

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Character Notes

DON PEDRO, PRINCE OF ARAGON

The most powerful person in the play both socially and politically. His opinion is highly sought and respected. Don Pedro is the consummate gentleman but also a widely respected soldier who shows no mercy to those who find themselves against him. Don Pedro is an old friend of Leonato, Hero's father, and is also close to the soldiers he leads, such as Benedick and Claudio. Don Pedro coordinates the whole plot to unite Benedick and Beatrice and also involves himself in Claudio's advances to Hero. This could be played as a result of his brotherly relationships with Benedick and Claudio or simply because he wants to be at the centre of the action. He is the only one of the three bachelors who does not find a wife by the end of the play.

DON JOHN, HIS BASTARD BROTHER

Don Pedro's illegitimate brother. Don John is morose and jealous of his brother's superior social position which he cannot attain due to the circumstances of his birth which make him an outcast from Messina's high society. His bitterness propels Don John to attack others' joy. He tries to make others as miserable as him, which is why he sets out to destroy Hero and Claudio's relationship.

CLAUDIO, A YOUNG LORD OF FLORENCE

A young man who has become renowned as a great soldier during the recent wars. Claudio falls in love with Hero while on leave in Messina. However, he has a proud, jealous and untrusting nature that causes him unnecessary grief. He believes the slanderous gossip about Hero and takes a spiteful revenge.

BENEDICK, A YOUNG LORD OF PADUA

A witty bachelor who swears at the beginning of the play that he will never marry or fall in love. Benedick is aristocratic and therefore closer to the Prince in social position than Claudio, but close friends with them both. They all fought together as soldiers in the recent wars. Throughout the play Benedick cracks jokes and banters with Beatrice, constantly trying to outdo her with verbal jousting.

LEONATO, GOVERNOR OF MESSINA

An elderly noble and a pillar of the community in Messina, whose estate provides the setting of the play. Leonato is Hero's father and Beatrice's uncle. As governor of Messina, he is second in social power only to Don Pedro.

ANTONIO, HIS BROTHER

Leonato's elderly brother, and uncle to Hero and Beatrice.

HERO, DAUGHTER OF LEONATO

Leonato's beautiful young daughter and Beatrice's younger cousin. Hero is demure, sweet-natured and kindhearted. She falls in love with Claudio, but is wrongly accused of an affair by Don John. This causes Claudio to take revenge, which is devastating for Hero. On advice from the Friar, she fakes her own death whilst her name is cleared, and is happily reunited with Claudio at the end of the play.

BEATRICE, NIECE TO LEONATO

Leonato's niece and Hero's cousin. Beatrice is a fun-spirited, unmarried woman who is renowned in the Messina community for her verbal wit. She is a loyal and loving friend and cousin but shares Benedick's tendency to mock other people with teasing jokes. She is constantly pitting herself against Benedick in wars of wit which she often wins. She appears not to care about being unmarried at the beginning of the play but consents to marry Benedick by the end.

MARGARET, GENTLEWOMAN ATTENDING ON HERO

Hero's serving woman and Borachio's lover. Margaret is fun-loving and has a risqué sense of humour – often lowering the tone with bawdy jokes. She is honest and loyal to her mistress. Margaret was born into Messina's lower class. Via her lover, Borachio, she still has some dealings with the underworld led by Don John. She unknowingly helps Don John and Borachio deceive Claudio into thinking that Hero is unfaithful.

URSULA, GENTLEWOMAN ATTENDING ON HERO

A genteel lady who is one of Hero's waiting women.

CONRADE, A FOLLOWER OF DON JOHN

One of Don John's closest allies and a fellow outcast. Conrade does his utmost to help Don John in his wicked schemes against Messina's aristocracy.

BORACHIO, A FOLLOWER OF DON JOHN

Borachio means 'drunkard' in Italian, which might be Shakespeare's hint to the actor playing him! He is one of Don John's low-brow associates and Margaret's lover. Borachio is untrustworthy and easily bribed. He plots with Don John to trick Claudio and Don Pedro into thinking that Hero is unfaithful.

FRIAR FRANCIS

A wise and intuitive old priest who counsels Leonato and devises the plan to fake Hero's death.

DOGBERRY¹, A MASTER CONSTABLE

The chief constable of Messina. Dogberry is very earnest and takes his job seriously. However, he has delusions of grandeur to rise above his middleclass station, which cause him to use elaborate language he does not understand. He ends up being the butt of many jokes when he uses the wrong word to express himself.

VERGES, A PETTY CONSTABLE

Dogberry's deputy. Unlike his boss, Verges has no aspiration to rise above his station. Possibly because he is not intelligent enough to aspire beyond staying on the right side of Dogberry!

¹ Dogberry and Verges have become a famous comic duo. Dogberry is large, rotund and an overbearing know-all, Verges is a small, wizened, modest incompetent.