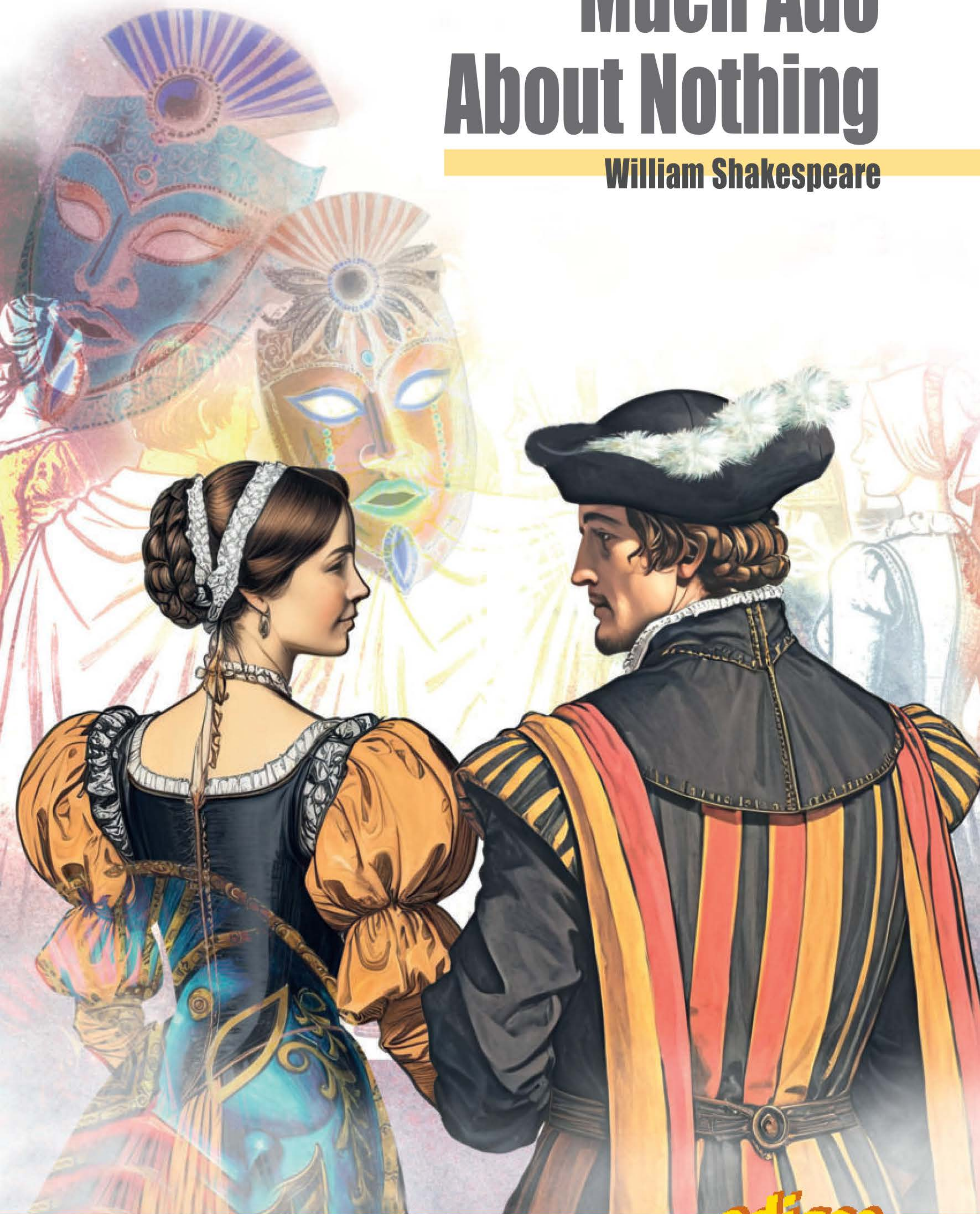




Much Ado About Nothing

William Shakespeare





R A I N B O W S

William Shakespeare

Much Ado About Nothing

Adaptation, dossiers and activities by
Cristina Gioli



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The Author

William Shakespeare



LIFE

William Shakespeare, who is considered the greatest writer and playwright¹ in the English language, was born in Stratford upon Avon, in central England. Not much is known about his life; what we know for certain comes from the parish² registers of Stratford – which have records of baptism³, marriage, and burial⁴ – his will⁵, the comments of his contemporaries, and the registers of the court. These contain the records of all the performances of his

company in front of Queen Elizabeth I, and later of King James I.

