

**SAMPLE - INCOMPLETE SCRIPT**



**A Community Shakespeare Company  
Edition of**

# Much Ado About Nothing

**Original verse adaptation by**

**Richard Carter**



## NOTES ABOUT PRODUCTION

The author asks that anyone planning to publicly stage one of his adaptations please contact him for permission, via the CSC website: [www.communityshakespeare.org](http://www.communityshakespeare.org). He also asks that scripts be purchased for every member of a cast. (This is how he makes his living, and photocopying scripts is not legal.) Discounts are available from the author for purchases of 20 scripts or more.

Frequently asked questions include, “What if my group is mostly girls?” Cross-casting (females playing male roles) is almost inevitable. Once it is explained that males played all the female roles in Shakespeare’s time, this concern is easily overcome. Girls also recognize that the “big” parts are often male, so those wanting more stage time naturally gravitate toward male roles. The author also encourages groups to take “liberties” such as changing the sex of some roles. With little alteration of the text, a duke may become a duchess, an uncle may become an aunt, etc.

In answer to the question, “What if I have too many (or too few) students?” some roles may be divided amongst several actors. (For example, a messenger may become two messengers.) Alternately, actors may take on more than one role. In short, do what is necessary to make the play fun and accessible for young people; the author did!

## SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

Leonato, Governor of Messina, is to be visited by Don Pedro, Prince of Aragon, who is returning victorious from war. This news sparks witty banter by Leonato's niece, Beatrice, who asks after Signor Benedick. We learn "there's a kind of merry war" between Beatrice and Benedick, and when the soldiers appear, we witness a "skirmish of wit." Don Pedro is attended not only by Benedick and a young nobleman, Count Claudio, but by his melancholy brother, Don John. We learn that the war was actually between Don Pedro and Don John, but they are reconciled now.

Almost immediately, Count Claudio falls in love with Leonato's daughter, Hero. The Prince vows to woo her on Claudio's behalf (during masked revels), and when she is won, to ask Leonato to accept the match. This plan is overheard by Don John's man, Borachio. Don John leaps at the chance to spoil any plan of his brother's.

Both plans proceed, with a disguised Don Pedro wooing Hero and with Claudio abused by Don John. Claudio is led to believe that Don Pedro woos Hero for himself, but before the evening ends, Claudio and Hero are happily engaged. Don Pedro is then inspired to undertake "one of Hercules' labors," namely, to bring Beatrice and Benedick together. Leonato observes, "they would talk themselves mad in a week," but along with Claudio and Hero, he agrees to set the trap for Benedick and Beatrice to fall in love.

Borachio instigates more mischief on behalf of Don John. They conspire to betray Claudio and Hero by having Borachio woo one of Hero's gentlewomen, Margaret, dressed as Hero. Don John will bring Claudio at night to witness this scene, in which "Hero" will appear to be unfaithful to him.

Meanwhile the plot to bring Beatrice and Benedick together moves forward. In the arbor, the men talk loudly of Beatrice's love, where Benedick can overhear. They say she is a rare catch, and Benedick is "unworthy so good a wife." Hero and her gentlewomen perform the same kind of scene for Beatrice, and the two "fish" are hooked.

Don John springs his own trap on Claudio and the Prince, who go to witness Hero's supposed infidelity. Shakespeare then introduces his faithful comic characters, led by the malaprop-prone Constable Dogberry, who together with his partner Verges, deputizes three night Watchmen to guard Leonato's door before Hero's wedding. ("Be vigilant" he says, when he means "vigilant"). The Watchmen overhear Borachio bragging to his cohort, Conrad, how the Prince and Claudio were completely deceived: they thought it was Hero they saw and heard, swearing her love to Borachio. They vow to shame her.

The Watchmen capture Borachio and Conrad. Next morning, Dogberry tries to convince Leonato that he has important news, but Leonato is so busy before the wedding, and Dogberry is so confusing (he has caught "two highly auspicious men"), disaster is inevitable. At the wedding, Claudio and Don Pedro tell everyone they witnessed Hero swearing her love to another man.

