius in third-party letters. Here's what we do know:

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon on or about April 23, 1564. Records from Holy Trinity Church tell us he was baptized there on April 26, 1564. His father was John Shakespeare, a glove-maker, and his mother was Mary Arden, a land-owning heiress. William was the third of eight children, three of whom died in childhood. His father was fairly successful and was an alderman and high-bailiff (mayor) of Stratford .

It is assumed that he went to the free grammar school in Stratford, which was considered an excellent school. It seems certain that Shakespeare never went on to University.

The next documented event is Shakespeare's marriage to Anne Hathaway on November 28, 1582. They had three children: a daughter, Susanna, and twins, Hamnet and Judith. Hamnet died at age 11.

We lose track of Shakespeare for the next seven years. There are rumors that he was fond of poaching and had to flee Stratford after an incident with one of the gentry there. He began to make a name for himself in London by 1592, possibly earlier, as both an actor and a playwright. Unfortunately, the plague forced the closing of theaters in 1592. By 1594 the plague had abated, and Shakespeare was acting, writing, and performing the duties of a managing partner for the Lord Chamberlain's Men. This was a popular company, enjoyed by the commoners as well as royalty. It was around the time that Shakespeare and company made plans for the Globe Theater. The Globe was to be across the river from London, and was built around 1599. In total, Shakespeare wrote 37 plays that have survived (or 38, depending on the point of view of the particular scholar) and numerous sonnets and poems.

April 23rd, 1616 is the day that marks Shakespeare's death (the same as his birthday!) though we are uncertain of that date's precision. We do know he was buried in Stratford, with services at the Holy Trinity Church on April 25, 1616. In his infamous will, he left his properties to his daughter Susanna, and to his wife his "second best bed."



# Shakespeare's England

Elizabeth I was one of the most popular and longest-reigning monarchs in English history (1558-1603). Images of her curly red hair and her reputation for possessing a shrewd political mind are well-known to us through books, movies, and works of art. Elizabethan England was a time of great literary and artistic flowering, as well as royal turmoil and global conquest.

Elizabeth I presided over a country rocked by nearly a century of religious upheaval. The country had endured radical ideological shifts, accompanied by public persecutions, as each new monarch took the throne. Elizabeth was the daughter of Anne Boleyn and the infamous Henry VIII of England. She became Queen of England at the age of 25 after her half-brother and half-sister had each briefly reigned and died. Her sister Mary's reign had been particularly brutal and violent.

Nonetheless, the age of Shakespeare was a great time in English history. The reign of Elizabeth saw England emerge as the leading naval and commercial power of the Western world with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, and she firmly established the Church of England (begun by her father, Henry VIII, after a dispute with the Pope).

At this time, London was the heart of England, reflecting all the vibrant qualities of the Elizabethan Age. Its dramatists and poets were among the leading literary artists of the day. London's population grew 400%, swelling to nearly two hundred thousand people in the city proper and outlying region by the time a young man named Shakespeare came to town.



## Food and Medicine

During the Elizabethan period, table manners were very different than they are now. Even noble people would throw bones on the floor when they were finished, and forks were a rarity at any table. Bread and meat were the two most important staples of the English diet. They also enjoyed a lot of wine and cheese but ate very few fruits and vegetables.

This poorly balanced diet was one cause of the many illnesses that swept through Elizabethan England. Illnesses resulted from malnutrition and improper cooking habits. Also, smallpox and syphilis were common afflictions passed from person to person. But the major cause of death during Elizabethan England was the plague known as the Black Death, which flooded all of Europe. It was carried by the rats living in the streets. People used herbal remedies for many ailments, but unfortunately, only the very rich were able to afford doctors or apothecaries.

# Shakespeare's Theater

In Renaissance England, theater was an important part of everyday life. Public theaters were built in and around the city of London and were open to all. The most expensive seats were in the balconies but the cheapest admission charge was for the "groundlings," the people who stood on the ground in front of the stage.

In 1599 The Globe opened. It was an open-air polygonal amphitheater with many levels and could seat up to 3,000 people. The stage area was a large platform that jutted out from the building and allowed for the audience to surround it on three sides. There was no curtain in front of the stage. A curtained area at the back of the stage could be opened to reveal another room, or some kind of surprise. Above this area was a balcony. This would be a place for kings to address the masses or perhaps for Juliet to talk to Romeo. Below the stage was a trap door that was used for special effects (Shakespeare was very fond of ghosts!). Behind the stage was the "tiring house," a place where actors changed costumes and could rest between scenes.