He was baptised in Stratford on 26th April 1564 and was buried there on 25th April 1616. Traditionally, however, the date of his birth is taken to be 23rd April 1564⁶. He was the son of John Shakespeare, a wealthy maker of gloves and merchant, and of Mary Arden, the daughter of a rich farmer in a nearby village.

At the time, Stratford was an important commercial centre with a good Grammar School whose teachers were all Oxford graduates. This was free for all male children from the age of seven to fourteen, although the poor ones, who generally had to work, rarely attended it. Even though there are no records of it, it is reasonable to think that Shakespeare was a pupil there. Grammar Schools mainly taught Latin, Rhetoric⁷, Logic⁸, and the works of the most important Latin authors, such as Virgil, Horace, and Ovid. The influence of the classical authors

1. *playwright*: a person who writes plays.
2. *parish*: a small administrative district having its own church and priest.
3. *baptism*: a religious ceremony in which people have water poured on their head to show that they have become part of the Christian Church.
4. *burial*: the act and ceremony of putting a dead body into the ground.
5. *will*: an official document in which a person declares what should be done with his property after his death.
6. *23rd April 1564*: baptisms usually took place within three days of

a new birth, and parents were instructed to ensure that their children were baptised no later than the first Sunday after birth. So it's unlikely that Shakespeare was born any earlier than the previous Sunday, 23 April. Three days is a reasonable interval between birth and baptism, so 23 April has come to be celebrated as his birthday.

7. *Rhetoric*: the art of using language effectively.
8. *Logic*: the study of reasoning in the correct way.

is clearly evident in Shakespeare's works, so he must have known them well. On the contrary, he probably knew little or no Greek, and never went to university.

When he was eighteen, in 1582, he married Ann Hathaway, who was eight years older than him. He probably married her because she was pregnant; in fact, six months after their marriage they had their first child, Susan, followed three years later by twins, Judith and Hamnet. Hamnet died when he was only eleven years old.

After this, nothing is known for certain about Shakespeare's life until 1592, when he was already at the centre of London theatrical life. We can be sure of it because, in that year, Robert Greene, another playwright who was evidently jealous of him, attacked him in a pamphlet⁹.

Why he left Stratford and what he did during those years is unknown. A common story, however, is that he had to escape in order to avoid punishment for poaching¹⁰ deer¹¹ on the land of a local landowner. According to another story, he left in order to follow a company of actors who had performed in Stratford.

It seems that in London he did many jobs, from schoolmaster to actor. What is certain is that in 1593 he published a poem, *Venus and Adonis*, dedicated to his patron¹², the Earl of Southampton. The poem was successful, and he became a well-known poet.

In 1595 he joined the **Lord Chamberlain's Men**, both as an actor and a playwright. That was one of the most important companies of actors in London which performed also at court, in front of the queen and nobles.

His fame and importance as a dramatist grew with time. Unlike the other playwrights of the moment, he also grew rich by becoming a shareholder¹³ in the Globe Theatre, where the company performed. He was able to buy lands and properties in Stratford and, in 1611, when he retired, he went to live there, in 'New Place', the finest house in town, where he died in 1616.

9. *pamphlet*: a very small book containing information or opinions about something.

10. *to poach*: to hunt and kill animals on somebody else's land without their permission.

11. *deer*: a large animal with four legs who eats grass and leaves. The males have big horns which look like branches.

12. *patron*: someone who supports a person, an activity, or an organisation, especially by giving money.

13. *shareholder*: someone who owns some of the parts a company is divided into, so that they also get some of its profits.

WORKS

Shakespeare wrote 38 plays (both comedies and tragedies), 154 sonnets¹⁴, two narrative poems, and several other poems.

Many of his works are called **historical plays** because they deal with historical figures and most have the name of an English King. Some examples are *Henry VI* (1589-91), *Richard III* (1592-93), and *Richard II* (1595-96). Although in those times the king was considered a sacred¹⁵ figure – God’s representative on earth – Shakespeare shows him more as a human being, often a tragic figure, with a complex and realistic personality which can be either good or bad, strong or weak.

The so-called **Roman plays**, such as *Titus Andronicus* (1592-1593), *Julius Caesar* (1599-1600), and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606-1607), also deal with tragic historical figures.