Hero faints. “How doth the lady,” Benedick asks, and Beatrice answers, “Dead, I think.” But as Hero revives, the wise Friar professes his belief in her innocence. He advises, “let it be said that she died from Claudio’s accusation.” This will in turn make Claudio remorseful, and when the time is right, there may yet be a wedding.

Leonato is satisfied, but not so Lady Beatrice. She demands that Benedick “kill Claudio” for what he has done to Hero. Benedick challenges Claudio to a duel, even as the relentless Dogberry makes Borachio and Conrad stand trial (Don John has fled). The henchmen confess their guilt, and as the Friar predicted, Claudio deeply regrets Hero’s “death.” To make amends, he agrees to marry Leonato’s “other niece”, who is “so much like Hero ... she’s almost a copy.”

Four ladies enter, masked, and Claudio vows to wed the one Leonato puts forth. When she unmask, Claudio cries, “Another Hero!” Leonato advises, “She died, my lord, but whiles her slander lived.” All’s well, until Benedick and Beatrice find out they’ve been tricked into loving each other, then each feigns disinterest. Claudio and Hero produce love letters that Beatrice and Benedick have written each other, and so, observing, “our own hands against our hearts” Benedick says, “Come, I will have thee,” and they agree to marry out of “pity” for one another.

### ABOUT THE SONGS IN THE PLAY

Melodies for the three songs used in this script – *Sigh No More Ladies*, *The God Of Love*, and *Pardon, Goddess Of The Night* – can be found in Shakespeare’s Songbook, by Ross W. Duffin, pub. 2004 by W. W. Norton & Company, NY, NY, ISBN 0-393-05889-1, along with information about Shakespeare’s music, and the process of tracking down appropriate tunes.

# CAST OF CHARACTERS

DON PEDRO	Prince of Aragon
DON JOHN	his illegitimate brother
CLAUDIO	a young lord of Florence
BENEDICK	a young lord of Padua
CONRAD, BORACHIO	followers of Don John
BALTHASAR	a singer, attendant on Don Pedro
LEONATO	Governor of Messina
ANTONIO	his brother
HERO	Leonato's daughter
BEATRICE	Leonato's niece
MARGARET, URSULA	gentlewomen attending upon Hero
MESSENGER	in the service of Don Pedro
PAGE	in the household of Leonato
FRIAR FRANCIS	a priest
DOGBERRY	master constable
VERGES	headborough, Dogberry's assistant
1 <sup>st</sup> WATCHMAN, WATCHMAN SEACOAL, WATCHMAN OATCAKE	three deputies of Constable Dogberry
A SEXTON	
MUSICIANS AND ATTENDANTS	

*This play should run approximately 80 minutes without intermission*

## **ACT I, Scene 1**

*Most of the action of the play takes place outside, inside, and around the house and garden of Leonato, Governor of Messina.*

(ENTER LEONATO, HERO, BEATRICE, ANTONIO, URSULA, MARGARET, AND OTHERS, WITH A MESSENGER)

### **LEONATO**

I learn in this letter that Don Pedro of Aragon comes this night.

### **MESSENGER**

He's very near to Messina; not three leagues off when I took flight.

### **ANTONIO**

How many gentlemen have you lost in this fray?

### **MESSENGER**

Few of any sort, and none of name, I'm pleased to say.

### **LEONATO**

(WITH THE LETTER) I find here that Don Pedro hath bestowed much grace  
On a young Florentine called Claudio.

### **MESSENGER**

And well deserved in this case:  
He hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age,  
In figure like a lamb, yet like a lion loosed from his cage.

### **BEATRICE**

But what of Signor Benedick? Is he returned too?  
Say how many hath he killed and eaten; do.  
Nay, how many hath he *killed*, say if you're willing,  
For indeed I promised to eat all of his killing.

### **LEONATO**

Faith, niece, you tax Signor Benedick too much.

### **MESSENGER**

He hath done good service.

### **BEATRICE**

At mealtime and such?  
He hath a good stomach.