This open-air theater was dependent on natural lighting and good weather. Costumes and props (like guillotines, ladders, crowns, etc.) may have been extravagant in some cases. The set did not change from show to show. When the play was to shift the location the spoken lines set the scene ("How dark is this night!"). They did use music and many sound effects such as cannons and drums. Many plays also had songs.

## **Shared Staging: The Globe and WillPower**

- Men played all of the roles- In Shakespeare's day, females were not allowed on the stage (until after 1660). Now, women often step into roles originally intended for men. Shakespeare trusted the audience's imagination, and so do we.
- Actors played many parts- At the Globe, an actor might have played seven parts in a single play! Our actors also double up. It is fun for them and the audience to see them play multiple roles.
- One fixed set- Like Shakespeare's company, WillPower uses a few pieces of scenery, such as benches and thrones to imply a new location, but mostly we trust the descriptive language to change the scene.
- No lighting design- As with the set, the lighting did not change with each scene (unless the sun went behind a cloud!)
- No intermission- Shakespeare often didn't have an intermission, and neither do we.
- Shakespeare used music- Sometimes the WillPower cast are musicians and the director is able to weave in live music into the production. Recorded music is also used to create moods and help tell the story.

# Shakespeare Timeline

- 1564** William Shakespeare and Galileo born.
- 1565** Pencils are first manufactured in England.
- 1567** Two comedies are performed at a Spanish mission in Tequesta, Florida.
- 1576** The first playhouse in England is run by James Burbage.
- 1588** Spanish Armada is battered by the English.
- 1590** *Henry VI, Part 1* becomes William Shakespeare's first play to open onstage.
- 1595** Shakespeare writes *Romeo and Juliet*.
- 1596** Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is completed.
- 1598-9** The Globe Theater is built. Shakespeare writes *Much Ado About Nothing*.
- 1600** Shakespeare writes *Hamlet*.
- 1603** James VI of Scotland rises to the English throne after the death of Elizabeth I, uniting England and Scotland under one crown, and takes the new name, James I.
- 1605** Miguel de Cervantes publishes *Don Quixote*.
- 1605-6** Shakespeare writes *Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth*.
- 1607** Jamestown, Virginia is founded.
- 1609** Johannes Kepler establishes that the planets move in an elliptical path around the sun; Galileo builds his first telescope.
- 1611** The King James Bible is published.
- 1614** English settler John Rolfe marries Pocahontas, the daughter of a Native American chief.
- 1616** William Shakespeare and Miguel de Cervantes both die.
- 1623** Publication of the First Folio.

# Dramatis Personae

## Characters in *Much Ado About Nothing*

### Leonato's House

**Leonato** – Governor of Messina, Hero's father, Beatrice's uncle, and the host for the play's events.

**Hero** – Leonato's only daughter, in love with Claudio and wrongfully accused of being unchaste.

**Beatrice** – Leonato's niece and Hero's cousin. She is admired for her wit and intelligence. She is comically tricked into falling in love with Benedick.

**Margaret & Ursula** – Hero's gentlewomen.

### The Military

**Don Pedro** – Prince of Aragon and close friend of Benedick and Claudio.

**Don John** – Don Pedro's illegitimate brother. A villain who ostracizes himself.

**Borachio** – a drunken follower of Don John. He plots against the marriage of Hero and Claudio.

**Benedick** – a comic hero with a dazzling wit who has vowed never to marry. He is "tricked" into falling in love with Beatrice.