In the **comedies** there is an initial situation of harmony which, although it is broken by someone or by some event, is eventually re-established, so that there is a happy ending. The tone is light and humorous, even if the central theme is often serious. Among them are: *The Taming of the Shrew* (1593-1594), *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1595-1596), *Much Ado about nothing* (1598-1599), and *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-1597).

Mostly written between 1597 and 1608 are the so-called **great tragedies**. In these, Shakespeare expresses great pessimism¹⁶ concerning human nature and human fate. This was a dark period for him, probably as a consequence of his son Hamnet’s death in 1596, which is reflected in his works. These tragedies are *Hamlet* (1600-1601), *Othello* (1603), *King Lear* (1605-1606), and *Macbeth* (1605-1606).

In all of them, an initial situation of harmony is broken, with fatal consequences for all the characters, and the hero always dies. Among the tragedies, *Romeo and Juliet* (1594-1596) also has an important place; it was one of his early works and certainly one of the best known.



Romeo and Juliet by
Frank Dicksee, 1884

14. *sonnet*: a poem which has 14 lines and a fixed rhyme pattern.

15. *sacred*: deserving love and respect because connected with God.

16. *pessimism*: the attitude of seeing the worst and expecting the worst in every situation. From here the adjective “pessimistic”.

In the so-called **final plays**, the tone is less pessimistic and there is often a magical, supernatural element, that is why they are also called **romance plays**. The best known are *The Tempest* (1611) and *Cymbeline* (1609-1610). In these, the initial order is finally re-established with a happy ending and an act of forgiveness¹⁷.

Shakespeare's plays are written in blank verse, i.e. lines which do not rhyme¹⁸ but follow a regular pattern. Each line, in fact, consists of an iambic pentameter, i.e. five groups of two syllables, in which an unstressed one is followed by a stressed one.

Shakespeare did not bother to publish his plays. Some of them, however, were printed during his lifetime as cheap, maybe inaccurate booklets, which were often 'pirate' copies of his manuscripts. The first complete edition of his plays was the **First Folio**¹⁹, published in 1623 by two of his friends. It contained 36 plays and is the reference point for all critical works on Shakespeare.

Shakespeare is also famous for his **sonnets** – also written in iambic pentameters – produced between 1593 and 1600. They deal with various themes: love and the passing of time, beauty, and mortality²⁰ as opposed to the immortality of art.

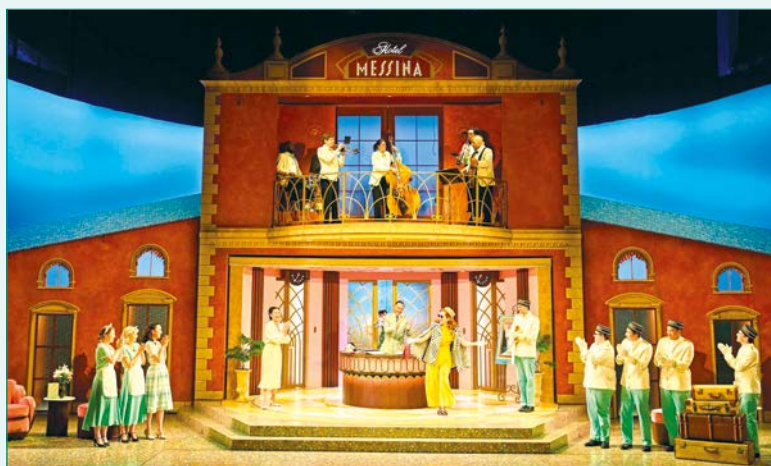
17. *forgiveness*: the act of forgiving.

18. *to rhyme*: to repeat the same last sound in different words.

19. *folio*: a folio was a book of great

dimensions in which the original sheet of paper was folded only once.

20. *mortality*: the fact that nobody lives forever.