**MESSENGER**

And is a good soldier too,  
Stuffed with honorable virtues.

**BEATRICE**

Hah! Now you say true:  
He's a stuffed man indeed. Let him stand in my garden  
To ward off the crows, while his arteries harden.

**LEONATO**

You must not, sir, mistake my niece.  
She and Signor Benedick are never at peace.

**HERO**

There's a kind of merry war, as betwixt cur and cat,  
A skirmish of wit . . .

**BEATRICE**

Alas, he gets nothing by that.  
In our last conflict, four of his five wits were lost,  
He's had but one wit since Pentecost.

**MESSENGER**

I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your favor.

**BEATRICE**

Were he *rainbow sorbet*, I'd ask for another flavor.  
But I pray you, hath he no young companion in tow?

**MESSENGER**

He's most in the company of the right noble Claudio.

**BEATRICE**

O Lord, he will hang upon him like a disease.  
God help noble Claudio if this pestilence seize  
Him. If he hath caught the Benedick, you may rest assured,  
It will cost him a thousand pound ere he be cured.

(MUSIC ANNOUNCES THE SOLDIERS' APPROACH)

**MESSENGER**

Don Pedro is approaching.

**ANTONIO**

With his men, in fine form.

**MARGARET**

(ASIDE) Coo! But they're handsome!

**URSULA**

(ASIDE) I love a man in uniform!

(ENTER DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, BALTHASAR, DON JOHN,  
CONRAD, BORACHIO, AND OTHERS)

**DON PEDRO**

Signor Leonato, come to meet your trouble apace?

**LEONATO**

Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your grace.

**DON PEDRO**

I think this is your daughter.

**LEONATO**

Her mother hath many times told me so.

**BENEDICK**

Were you in doubt that you asked?

**LEONATO**

Signor Benedick, no.

**DON PEDRO**

Be happy, lady: you have your father's face.  
Let us speak, good Leonato.

**LEONATO**

Willingly, your grace.

(THEY SPEAK PRIVATELY)

**BENEDICK**

If she hath her father's face, still I would swear,  
She will not have his head with all its gray hair.

**BEATRICE**

I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor.  
Nobody marks you, as I've told you before.

**BENEDICK**

My dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?

**BEATRICE**

How should disdain die? With turkeys like *you*, each day is Thanksgiving.

**BENEDICK**

It is certain I am loved of all ladies but you,  
And yet I love none; cross my heart, that's true.

**BEATRICE**

A dear happiness to women, and I thank God above me.  
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.  
So a man may escape a scratched face from *your* kind.

**BEATRICE**

Scratching could not make *your* face any worse.  
But I'm of your humor: I'll take no husband as my curse.  
I thank my cold blood my heart is not young.

**BENEDICK**

I would my horse had the speed of your tongue.  
But keep your way, I have done, truth be told.

**BEATRICE**

You always end with a jade's trick. I know you of old.

**DON PEDRO**

(ENDING HIS TALK WITH LEONATO)

My dear friend Leonato hath invited you all:  
We shall stay here a month at least!

**LEONATO**

Or longer, if you shall.  
Don John: being reconciled to the prince your brother,  
I owe you all duty, and bid you welcome hither.

**DON JOHN**

I thank you. I am not of many words, but I thank you.

**LEONATO**

(TO DON PEDRO) Will your grace lead on?

**DON PEDRO**

Nay, in this I'll not outrank you:  
Your hand, Leonato. We will go together.

**LEONATO**

Come then, one and all, like birds of a feather!

(EXEUNT ALL BUT BENEDICK AND CLAUDIO)

**CLAUDIO**

Benedick, did you note Signor Leonato's daughter?

**BENEDICK**

I noted her not, but my eye now and then caught her.

**CLAUDIO**

Is she not a modest young lady?

**BENEDICK**

Methinks she's too low for high praise.

**CLAUDIO**

She's the sweetest lady that ever met my gaze.

**BENEDICK**

I can see yet without spectacles, and I see no such matter.  
Her cousin exceeds her in beauty, though she's mad as a hatter.  
But I hope you've no intent to turn husband and fool?  
Would you *buy* her that you inquire?

