Much Ado About Nothing

Story by
William Shakespeare

Edit by
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Much Ado About Nothing

**Cast:** Seattle Children’s Theatre performed the play with 14 actors.

There are twenty-three speaking parts, four female and nineteen male. Even with doubling, it takes about a dozen actors minimum to do this version.

Hero, daughter of Leonato  
Beatrice, niece to Leonato  
Margaret, a gentlewoman attending on Hero  
Ursula, a gentlewoman attending on Hero

Don Pedro, prince of Arragon  
Don John, his bastard brother  
Claudio, a young lord of Florence, marries Hero  
Benedick, a young lord of Padua, marries Beatrice  
Leonato, governor of Messina  
Antonio, Leonato’s brother  
Balthasar, attendant on Don Pedro  
Conrade, follower of Don John  
Borachio, follower of Don John  
Friar Francis  
Dogberry, a constable  
Verges, a headborough  
Sexton  
Boy

Lord  
Messenger  
Watchman  
First Watchman  
Second Watchman

**Setting:** Messina. The conventional scene divisions and locations have been put in for reference, but this play actually comes close to observing the unity of place; almost all of it happens on Leonato’s estate, and the action should be continuous.
ACT I, SCENE ONE, BEFORE LEONATO’S HOUSE
Enter LEONATO, HERO, and BEATRICE, with a Messenger

LEONATO
Don Pedro of Arragon comes this night?

Messenger
He is very near.

LEONATO
I find here that Don Pedro hath bestowed much honor on young Claudio.

Messenger
He hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age, doing, in the figure of a lamb, the feats of a lion.

BEATRICE
I pray you, is Signior Mountanto returned from the wars or no?

Messenger
I know none of that name, lady.

HERO
My cousin means Signior Benedick.

Messenger
O, he's returned.

BEATRICE
I pray you, how many hath he killed in these wars? For indeed I promised to eat all of his killing.

Messenger
He hath done good service, lady, in these wars.

LEONATO
You must not, sir, mistake my niece. There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signior Benedick and her: they never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them.

BEATRICE
Who is his companion now? He hath every month a new sworn brother.

Messenger
He is most in the company of the right noble Claudio.
BEATRICE
God help the noble Claudio! If he have caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand pound ere he be cured.

Messenger
Don Pedro is approached.

Enter DON PEDRO, DON JOHN, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, and BALTHASAR

DON PEDRO
Good Signior Leonato

LEONATO
Your grace.

DON PEDRO
This is your daughter?

LEONATO
Her mother hath many times told me so.

BENEDICK
Were you in doubt, sir, that you asked her?

BEATRICE
I wonder that you will be talking, Signior Benedick: nobody marks you.

BENEDICK
What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?

BEATRICE
I wonder that you will be talking, Signior Benedick: nobody marks you.

BENEDICK
What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?

BEATRICE
Is it possible disdain should die while she hath such food to feed it as Signior Benedick?

BENEDICK
I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted: and truly, I love none.

BEATRICE
A dear happiness to women: I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.

BENEDICK
God keep your ladyship still in that mind!
DON PEDRO
Signior Claudio and Signior Benedick, my dear friend Leonato hath invited you all. I tell him we shall stay here at the least a month.

LEONATO
To DON JOHN
Let me bid you welcome, my lord: being reconciled to the prince your brother, I owe you all duty.

DON JOHN
I thank you: I am not of many words, but I thank you.

Exeunt all except BENEDICK and CLAUDIO

CLAUDIO
Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of Signior Leonato?

BENEDICK
I looked on her.

CLAUDIO
I pray thee speak in sober judgment.

BENEDICK
Would you buy her, that you inquire after her?

CLAUDIO
Can the world buy such a jewel?

BENEDICK
Yea, and a case to put it into.

CLAUDIO
In mine eye she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on.

BENEDICK
I can see without spectacles and I see no such matter: I hope you have no intent to turn husband, have you?

CLAUDIO
If Hero would be my wife.

BENEDICK
Is it come to this? Go to, in faith; if thou wilt needs thrust thy neck into a yoke, wear the print of it and sigh away Sundays.
Re-enter DON PEDRO

DON PEDRO
What secret hath held you here, that you followed not?

BENEDICK
He is in love. With Hero, Leonato's daughter.

CLAUDIO
That I love her, I feel.

DON PEDRO
That she is worthy, I know.