A National Theatre production of *Much Ado About Nothing*



BEFORE READING

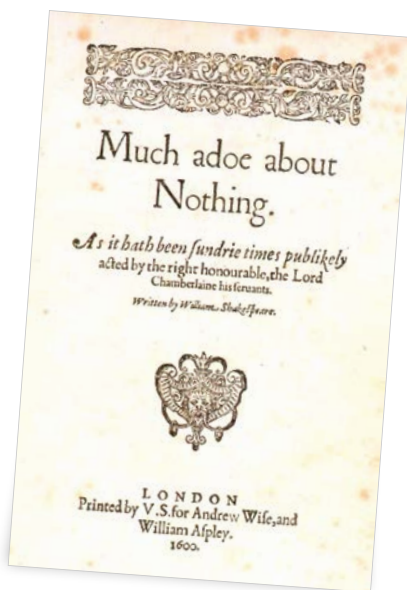


1 You are going to read an adaptation in prose of a play which was probably written between 1598 and 1599. Now listen to the beginning of the story and answer the questions.

- Who is Leonato?
- How are Beatrice and Hero different from each other?
- Who is Leonato waiting for?
- How far is Don Pedro from Messina when the messenger arrives?
- Who is Don Pedro bringing with him?
- How does the messenger describe Sir Benedick's character?
- Are Beatrice and Benedick kind to each other every time they meet?
- Who is Sir Benedick's best friend?
- Who is Don Juan?
- Was he always a good friend of his brother?

2 The picture you see here is the title page of the first quarto edition of *Much Adoe about Nothing*, which was published in 1600. Go online to look for the following information.

- What does the phrase *quarto edition* mean?
- What is the meaning of *Adoe*?
- The subtitle to the page quotes: "As it hath been sundrie times publikely acted by the right honourable, the Lord Chamberlaine his servants." Translate this sentence from 16th century English into modern English.
- Who was *the Lord Chamberlaine* and why is he quoted on the page?
- Who do you think his servants are?



Much Ado About Nothing

Someone falls in love



Chapter 1

Leonato, the governor of Messina, lived with his daughter Hero, his brother Antonio, and his niece, called Beatrice. Beatrice was very lively, clever, and witty¹, and liked to make jokes about people. Hero, on the contrary, was more serious, gentle, and quiet.

Leonato was waiting for the Prince of Aragon and other noblemen² to return from a war they had won. He was outside his house with his daughter and his niece when a messenger³ arrived and gave him a letter. He read it quickly and said,

“Don Pedro, the Prince of Aragon, writes that he’s coming to Messina tonight.”

“Oh, he must be very near by now. When I left him, he was only about five kilometres away,” the messenger said.

“Did you lose many men in this war?” Leonato asked him.

“No, only a few,” the messenger replied.

“Ah, that’s good news. It’s a double victory when all your soldiers come back! The letter also says that Don Pedro is bringing with him a young man from Florence called Claudio, someone he respects and loves very much.”

“Respect and love which he has well deserved. He is so young that no one would have expected him to do the great things he has done. He looks like a lamb, but fights like a lion,” the messenger said.

At that moment, Beatrice interrupted them.

“Excuse me, please, has also Sir Boastful⁴ returned from the war?” she asked.

“Who?”

Hero laughed and said,

“My cousin is joking. She means Sir Benedick of Padua.”

1. *witty*: a person who speaks in a clever and funny way.
2. *nobleman*: someone belonging to a high social class by birth.
3. *messenger*: someone who takes a

message from somebody to somebody else.

4. *boastful*: quality of someone who praises themselves and what they have done.

“Oh, he has returned, and he is as cheerful and witty as ever,” the messenger answered.

“Did he kill many men? I’m sure he didn’t,” said Beatrice, laughing.

“Sir Benedick is a brave, honest man, and he has fought very well in the war,” answered the messenger.

“Really, niece, I wonder why you always say unkind things about Sir Benedick! But I’m sure he’ll give you tit for tat⁵ when he arrives,” Leonato added.

He referred to the fact that Beatrice and Benedick, who knew each other well, started a sort of war made of witty remarks every time they met. It was like a game between them to see who was capable of insulting⁶ the other in the cleverest way.

“Tell me, who is his best friend now?” Beatrice also asked. “You know, he changes his best friends every month, as if they were hats that he replaces following new fashion trends.”

“Young Claudio is Sir Benedick’s best friend now,” answered the messenger.

“Oh, then God help poor Claudio. Benedick is like a disease. If you catch him, you can’t get rid of him,” Beatrice replied.

“These are hard words, my lady,” the messenger said. “I see I’d better have you as my friend rather than my enemy.”

“Please, do,” laughed Beatrice.

Don Pedro arrived shortly afterwards with Claudio, Benedick, and Don Juan, his illegitimate⁷ brother, who was a silent, unpleasant man. They had only recently made peace again after a period in which they had been bitter enemies.