**CLAUDIO**

Can the world buy such a jewel?

**BENEDICK**

Alack, alack! Is it come to this, then?  
Shall I never see a bachelor of three-score again?  
Go to, in faith, thrust thy neck into a yoke.  
Don Pedro is returned: wait till I tell him this joke!

(ENTER DON PEDRO)

**DON PEDRO**

What secret hath held you that here you still dwell?

**BENEDICK**

I would your grace would constrain me to tell.

**DON PEDRO**

I charge thee on thy allegiance.

**BENEDICK**

(TO CLAUDIO) On my *allegiance*, do you hear?

The Prince *commands* me to tell him this cheer.

(TO DON PEDRO) In short, your grace, this lamb is led to slaughter:  
Count Claudio is in love with Leonato's daughter.

**DON PEDRO**

With Hero? That the lady is worthy, I know.

**CLAUDIO**

I feel that I love her.

**BENEDICK**

Oh, please: stop the show!

I know not how a *woman* should be worthy, that's certain,

Nor *feel* a man should love. Bring down the curtain!

That a woman conceived me, I thank her, it's true;

That she brought me up, thanks is also her due.

But women shall pardon me if among them I trust none:

I will live a bachelor till my days are done.

**DON PEDRO**

I shall see thee ere I die look pale with love.

**BENEDICK**

Not I, my lord, by heaven above.

With anger, with sickness, or with hunger I may pine.

**DON PEDRO**

Time shall try, and if thou fall, the last laugh will be mine.

In the meantime, Signor Benedick, to Leonato repair.

He prepares for supper: tell him I'll be there.

**BENEDICK**

I have almost matter enough to sound so wise,

And so I leave you with Signor Googly Eyes.

(EXIT)

**CLAUDIO**

My liege: your highness may now do me good.

**DON PEDRO**

My love is thine to teach; teach it how it should.

**CLAUDIO**

Hath Leonato a son?

**DON PEDRO**

No child but Hero. She's his only heir.  
Dost thou love her, Claudio?

**CLAUDIO**

Since returning from war, she's my only care.

**DON PEDRO**

I will speak with her father; thou shalt have her, you'll see.  
Is not that the end thou desir'st of me?

**CLAUDIO**

How sweetly you do minister to love, your grace.

**DON PEDRO**

Tonight we shall have revels: I'll assume thy place,  
And in some disguise, tell Hero I'm Claudio.  
Unclasping my heart, that *your* love she should know.  
I'll take her hearing prisoner with my amorous tale,  
Then after to her father; my plan will not fail.  
The conclusion is, she shall be thine ere long.  
In practice let us put it presently. Come along.

(EXEUNT)

**ACT I, scene 2**

(ENTER LEONATO, MEETING ANTONIO)

**LEONATO**

How now, good brother, is the music provided?

**ANTONIO**

My son is busy at it; that is decided.  
But I can tell you strange news you've dreamt not of:  
The prince loves your daughter!

**LEONATO**

Heaven above!

**ANTONIO**

My man overheard Count Claudio and the prince  
As they walked in mine orchard, not half an hour since.  
The prince told Claudio that he loved my niece:  
Your daughter, young Hero.

**LEONATO**

Will wonders never cease?

**ANTONIO**

He means to acknowledge it this night in a dance,  
And if he finds her accordant by chance,  
Then instantly will he break the news with you.

**LEONATO**

Hath the fellow any wit who told this to you?

**ANTONIO**

A sharp good fellow, you may question him yourself.

**LEONATO**

Nay, we'll hold it as a dream till it appear itself.  
But I'll acquaint my daughter, that she may be prepared.  
If this news be true, she's bound to be scared.

(ENTER ATTENDANTS)

Cousins, you know what you have to do,  
For we revel tonight with the prince and his crew.  
Have a care this busy time. Good brother, come with me,  
Let us give my daughter these glad tidings from thee.

(EXEUNT)

**ACT I, scene 3**

(ENTER DON JOHN AND CONRAD)

**CONRAD**

Why are you out of measure sad, my lord?