BENEDICK
That I neither feel how she should be loved nor know how she should be worthy, is the opinion that I will die in at the stake.

DON PEDRO
Thou wast ever an obstinate heretic in the face of beauty.

BENEDICK
That a woman conceived me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks: but I will live a bachelor.

DON PEDRO
I shall see thee, ere I die, look pale with love.

BENEDICK
With anger, with sickness, or with hunger, my lord, not with love.

DON PEDRO
'In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke.'

BENEDICK
The savage bull may; but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it, pluck off the bull's horns and set them in my forehead: and let me be vilely painted, and in great letters write 'Here you may see Benedick the married man.'

Exit
DON PEDRO
Dost thou affect her, Claudio?

CLAUDIO
O, my lord, now that war-thoughts
Have left their places vacant, in their rooms
Come thronging soft and delicate desires.

DON PEDRO
If thou dost love fair Hero, cherish it,
I know we shall have revelling to-night:
I will assume thy part in some disguise
And tell fair Hero I am Claudio,
And in her bosom I'll unclasp my heart
And take her hearing prisoner with the force
And strong encounter of my amorous tale:
Then after to her father will I break;
And the conclusion is, she shall be thine.
In practice let us put it presently.

Exeunt

ACT I, SCENE THREE, A ROOM IN LEONATO’S HOUSE
Enter DON JOHN and CONRADE

CONRADE
My lord! Why are you sad?

DON JOHN
I cannot hide what I am: I must be sad when I have cause.

CONRADE
Yea, but you must not make the full show of this. You have of late stood out against your brother, and he hath taken you newly into his grace.

DON JOHN
I had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in his grace. I am trusted with a muzzle. If I had my mouth, I would bite.

CONRADE
Can you make no use of your discontent?

DON JOHN
Who comes here?

Enter BORACHIO
What news, Borachio?

BORACHIO
I can give you intelligence of an intended marriage.

DON JOHN
What is the fool that betroths himself to unquietness?

BORACHIO
Marry, it is your brother's right hand.

DON JOHN
Who? The most exquisite Claudio?

BORACHIO
Even he.

DON JOHN
And who, and who? which way looks he?

BORACHIO
Marry, on Hero, the daughter and heir of Leonato.

DON JOHN
How came you to this?

BORACHIO
I heard it agreed upon that the prince should woo Hero, and having obtained her, give her to Count Claudio.

DON JOHN
Come, come, let us thither. That young start-up hath all the glory of my overthrow: if I can cross him any way, I bless myself every way. You both will assist me?

CONRADE
To the death, my lord.

Exeunt

ACT II, SCENE ONE, A HALL IN LEONATO’S HOUSE
Enter LEONATO, ANTONIO, HERO, BEATRICE, and others
LEONATO
Was not Count John here at supper?

ANTONIO
I saw him not.

BEATRICE
How tartly that gentleman looks! I never can see him but I am heart-burned an hour after.

LEONATO
By my troth, niece, thou wilt never get thee a husband, if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue.

BEATRICE
Lord, I could not endure a husband with a beard on his face.

LEONATO
You may light on a husband that hath no beard.

BEATRICE
What should I do with him? He that hath no beard is less than a man: and he that is less than a man, I am not for him.

LEONATO
The revellers are entering, brother.

_All put on their masks_

Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, BALTHASAR, DON JOHN, BORACHIO, MARGARET, URSULA and others, masked

DON PEDRO
Lady, will you walk about with your friend?

HERO
So you walk softly and look sweetly, I am yours for the walk.

_Drawing her aside_

BALTHASAR
Well, I would you did like me.

MARGARET
So would not I, for your own sake; for I have many ill qualities.
BALTHASAR

Which is one?

MARGARET

I say my prayers aloud.

BALTHASAR

I love you the better: the hearers may cry, Amen.

MARGARET

God match me with a good dancer!

BALTHASAR

Amen.

MARGARET

And God keep him out of my sight when the dance is done!

No more words.

BEATRICE

Will you not tell me who told you so?

BENEDICK

No, you shall pardon me.

BEATRICE

That I was disdainful, and that I had my wit out of a book—well, this was Signior Benedick that said so.

BENEDICK

What's he?

BEATRICE

I am sure you know him well enough.

BENEDICK

Not I, believe me.

BEATRICE

Why, he is the prince's jester: a very dull fool; his gift is in devising impossible slanders: he both pleases men and angers them, and then they laugh at him and beat him. I am sure he is in the fleet: I would he had boarded me.
BENEDICK

When I know the gentleman, I'll tell him what you say.