“Good Sir Leonato, are you sure you want to have me and my friends as guests in your home? For a whole month? People usually try not to spend money, but you do the opposite!” said Don Pedro, greeting Leonato.

“It’s a joy to have you here, Don Pedro, and I’m glad to welcome your brother, too!” replied Leonato.

5. *tit for tat*: action done to punish someone who has done something unpleasant to you.

6. *to insult*: to say rude things meaning to hurt someone.

7. *illegitimate*: born of parents not married to each other.



Messina in the 16th century

The prince noticed Hero and said,

“I think this young lady must be your daughter.”

“At least this is what her mother has always told me, Your Grace⁸,” answered Leonato, who wanted to be funny.

“Do you have any doubts about it?” asked Benedick.

“Oh, no, Sir Benedick, because at the time you were only a child, too young to seduce⁹ my wife,” answered Leonato, joking about the reputation of his friend, who was known as a ladies’ man¹⁰.

Everybody laughed, then Leonato and Don Pedro started to talk among themselves, and the others moved away.

Benedick began to speak to one of his friends, but Beatrice interrupted him,

“I’m surprised that you’re still talking. Nobody is paying any attention to you,” she said.

“Oh, Lady Disdain¹¹, are you still alive?” he replied.

After which, they started their usual repartee¹² made of unkind witticisms¹³, and once again they insulted each other’s appearance, character, and intelligence.

“All the ladies love me, except you, but I don’t care, I don’t love any of them,” he said at one point.

To which she replied,

“Then those women are lucky because you would be a terrible lover. But in this I am like you, I couldn’t stand a man who is in love with me.”

“Let’s hope you don’t change your mind, my lady, so no gentleman will risk having his face scratched!” said Benedick.

Beatrice was going to reply, but she had to stop in the middle of a sentence because Leonato called her.

“Come, Beatrice, let’s go into the house,” he said, and then led her and his daughter inside. Don Pedro and Don Juan followed them.

8. *Your Grace*: expression used to address a duke or, in this case, a prince.

9. *to seduce*: to persuade someone to have sex with you.

10. *ladies’ man*: a man who is very interested in women and has many sexual partners.

11. *disdain*: the feeling of not liking or respecting someone or something.

12. *repartee*: quick, clever, and usually funny questions and answers in conversation.

13. *witticism*: a clever and humorous remark.



"Young Claudio is Sir Benedick's best friend now."
(from the 1993 film adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing*)

Benedick and Claudio remained alone in the courtyard. Claudio looked unusually serious.

"Benedick, did you notice Sir Leonato's daughter?" he asked.

"I saw her, but I didn't particularly 'notice' her," Benedick answered.

"Don't you think she is a very fine young lady?"

"Do you want me to say what you want to hear, or do you want an honest answer?"

"Please, give me an honest answer!" replied Claudio.

But Benedick wanted to joke with his friend, so he said that he did not like her, because she was short and ugly.

"Oh, come on!" said Claudio. "You think I'm joking, but I really need to know what you think of her."

"Why are you asking? Do you want to 'buy' her?" he joked.

"Nothing in the world would be enough to buy such a precious jewel! I don't mean to 'buy her', as you say, I mean to marry her!" answered Claudio passionately.

Thus, Benedick understood that Claudio was speaking seriously, and was quite shocked at the idea that his friend wanted to get married. He tried to convince him that Hero was no great beauty and even said that her cousin Beatrice was much prettier, 'if only she didn't have that terrible temper¹⁴ of hers!' Besides, according

14. *temper*: the state of mind of being calm (good temper) or becoming angry very easily (bad temper).

to him, getting married surely meant earning an unfaithful¹⁵ wife, and he did not want that for his friend.

He was still speaking when Don Pedro returned and saw them.

“I’d like to know what secrets you are telling each other. We were waiting for you inside,” he said.

“I can’t tell you, your Grace!” replied Benedick.

“But I want you to tell me!” said the prince.

“Well, Claudio, you know that I can keep a secret, but this is a request of our prince, therefore I must speak,” Benedick said to Claudio before turning to Don Pedro.

“The great secret, your Grace, is that Claudio is in love! With whom? With Leonato’s daughter, and he wants to marry her.”

“Is it true, Claudio?”

“Yes, it is,” he finally admitted.