**Claudio** – a young man and friend of Benedick. He quickly falls in love with Hero and becomes engaged to marry her.

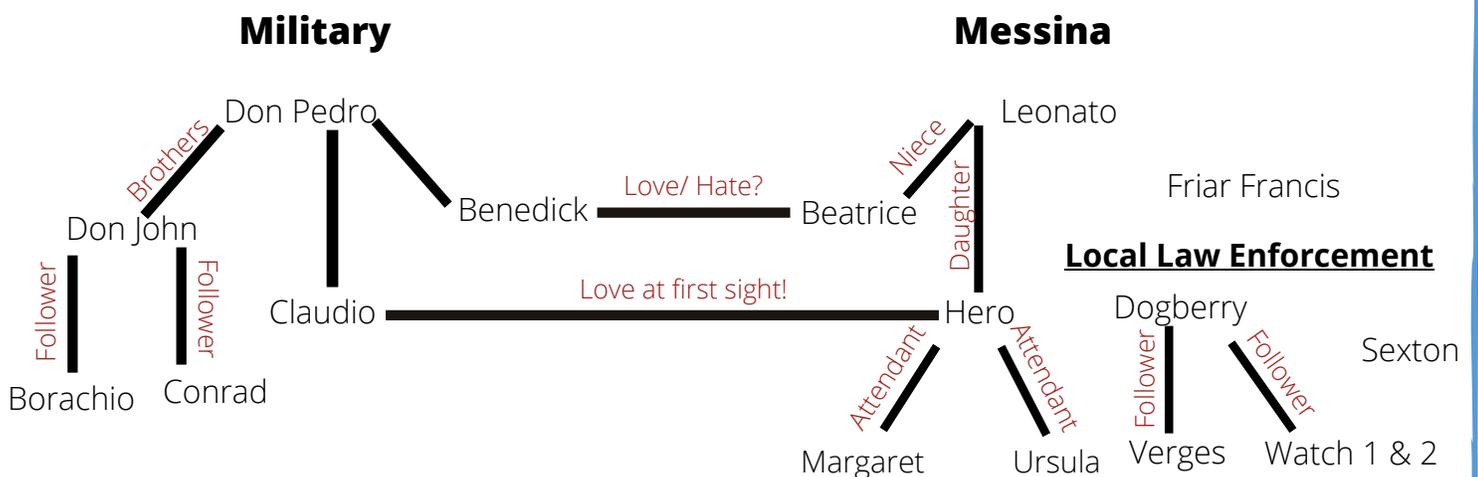
### The Townsfolk

**Dogberry** – a local constable who brings the truth to light despite his ignorance and comic blunders.

**Verges** – Dogberry's sidekick and deputy constable.

**Sexton** – the local judge

**Watch 1 & 2** – Dogberry's followers



# Synopsis

## **Act 1** ***"I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me."***

A messenger alerts Leonato, the Governor of Messina, his daughter, Hero, and her cousin, Beatrice, that Don Pedro, Prince of Aragon, and his army are returning victorious from war. The Prince arrives with Benedick, Claudio, and Don Pedro's half-brother, Don John. Claudio falls in love with Hero at first sight while Benedick and Beatrice begin a "merry war" of wits. Claudio tells Benedick of his love, but Benedick teases him and vows to be a lifelong bachelor. Don Pedro offers to help Claudio by wooing Hero on his behalf at the masked ball that evening. Don John's servant, Borachio, overhears the plan and shares it with his master, who sees an opportunity to be a "plain-dealing villain."

## **Act 2** ***"Friendship is constant in all other things save in the office and affairs of love..."***

Before the party, Leonato urges Hero to be open to an offer of marriage if it comes her way, but Beatrice urges her to make her own decision and vows never to marry. The men arrive masked, and Don Pedro asks Hero to dance. Beatrice is paired with Benedick, but unaware of her dance partner's identity, she calls Benedick a "dull fool." Don John attempts to upset Claudio by saying that the Prince is courting Hero for himself, but this matter is quickly resolved when Don Pedro announces that he has successfully wooed Hero on Claudio's behalf. Claudio and Hero will be married and Don Pedro decides that they should all trick Beatrice and Benedick into falling in love with each other. Unable to destroy their relationship, Don John plots to ruin Hero and Claudio's wedding; he will use Hero's maid, Margaret, to make it seem Hero is unfaithful. Don Pedro stages a conversation about Beatrice's "love" for Benedick for Benedick to overhear, and Benedick secretly admits his affection for her.

## **Act 3** ***"What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?"***

Beatrice overhears another staged conversation between Hero and Margaret about Benedick's love for her, and she privately confesses her own affection for Benedick. Don John tells Pedro and Claudio that Hero is unfaithful, and "proves" it by leading them to Hero's window, where Borachio is wooing Margaret. Dogberry, the bumbling local constable, and his follower, Verges, overhear the drunken Borachio bragging about the scheme to make Hero appear unfaithful. Dogberry and Verges arrest Borachio, but are unable to communicate the situation to Leonato.