   Dance. Then exeunt all except DON JOHN, BORACHIO, and CLAUDIO

DON JOHN

I’ll say my brother is amorous on Hero and hath withdrawn her father to break with him about it.

BORACHIO

That is Claudio: I know him by his bearing.

DON JOHN

Are not you Signior Benedick?

CLAUDIO

You know me well; I am he.

DON JOHN

Signior, you are very near my brother in his love: he is enamored on Hero; I pray you, dissuade him from her: she is no equal for his birth.

CLAUDIO

How know you he loves her?

DON JOHN

I heard him swear his affection.

BORACHIO

So did I too; and he swore he would marry her tonight.

DON JOHN

Come, let us to the banquet.

   Exeunt DON JOHN and BORACHIO

CLAUDIO

Thus answer I in the name of Benedick, But hear these ill news with the ears of Claudio. 'Tis certain so; the prince woos for himself. Farewell, therefore, Hero!

Re-enter BENEDICK

BENEDICK

Count Claudio?
CLAUDIO

Yea, the same.

BENEDICK

The prince hath got your Hero.

CLAUDIO

I wish him joy of her.

BENEDICK

Why, that’s spoken like a drover: so they sell bullocks. But did you think the prince would serve you thus?

CLAUDIO

I pray you, leave me.

Exit

Re-enter DON PEDRO

DON PEDRO

Now, signior, where's the count? Did you see him?

BENEDICK

I found him here as melancholy as a rabbit in a warren: I told him, and I think I told him true, that your grace had got the good will of this young lady; but you, he takes it, have stolen his birds' nest.

DON PEDRO

I will but teach them to sing, and restore them to the owner. The Lady Beatrice hath a quarrel to you: the gentleman that danced with her told her she is much wronged by you.

BENEDICK

O, she misused me past the endurance of a block! She told me, not thinking I had been myself, that I was the prince's jester. I would not marry her, though she were endowed with --

DON PEDRO

Look, here she comes.

Enter CLAUDIO, BEATRICE, HERO, and LEONATO
BENEDICK
Will your grace command me any service to the world's end? I will fetch you a toothpick now from the furthest inch of Asia. You have no employment for me?

DON PEDRO
None, but to desire your good company.

BENEDICK
O God, sir, here's a dish I love not: I cannot endure my Lady Tongue.

Exit

DON PEDRO
Come, lady, come; you have lost the heart of Signior Benedick.

BEATRICE
I have brought Count Claudio, whom you sent me to seek.

DON PEDRO
Why, how now, count! Wherefore are you sad?

CLAUDIO
Not sad, my lord.

DON PEDRO
How then? Sick?

CLAUDIO
Neither, my lord.

BEATRICE
The count is neither sad, nor sick, nor merry, nor well; but civil, count, civil as an orange, and something of that jealous complexion.

DON PEDRO
Claudio, I have wooed in thy name, and fair Hero is won: I have broke with her father, and his good will obtained: name the day of marriage, and God give thee joy!

LEONATO
Count, take of me my daughter, and with her my fortunes.

BEATRICE
Speak, count, 'tis your cue.
CLAUDIO
Silence is the perfectest herald of joy. Lady, as you are mine, I am yours:

BEATRICE
Speak, cousin; or, if you cannot, stop his mouth with a kiss, and let not him speak neither.

DON PEDRO
In faith, lady, you have a merry heart.

BEATRICE
Yea, my lord; I thank it, poor fool; it keeps on the windy side of care. My cousin tells him in his ear that he is in her heart.

CLAUDIO
And so she doth, cousin.

BEATRICE
Good Lord, for alliance! Thus goes every one to the world but I; I may sit in a corner and cry heigh-ho for a husband!

DON PEDRO
Lady Beatrice, I will get you one.

BEATRICE
I would rather have one of your father's getting. Hath your grace ne'er a brother like you? Your father got excellent husbands, if a maid could come by them.

DON PEDRO
Will you have me, lady?

BEATRICE
No, my lord, unless I might have another for working days: your grace is too costly to wear every day. But, I beseech your grace, pardon me: I was born to speak all mirth and no matter.

DON PEDRO
Out of question, you were born in a merry hour.

BEATRICE
No, sure, my lord, my mother cried; but then there was a star danced, and under that was I born. Cousins, God give you joy!
DON PEDRO
By my troth, a pleasant-spirited lady.