**DON JOHN**

My sadness is without limit; I'm miserably bored.  
I can't hide what I am: I must be sad when I have cause,  
Sleep when I'm drowsy, eat when my stomach gnaws.

**CONRAD**

But your brother hath taken you into his grace,  
Forgiven your war with him, offered you a place  
At his side. It's needful that you frame the season  
For your own harvest. Listen to reason.

**DON JOHN**

I had rather be a canker in a hedge, you clod,  
Than a rose in his grace! I don't care if I'm odd.  
It better fits my blood to be disdained of all;  
I'm a plain-dealing villain, I answer to no man's call.  
Grr! I am muzzled: had I my mouth, I would bite!  
If I had my liberty I'd fashion my spite.  
In the meantime, seek not to alter me,  
Let me be as I am, if I cannot be free.  
(ENTER BORACHIO)  
What news, Borachio?

**BORACHIO**

I come from a great supper yonder,  
With intelligence of a marriage that will leave you in wonder.

**DON JOHN**

Will it serve as a model for mischief? Say on:  
What fool will be wed to unquietness ere long?

**BORACHIO**

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

**DON JOHN**

The most exquisite Claudio? Tell me the plan:  
Which way does he look? Say on who, and staccato!

**BORACHIO**

On Hero, the daughter of old Leonato.

**DON JOHN**

How came you to this?

**BORACHIO**

I overheard the two men:

The prince shall woo Hero for Count Claudio and then,  
Winning consent for the lady to be wed,  
He shall give her to Claudio for his marriage bed.

**DON JOHN**

Come, let us thither. This may prove the food  
To nourish my displeasure and lighten my mood.  
Claudio hath the glory that should be mine from the war;  
If I can cross him in any way, I'll even the score.  
You both will assist me?

**CONRAD/BORACHIO**

To the death, my lord.

**DON JOHN**

Then let us to supper, for my spirits have soared!

(EXEUNT)

**ACT II, scene 1**

(ENTER LEONATO, ANTONIO, HERO, AND BEATRICE)

**LEONATO**

Was Count John at supper?

**ANTONIO**

I saw him not.

**HERO**

Nor I.

**BEATRICE**

How tartly that gentleman looks. He'd be good in a pie.  
I can never see Count John but I'm heartburned an hour after.

**HERO**

He's of a melancholy disposition.

**BEATRICE**

His spirit needs more laughter.  
An excellent man were made midway between Benedick and he.

**LEONATO**

With so shrewd a tongue, thou wilt never get a husband for thee.

**BEATRICE**

For which blessing I kneel daily; God knows my prayer by rote.  
I could not endure a husband with a beard; I'd rather be married to a goat.

**ANTONIO**

You might find a husband that hath no beard.

**BEATRICE**

And what should I do with such a boy?  
Make him my waiting gentlewoman? I've no need of such a toy.  
No, he with a beard is not for me, for *he* is more than a youth,  
And a youth is no man, so *I'm* not for him, so I'll have none.

**ALL**

That's the truth!

**ANTONIO**

(TO HERO) I trust *you* will be ruled by your father better.

**BEATRICE**

Faith, it's her *duty* to be his Irish Setter,  
To fawn and say, "so please you." But one word, cousin:  
If he's not handsome, choose one yourself. Men are cheaper by the dozen.

**LEONATO**

(TO BEATRICE) I hope to see *you* fitted with a husband one day.

**BEATRICE**

Not till God make men of something other than clay.

**ANTONIO**

The revellers are entering.

**LEONATO**

Don your masks and make good room.

(ENTER DON PEDRO, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, BALTHASAR, ALL MASKED.  
ENTER DON JOHN AND BORACHIO, UNMASKED. ENTER MARGARET AND  
URSULA, ATTENDANTS AND MUSICIANS. MUSIC PLAYS.)

**HERO**

(ASIDE) I wonder which is the prince?

**BEATRICE**

(ASIDE) Look no further: here comes the groom.