## **Act 4** ***"I do love nothing in the world so well as you. Is not that strange?"***

At the wedding, Claudio and Don Pedro publicly accuse Hero of being unfaithful. Hero protests her innocence, and the Friar suggests the family hide her away and pretend she is dead, so that the guilty parties may feel remorseful and the truth will come to light. Privately, Beatrice and Benedick confess their love for one another. Beatrice asks Benedick to prove his love by killing Claudio for shaming Hero, and Benedick reluctantly agrees. Meanwhile, Dogberry witlessly interrogates Borachio.

## **Act 5** ***"A miracle! Here's our own hands against our hearts."***

Benedick challenges Claudio to a duel. Dogberry presents Borachio to Leonato and the plot against Hero is revealed. Leonato tells a remorseful Claudio that he can atone for his mistake by marrying Hero's cousin in the morning. Benedick asks Leonato for Beatrice's hand in marriage. Claudio, arriving to marry Hero's cousin, happily discovers that the bride is Hero herself. Beatrice and Benedick realize they have been tricked into loving each other, and are forced to admit their affection to their friends and family. It is reported that Don John has been arrested and will be punished for his deceit.

# Shakespeare's Inspiration

With any work of art, there is always a seed of inspiration: a germinal idea that grows into a painting, a dance or a play. Sometimes, after being influenced by particular works, writers and playwrights will adopt elements of such works and fashion them into their own story.

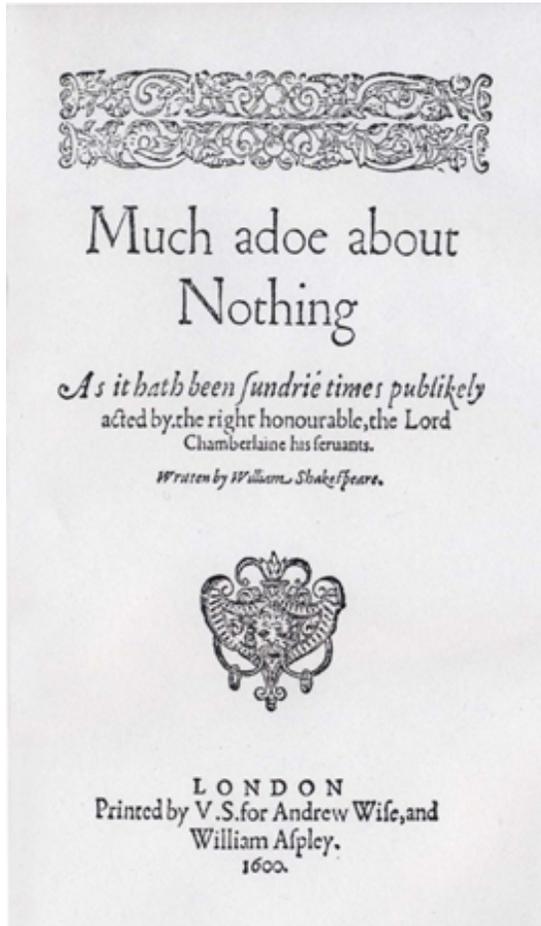
The main plot between Claudio and Hero was inspired by many different sources. The first is a novella by Matteo Bandello from 1554. Bandello's story takes place in Messina, the same town where *Much Ado* is set, and includes many similar character names, including Lionato and Don Pedro. The second is an epic poem, *Orlando Furioso* by Italian poet Ludovico Ariosto. The poem was written more than 100 years before Shakespeare's play and includes an instance where a lover is misled to believe that his mistress is unfaithful. Shakespeare may not, however, have been familiar with Ariosto's original poem, which was written in Italian, but with the English translation published in 1591. Another epic poem may also have served as a source; English poet, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* includes events that are similar to *Much Ado*, although the poem was only published a few years before *Much Ado* premiered.

The element that really sets *Much Ado* apart from its source material is the addition of Beatrice and Benedick. The sources Shakespeare pulled from all lacked the comedic element that these two characters bring to *Much Ado*, and they are considered original to Shakespeare. The characters' witty banter may have been inspired by Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of Courtier*. This book, which was published in 1528, remains one of the most important and widely read works of all time; Shakespeare almost certainly read it, either in the original Italian or the English translation from 1561. The book was revolutionary because Castiglione suggests that women should contribute to courtly life. To illustrate his point, he wrote a series of upbeat debates between a man and a woman that may have inspired the verbal sparring between Beatrice and Benedick.