LEONATO
She is never sad but when she sleeps, for I have heard my daughter say, she hath often dreamed of unhappiness and waked herself with laughing.

DON PEDRO
She were an excellent wife for Benedict.

LEONATO
O Lord, my lord, if they were but a week married, they would talk themselves mad.

DON PEDRO
County Claudio, when mean you to go to church?

CLAUDIO
Tomorrow, my lord.

LEONATO
Not till Monday, my dear son, which is hence just seven-night.

DON PEDRO
I warrant thee, Claudio, the time shall not go dully by us. I will in the interim undertake to bring Signior Benedick and the Lady Beatrice into a mountain of affection the one with the other, if you three will but minister such assistance as I shall give you direction.

LEONATO
My lord, I am for you.

CLAUDIO
And I, my lord.

DON PEDRO
And you too, gentle Hero?

HERO
I will do any modest office, my lord, to help my cousin to a good husband.
DON PEDRO
I will teach you how to humour your cousin, that she shall fall in love with Benedick; and I, with your two helps, will so practice on Benedick that, in despite of his quick wit, he shall fall in love with Beatrice. If we can do this, Cupid is no longer an archer: his glory shall be ours, for we are the only love-gods.

Exeunt

ACT II, SCENE TWO, LEONATO’S HOUSE
Enter DON JOHN and BORACHIO

DON JOHN
It is so; the Count Claudio shall marry the daughter of Leonato.

BORACHIO
Yea, my lord; but I can cross it.

DON JOHN
Show me how.

BORACHIO
I think I told your lordship, how much I am in the favour of Margaret, the waiting gentlewoman to Hero.

DON JOHN
I remember.

BORACHIO
I can, at any unseasonable instant of the night, appoint her to look out at her lady’s chamber window.

DON JOHN
What life is in that, to be the death of this marriage?

BORACHIO
Draw Don Pedro and the Count Claudio alone. Tell them that you know that Hero loves me. They will see me at her chamber-window, hear me call Margaret Hero, hear Margaret term me Claudio; and bring them to see this the very night before the intended wedding.

DON JOHN
Be cunning in working this, and thy fee is a thousand ducats.
Enter BENEDICK

BENEDICK
Claudio was wont to speak plain and to the purpose, like an honest man and a soldier; and now his words are a very fantastical banquet. May I be so converted? I think not: till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace. Rich she shall be, that's certain; wise, or I'll none; virtuous, or I'll never cheapen her; fair, or I'll never look on her; mild, or come not near me; noble, or not I for an angel; of good discourse, an excellent musician, and her hair shall be of what colour it please God. Ha! The prince and Monsieur Love! I will hide me in the arbor.

Withdraws

Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, and LEONATO

DON PEDRO
Come hither, Leonato. What was it you told me of today, that your niece Beatrice was in love with Signior Benedick?

CLAUDIO
I did never think that lady would have loved any man.

LEONATO
No, nor I neither; but most wonderful that she should so dote on Signior Benedick.

BENEDICK
Is it possible?

DON PEDRO
You amaze me: I would have I thought her spirit had been invincible against all assaults of affection.

LEONATO
I would have sworn it had, my lord; especially against Benedick.

CLAUDIO
He hath taken the infection: hold it up.
DON PEDRO
Hath she made her affection known to Benedick?

LEONATO
No; and swears she never will: that's her torment.

CLAUDIO
'Tis true, indeed; so your daughter says: 'Shall I,' says she, 'that have so oft encountered him with scorn, write to him that I love him?'

LEONATO
'I measure him,' says she, 'by my own spirit; for I should flout him, if he writ to me; yea, though I love him, I should.'

CLAUDIO
Then down upon her knees she falls, weeps, sobs, beats her heart, tears her hair, prays, curses; 'O sweet Benedick! God give me patience!'

LEONATO
She doth indeed; my daughter says so: my daughter is sometime afeared she will do a desperate outrage to herself: it is very true.

DON PEDRO
It were good that Benedick knew of it.

CLAUDIO
He would make but a sport of it and torment the poor lady worse.

DON PEDRO
She's an excellent sweet lady; and, out of all suspicion, she is virtuous.

CLAUDIO
And she is exceeding wise.

DON PEDRO
In every thing but in loving Benedick.

LEONATO
I am sorry for her, being her uncle and her guardian.