Don Pedro was pleased when he heard that because he thought that Hero was not only beautiful, but also good and honest. Benedick, however, continued to say he did not see anything particularly attractive in her and added that he himself would never marry.

“I am grateful to my mother who brought me into this world and then brought me up,” he explained, “but all the other women must excuse me if I don’t want to look like a fool, with a good pair of horns¹⁶ growing on my head. No, I’ll remain a bachelor¹⁷ ... and so I’ll have more money to spend on fine clothes!” he said cheerfully.

The prince laughed and replied,

“Time will tell, Benedick. You know, even the wildest bull wears the yoke¹⁸ in the end! Therefore, I’m sure we’ll soon see you sick with love. In the meantime, however, run to Leonato’s house and tell him that I’ll be there for dinner; I know that he has made great preparations for it.”

When Benedick left, Claudio was able to speak to the prince.

“Please, help me, my lord,” he asked.

“I will certainly help you,” the prince replied. “Just let me know what I can do, and I will do it.”

15. *unfaithful*: someone who has a sexual relationship with a person who is not their usual partner.

16. *horn*: a hard pointed part that grows on the head of some animals. In a figurative sense, having horns mean

that someone has an unfaithful partner.

17. *bachelor*: a man who has never married.

18. *yoke*: a wooden stick which is tied to the neck of an animal and connected to a vehicle it has to pull.



"... a servant heard them, but misunderstood the prince's words."

"You know, when I first saw Hero, I liked her, but at the time all my thoughts were for the war we were going to fight, and I didn't have time to fall in love. But now the war is over, and all I can think of is how beautiful young Hero is, and how much I love her. You know I'm not very good with words, so, please, help me to persuade her to marry me."

"If you love her, I'll speak to her and her father and soon she'll be your wife," the prince answered.

Then he added,

"I know there will be a party and a masked ball¹⁹ tonight. I'll wear a mask and pretend to be you; then I'll try to remain alone with Hero, and I'll tell her of "my" feelings for her. When she hears my passionate words, I'm sure she'll fall in love. After that, I'll talk to her father and, in the end, she'll be yours. Come, let's go and carry out this plan!"

Claudio was very happy when he heard that, and they went into Leonato's house together.

While they were talking, a servant heard them, but misunderstood²⁰ the prince's words. He believed that it was the prince himself who wanted to marry Hero, so he hurried to his master Antonio, Leonato's brother, to inform him about it. Antonio told Leonato and he, of course, was very pleased with the news, but could not really believe such luck.

"Until the prince actually asks Hero to marry him, I'll pretend

19. *masked ball*: a dance where people wear masks.

20. *to misunderstand* (*misunderstood*,

misunderstood): to think you have understood something, but you have not.

it's just a dream. But I'd better tell her what your servant has heard so that she can prepare a proper answer, in case he does," he told his brother.

In another part of the house, Don Juan, the prince's brother, was talking with Conrad, one of his men.

"You really look sad, my lord, and that's bad for you!" Conrad said.

"That's because I've got many reasons to be sad. Don't tell me I shouldn't be sad. I'm certainly not going to smile to please other people."

"I mean it's dangerous to show your feelings so clearly. You have rebelled against your brother, and he has only just forgiven you. If you want to remain his friend, you must show him a friendly face."

"I'm not his friend and he doesn't trust me; he gives me the same freedom of a dog wearing a muzzle²¹ and tied to a chain. If my mouth were free, I would bite! In the meantime, leave me alone and don't try to change me."

Don Juan hated his brother and hoped to find an opportunity to hurt or damage him. It was another of his men, Borachio, who offered him the chance he was looking for. Borachio, in fact, had also heard the prince and Claudio talk, and had learnt that the prince would go to the ball wearing a mask and pretending to be Claudio. As Claudio, he would dance with Hero, tell her of his love, and ask her to marry him.

Don Juan was glad to hear that and said,

"Come, let's go to the party, then! Maybe I'll find there the cure to my unhappiness. That young man, Claudio, has had honour and glory²² thanks to my defeat. If I can hurt him in any way, I'll be really happy. You two will help me, won't you?"

"We are with you until death, and we'll help you in any possible way!" Conrad and Borachio said.

"Very well, then, let's go to this party and see what must be done."

And the three men left to get ready for the ball.

21. *muzzle*: a covering put on the nose and mouth of a dog, so that he cannot bite.