Bumbling and inept policemen were theatrical staples by Shakespeare's time, but Dogberry is considered a Shakespeare original. The role was written for a specific actor – William Kempe. Kempe was a famous Elizabethan actor who was known for his skills as a physical comedian. Kempe was an actor with Shakespeare's troupe, Lord Chamberlain's Men, from 1594 to 1599 and it is believed that other comedic roles like Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Peter in *Romeo and Juliet* were written for him as well.

# Shakespeare Inspires



Artists have always been interested in reinventing Shakespeare. They are as inspired by him as he was by the artists who came before him. Since the original production of *Much Ado About Nothing* back in the 1500s, the story has been interpreted and re-imagined in numerous ways.

In the year 1662, *Much Ado About Nothing* was merged with another Shakespeare play, *Measure for Measure*, by William Davenant, and was titled *The Law Against Lovers*. Then again in 1721, it was combined with Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and called *Love in a Forest*, and the play was even merged with one of Moliere's comedies in 1737.

Even early on, adaptations of *Much Ado About Nothing* moved beyond the straight (non-musical) play, as can be seen with Hector Berlioz's opera, *Béatrice et Bénédict*, which was written in 1862, and completely removed the Hero and Claudio plot.

In the advent of early film making, a 1913 silent film adaptation of the play was made. Since then, multiple film and television variations have been produced, including the most modern versions. Kenneth Branagh (Gilderoy Lockhart in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*) directed and starred in a film version made in 1993, also starring Emma Thompson (Professor Trelawney in the *Harry Potter* franchise), Denzel Washington (Coach Herman Boone in *Remember the Titans*), and Keanu Reeves (Neo in *The Matrix*), amongst other notable actors. In the spring of 2013, Joss Whedon, best known for his film *The Avengers*, filmed a low budget black-and-white adaptation, which was done in his California home over the course of 12 days. Whedon's cast included Clark Gregg (Agent Coulson in *The Avengers*), and Alexis Denisof (The Other in *The Avengers* and *Guardians of the Galaxy*).

*Much Ado About Nothing* has also appeared in other forms of media, and many of them have taken place in the year 2014. A vlog series called *Nothing Much To Do* came out in March, and it set the story in a New Zealand high school. A webseries adaptation was also released in July. It is entitled *A Bit Much*, and this series places the action in a present day summer camp. A rock opera variation of the play was also conceived, and Yale Repertory Theatre premiered the show, with music written by Billie Joe Armstrong, guitarist and vocalist for the band Green Day.

# The Play in Performance

While no exact premiere date for *Much Ado About Nothing* is noted, it was known that by 1600 the play had been performed several times and had become immensely popular. Historians believe the opening of the play to have been between about 1598 and 1599. There is evidence of productions being done at the court of King James I around 1613, and King Charles I was a huge fan of the play.

*Much Ado About Nothing's* popularity continued into the 18th century, with famous actor David Garrick playing Benedick numerous times between 1748 and 1776, the role which many perceived to be his greatest. In the 19th century, the duo of Henry Irving and Ellen Terry took on the roles of Beatrice and Benedick, proving that across decades, the story of these two bickering lovers was still captivating to audiences.

More modern productions of the play include A.J. Antoon's 1972 adaptation, which was the longest Broadway production in history. In 2011, David Tennant (The 10th Doctor in *Doctor Who*) took stage in London as Benedick, alongside his *Doctor Who* co-star, Catherine Tate, in a 1980s rendition of the play. Tennant's performance received quite a bit of praise, and the production was recorded and is available for viewing by the public.

In a somewhat interesting casting choice, both Vanessa Redgrave (Max in *Mission: Impossible*) and James Earl Jones (voice of Darth Vader in the original *Star Wars* trilogy) took on the roles of Beatrice and Benedick in 2013, with both actors in their seventies and eighties. The production was not received well by critics, but having the roles of Beatrice and Benedick coveted by the most celebrated of actors merely proves the weight this story has held over time.



Ellen Terry as Beatrice

**She speaks poniards, and every word stabs; if her breath were as terrible as her terminations, there were no living near her; she would infect to the north star.**

**Act 2, Scene 1**

# Elizabethan Marriage Customs

Dating, relationships, and marriage have changed a lot in the 400 years since Shakespeare was writing. Evidence of this can be found in *Much Ado About Nothing* and other Shakespeare plays. We have laws about marriage now, but in Shakespeare's time, they had laws about dating and engagements, too! Along with the numerous laws, there were strict customs and expectations to adhere to, so there wasn't much place for romance.