DON PEDRO
I would she had bestowed this dotage on me: 'tis very possible he'll scorn her love; for the man, as you know all, hath a contemptible spirit.

CLAUDIO
He is a very proper man.

DON PEDRO
Well I am sorry for your niece. I love Benedick well; and I could wish he would modestly examine himself, to see how much he is unworthy so good a lady.

LEONATO
My lord, dinner is ready.

CLAUDIO
If he do not dote on her upon this, I will never trust my expectation.

DON PEDRO
Let there be the same net spread for her; and that must your daughter and her gentlewomen carry. Let us send her to call him in to dinner.

_Exeunt DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, and LEONATO_

BENEDICK
[Coming forward] This can be no trick: the conference was sadly borne. Love me! Why, it must be requited. I did never think to marry: I must not seem proud: happy are they that hear their detractions and can put them to mending. They say the lady is fair and virtuous; 'tis so, I cannot reprove it; and wise, but for loving me; by my troth, it is no addition to her wit, nor no great argument of her folly, for I will be horribly in love with her. I have railed so long against marriage: but doth not the appetite alter? A man loves the meat in his youth that he cannot endure in his age. The world must be peopled. When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married. Here comes Beatrice. By this day! she's a fair lady: I do spy some marks of love in her.

_Enter BEATRICE_

BEATRICE
Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner.
BENEDICK
Fair Beatrice, I thank you for your pains.

BEATRICE
If it had been painful, I would not have come: fare you well.

Exit

BENEDICK
Ha! 'Against my will I am sent to bid you come in to dinner;' there's a double meaning in that. If I do not take pity of her, I am a villain.

Exit

ACT III, SCENE ONE, LEONATO’S GARDEN
Enter HERO, MARGARET, and URSULA, BEATRICE behind

HERO
No, truly, Ursula, she is too disdainful. I know her spirits are as coy and wild as haggards of the rock.

URSULA
But are you sure that Benedick loves Beatrice so entirely?

HERO
So says the prince and my new-trothed lord.

URSULA
And did they bid you tell her of it, madam?

HERO
They did entreat me to acquaint her of it; But I persuaded them, if they loved Benedick, To never to let Beatrice know of it.

URSULA
Why did you so?

HERO
Nature never framed a woman's heart Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice; Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes, Misprising what they look on, and her wit Values itself so highly that to her All matter else seems weak: she cannot love.
URSULA
Sure, I think so;  
And therefore certainly it were not good  
She knew his love, lest she make sport at it.

HERO
Why, you speak truth. I never yet saw man,  
How wise, how noble, young, how rarely featured,  
But she would spell him backward: if fair-faced,  
She would swear the gentleman should be her sister;  
If speaking, why, a vane blown with all winds;  
If silent, why, a block moved with none.  
So turns she every man the wrong side out.

URSULA
Sure, sure, such carping is not commendable.

HERO
But who dare tell her so? If I should speak,  
She would mock me into air;  
Therefore let Benedick, like covered fire,  
Consume away in sighs, waste inwardly:

URSULA
Yet tell her of it: hear what she will say.

HERO
No; rather I will go to Benedick  
And counsel him to fight against his passion.

URSULA
O, do not do your cousin such a wrong.  
She cannot be so much without true judgment--as to refuse  
So rare a gentleman as Signior Benedick.

HERO
He is the only man of Italy.  
Always excepted my dear Claudio.

URSULA
When are you married, madam?
HERO
Why, every day, to-morrow. Come, go in:
I'll show thee some attires, and have thy counsel
Which is the best to furnish me to-morrow.

URSULA
I warrant you: we have caught her, madam.

Exeunt HERO and URSULA

BEATRICE
[Coming forward]
What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?
Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?
Contempt, farewell! And maiden pride, adieu!
And, Benedick, love on; I will requite thee,
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand:
If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee
To bind our loves up in a holy band;
For others say thou dost deserve, and I
Believe it better than reportingly.

Exit

ACT III, SCENE TWO, LEONATO’S HOUSE
Enter DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, and LEONATO

DON PEDRO
I do but stay till your marriage be consummate, and then go I
toward Arragon.

CLAUDIO
I'll bring you thither, my lord.

DON PEDRO
Nay, that would be as great a soil in the new gloss of your
marriage as to show a child his new coat and forbid him to wear
it. I will only be bold with Benedick for his company; he hath a
heart as sound as a bell.

BENEDICK
Gallants, I am not as I have been.

LEONATO
So say I; methinks you are sadder.