22. *glory*: honour and praise that you get for something you have done.

WORKING ON THE TEXT

1 Complete the following sentences with the appropriate name.

- a. is the governor of Messina.
- b. is very lively and witty.
- c. is gentle and quiet.
- d. is Leonato's brother.
- e. is bringing a friend with him.
- f. is young but is able to fight very well.
- g. always says unkind things about Sir Benedick.
- h. is Don Pedro's illegitimate brother.

2 Answer the questions.

- a. Did Don Pedro win the war?
- b. Why does Beatrice call Benedick 'Sir Boastful'?
- c. Have Don Pedro and Don Juan always been good friends?
- d. How long are the guests going to stay in Leonato's house?
- e. What type of conversation do Beatrice and Benedick start when they are alone?
- f. Is Beatrice looking for a man to be in love with her?
- g. Who does Claudio call 'a precious jewel'?
- h. What does Claudio want?

3 Some of the following statements are right; tick them and then correct the false ones.

- a. Don Pedro wants to know Claudio's secret. ☐
- b. Don Pedro does not like Hero. ☐
- c. Benedick does not want to marry because he does not like women. ☐
- d. Claudio wants Don Pedro to help him declare his love because he is afraid not to be accepted. ☐
- e. Don Pedro goes to the ball pretending to be Claudio. ☐
- f. Antonio's servant thinks that the prince wants to marry Hero. ☐
- g. Don Juan hates both his brother and Claudio. ☐
- h. Don Juan goes to the ball because he likes dancing. ☐

.....

.....

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WORKING ON VOCABULARY

4 Match each adjective to its antonym. Then, use some of them to complete the following sentences.

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| a. bitter | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. cowardly |
| b. precious | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. domestic |
| c. opposite | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. unable |
| d. brave | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. sweet |
| e. wild | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. identical |
| f. capable | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. cheap |

- a. Beatrice suggested that Benedick had been a soldier.
- b. Leonato prepared a rich dinner for his guests because he did not want to offer hospitality.
- c. Don Juan and Don Pedro had been enemies.
- d. Beatrice was of insulting Benedick in a clever way.

WORKING ON GRAMMAR

5 REPORTED SPEECH. Turn the following sentences into reported speech.

- a. "When I left the prince, he was only about five kilometres away," the messenger said.
The messenger said
- b. "Claudio looks like a lamb, but fights like a lion," he thought.
He thought
- c. "Has Sir Boastful also returned from the war?" Beatrice asked.
Beatrice asked
- d. "He has returned, and he is as witty as ever," answered the man.
The man answered that
- e. "I'm sure Benedick will give you tit for tat," Leonato told Beatrice.
Leonato told Beatrice that
- f. "It's a joy to have you here," Leonato told the prince.
Leonato told the prince
- g. "Don't you think Hero is a fine young lady?" Claudio asked him.
Claudio asked Benedick
- h. "Please, help me, my lord," Claudio asked Don Pedro.
Claudio asked Don Pedro

WORKING ON SKILLS

Listening



- 6** **FIRST** Listen to a passage about the condition of women in the Elizabethan Era and complete the sentences using no more than three words.

- Elizabethan England was a patriarchal society, i.e. a society entirely
- Women were not allowed to attend
- The only jobs legally available to women were those that could be
- Women could not own property of their own, except widows. A widow was in charge of her own
- Sermons and books written during the Elizabethan era encouraged women to be silent and obedient
- When a woman's father thought her ready to marry, he normally decided
- When a woman married, her husband became
- A husband was permitted to punish his wife as

Writing

- 7** In the play, Claudio falls in love with Hero 'at first sight'. Write a paragraph of about 100 words explaining:
- the meaning of the expression 'love at first sight';
 - which, in your opinion, are the factors that cause it;
 - if you, or someone you know, have ever felt it and if it has been a lasting feeling.

Speaking

- 8** Think about Don Juan's attitude. Why do you think he is always sad? Why does he hate Don Pedro and Claudio? What advantages would he have if he succeeded in damaging them?



Amalia Vitale and Lydia Fleming
as Beatrice and Hero

THE ELIZABETHAN ERA



The Darnley Portrait of Queen Elizabeth, 1585 ca

Shakespeare lived in the *Elizabethan Era*, the period during which **Queen Elizabeth I** ruled England, from 1558 to 1603. The period is often referred to as a 'golden age' because the country enjoyed relative peace, prosperity¹, and political stability.