Weddings often served as business arrangements; families would marry off their children to strengthen their social position. Fathers were allowed to marry off their daughters when they were just seven years old, and at 12, a girl could consent to marriage on her own. It was legal for boys to marry at 14, but most Elizabethan men would not marry until they'd reached the age of consent which was 21. Arranged marriages were common and in many circumstances, the bride and groom would not meet until their wedding day.



During the engagement or betrothal period, the bride and groom's families would carefully negotiate the terms of the "dowry," a gift of money or property, which the bride's family was expected to pay the groom. This dowry offered the wife stability if her husband predeceased her, because after they were married, the wife became his property. Betrothals could be terminated for a variety of reasons: heresy or apostasy, infidelity, serious physical disfigurement, discovery of previous marriage contracts, wickedness or drunkenness, or a long separation of the couple.

On the morning of the wedding, people would gather at the bride's home before heading to the church. The wedding ceremony itself was solemn, but afterwards, there would be dancing, drinking, and feasting; the guests would continue to celebrate even after the bride and groom departed. The white dresses we know today did not exist in the Elizabethan era. Upper class women would wear their best gowns- or new ones if they could afford it- and sometimes a cloak, while the lower class women would wear dresses made from cotton or wool and tie flowers into their hair. Men would wear a suit that consisted of a doublet, a jerkin and a hose along with a cloak and hat.

Marriage for royals was usually a necessity. While there weren't any laws mandating it, marriage was a political matter and one way countries made alliances. Queen Elizabeth I, however, never married- that is how she came to be called the "Virgin Queen." She had plenty of offers, but she famously declared she was married to her country and England was her first priority. Queen Elizabeth's refusal to marry was likely because she enjoyed her power and direct involvement in the government, and a marriage would have diminished both considerably. She used the possibility of marriage as a diplomatic tactic for decades, but ultimately ruled alone for the entirety of her reign.

Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway on November 28, 1582, when she was 26 and he was 18. Since Shakespeare was below the age of consent, he had to get his parents' permission before he could go through with the wedding. The couple paid 40 pounds for their marriage license in Stratford-upon-Avon. They had three children together, but Shakespeare's playwriting career kept them apart for many years. In his will, he famously left Anne just one thing- his "second best bed."

## Malapropisms

Miscommunication is a major plot-driver in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Hero and Claudio's marriage is almost foiled by it, a clever miscommunication causes Beatrice and Benedick to fall in love, and the local constable, Dogberry, can't ever seem to say what he means. **Malapropisms**, or outrageous misuses of words, especially words that sound alike, abound whenever Dogberry is around. He is the clown of the play. In his effort to use the heightened language of his more educated contemporaries, Dogberry insults people when he intends to compliment them, and compliments them when he intends to insult them. Listen for mix-ups like "You are thought to be the most senseless (instead of sensible) and fit man for the constable for the watch," or "Villain! Thou will be condemned into everlasting redemption (instead of condemnation!) for this!" He is too confusing to be understood by Leonato, who impatiently dismisses Dogberry when he comes to warn the family about the plot against Hero.

The term malapropism was first used in reference to Richard Sheridan's play, *The Rivals*, which has a character named Mrs. Malaprop who would speak in a mixed-up vernacular. However, Shakespeare's misuse of words in *Much Ado About Nothing* was known as "dogberryisms" to crowds of the 1500s, and therefore he can lay claim to the use of malapropisms before they became a standard literary device.

## Cuckolds



The characters in *Much Ado About Nothing* place a great deal of importance on male honor and pride. For characters like Count Claudio, social standing is key, and being considered "unmanly" is the worst insult a man can receive. Throughout the play, you will hear the men mocking one another, making reference to horns or being cuckolded. A **cuckold** is a man whose wife has been unfaithful towards him, and to show his shame, he wears a pair of horns on his head. This term comes from the cuckoo bird, as some species lay their eggs in the nests of other birds, and the imagery of the horns or antlers comes from male deer ("stags"), who lose their mates when they lose a confrontation with another male.

While the term is used in the play as a good natured jest, it was a real fear for the men of that time. When Claudio believes Hero has been unfaithful, his pride is wounded, as his entire worth is wrapped up in his social honor. Marrying an unfaithful woman would have made him a cuckold, and therefore an object of ridicule to his friend and superiors.



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