The 16th and early 17th century also coincide² with the *English Renaissance*, which started with a new interest in the study of the classics. Its consequence was a rebirth³ of the English culture, in particular its literature, poetry, music and especially drama, which reached its highest point in that period.

Elizabeth I was a **Tudor**. The Tudor family had come to the throne with

Henry VII in 1485, after the Wars of the Roses which had lasted thirty years. Henry VII had managed to put an end to them, unifying the country under a strong central government. He maintained peace and made the state finances strong again.

After his death, his son **Henry VIII** became king in 1509. When the Pope refused him the divorce from his first wife who had not been able to give him a male heir⁴, he broke with the Roman Catholic Church and set up the Church of England in 1534. With the Act of Supremacy, he declared himself Supreme Head of the Church and closed down monasteries⁵ and convents⁶, transferring all their lands and gold to the Crown⁷.

Henry VIII married six times. After his death in 1547, his three legitimate children – Edward, Mary and eventually Elizabeth – came to the throne. They ruled one after the other as **Edward VI** (1547-53), **Mary I** (1553-58), and **Elizabeth I** (1558-1603).

1. *prosperity*: a situation in which you are rich and successful.
2. *to coincide*: to happen at the same time.
3. *rebirth*: a period of new growth of something.
4. *heir*: someone who will legally receive the money and property of someone else when they die.
5. *monastery*: a building in which a group of religious men live and pray.
6. *convent*: a building in which a group of religious women live and pray.
7. *the Crown*: the governing power of a country which has a queen or king.

Edward VI was only a boy when he came to the throne and was sixteen when he died. Since he was so young, the country was actually ruled by regents⁸ during his reign. Mary I, who came to the throne at his death, tried to restore the Catholic religion to the nation by means of cruel methods and persecution⁹ of the protestants, and that is why she is remembered as *Bloody Mary*. At her death in 1558, her half-sister Elizabeth, who at the time was twenty-five, became queen.

She restored the Church of England and declared both Catholicism and Judaism illegal, but in religious matters she behaved with much greater tolerance than her sister. Elizabeth was intelligent and cultured and, also thanks to her faithful and able councillors¹⁰, was able to defend herself from her many enemies.

The most dangerous was the Catholic king of Spain, Philip II, who had been married to Mary I and who, for that reason, had hoped to be king of England at her death. In 1559 he asked Elizabeth to marry him, but she refused. After that, England was in danger of invasion from Spain until 1588, when Philip sent his *Invincible Armada* to invade England in order to restore Catholicism and overthrow¹¹ Elizabeth. The English ships, however, completely defeated the Armada, and Philip never tried invading again.

Although many European princes proposed¹² to her, Elizabeth, who did not want to hand over part of her power to a foreigner, never

8. *regent*: a person who rules a country for a limited period of time when the legitimate king or queen is too young or ill.

9. *persecution*: cruel and unfair treatment of someone because of their religion, beliefs, or race.

10. *councillor*: a member of a group of

noblemen chosen by Elizabeth – the Privy Council – who advised but did not control her.

11. *to overthrow (overthrew, overthrown)*: to remove someone from power using force.

12. *to propose*: to ask someone to marry you.



The Invincible Armada (Flemish school)



Much Ado About Nothing

Much Ado About Nothing is one of Shakespeare’s most famous and brilliant comedies. Set in Messina, it is a tale of love, jealousy, deception, and misunderstanding. The reader is soon caught in a net in which humour and pathos alternate, following the stories of the main characters, Hero and Claudio, Beatrice and Benedick, but also the prince of Aragon and his wicked step-brother. The language will also appeal to the readers: the noble characters have clever, witty conversations, while lower class characters result irresistibly funny by saying paradoxical things. Readers will be both amused and moved and will have the chance to learn something new about the complexities of the human soul.

- beginner

elementary

pre-intermediate

✓ intermediate

post-intermediate
- A1 (Breakthrough)

• A2 (Waystage)

• B1 (Threshold)

• B2 (Vantage)

• C1 (Effectiveness)

Levels of accredited examination boards:	
Cambridge English:	First
Trinity:	Grade 7, 8 / ISE II
City & Guilds (Pitman):	Intermediate
ESB:	Intermediate 2, 3
Edexcel:	Intermediate



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