**DON PEDRO**

(TO HERO) Lady, will you walk about with your friend?

**HERO**

If you walk softly and look sweetly from now till the end.  
I hope your face is not like your visor.

**DON PEDRO**

If I were to lift it, you'd be the wiser.  
But time will tell, my turtledove.

**HERO**

Then let us speak.

**DON PEDRO**

Speak low if you speak of love.

(THEY MOVE ASIDE)

**BALTHASAR**

(TO MARGARET) I would you did like me, that my hand you'd take.

**MARGARET**

So would I not, for your own sake,  
For I've many ill qualities.

**BALTHASAR**

Which is one?

**MARGARET**

I say my prayers aloud.

**BALTHASAR**

Honeybun!  
That's *good*: then the hearers may cry amen!

**MARGARET**

I never thought of that.

**BALTHASAR**

I'm the smartest of men.

**MARGARET**

God match *me* with a good dancer.

**BALTHASAR**

Amen, I cry!  
I can do the macarena!

**MARGARET**

Coo! What a guy.

(THEY MOVE ASIDE)

**URSULA**

(TO ANTONIO) I know you well enough, Signor Antonio.

**ANTONIO**

At a word, I am not. What makes you think so?

**URSULA**

I know you by the wagging of your head.

**ANTONIO**

I counterfeit, so you'll think me him instead.

**URSULA**

You could not do it so well were you not he.

**ANTONIO**

At a word, I am not. Take it from me.

**URSULA**

Do you think I do not know you by your excellent wit?  
Go to, you are he, there's an end to this skit.

(THEY MOVE ASIDE)

**BEATRICE**

(TO BENEDICK) And will you not tell me who told you so?

**BENEDICK**

Ach! You shall pardon me lady, no.

**BEATRICE**

Nor will you not tell me who you are?  
(BENEDICK SHAKES HIS HEAD)  
Only one man would stretch the truth so far,  
To say I was disdainful, and my wit not too quick.  
This was undoubtedly Signor Benedick!

**BENEDICK**

Ach! What is he?

**BEATRICE**

I'm sure you know him well enough.

**BENEDICK**

Not I, believe me.

**BEATRICE**

"Ach!" That's the stuff.  
Did he never make you laugh? For he's the prince's jester,  
A very dull fool, whose gift is to pester  
All decent folk with impossible slander.  
None but fools delight in this goose . . . I mean gander.

**BENEDICK**

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

**BEATRICE**

Do. But we must follow the leaders. Come this way.

(THEY MOVE OFF, FOLLOWING THE OTHERS IN A DANCE OR PROMENADE  
TO THE MUSIC. EXEUNT ALL BUT DON JOHN, BORACHIO, AND CLAUDIO)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR— RICHARD CARTER

Richard Carter grew up in Portland, Oregon, the son of a doctor and a dancer. Since 1986 he has made his home in the San Juan Islands, between the Olympic Peninsula and the mainland of Washington State.

Richard graduated from Vassar College and received his MFA in playwriting from the University of Washington. His play *Blood and Iron* won the 1993 Jumpstart New Play Competition and was presented by the Seattle Shakespeare Company, and then on the London stage. His musical play, *Winds in the Morning* received glowing reviews at the 1997 Seattle Fringe Festival and was selected to inaugurate the Wooden Boat Festival in 2000, at Port Townsend, Washington.

Richard offers his talents in many venues. As Co-founder/Director of the Community Shakespeare Company, he is one of the few playwrights today with the audacity to work *with* Shakespeare. Working in rhyming couplets, updating some of the language, he delivers the best of the Bard for performance by young actors. The adaptations are so authentic that audiences scarcely know they aren't seeing and hearing the original.

Community Shakespeare Company itself breaks new ground. Its mission, "to enrich young lives and cultivate community," uses Shakespeare as the inspiration and theatre as the means. Richard's unique adaptations motivate and enchant young actors, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and up. His leadership skills engage parents, mentors and artists to support and encourage their youth. The result is a dynamic model that can be replicated in schools, organizations, clubs and communities.

Richard and his wife Jeanna live on a small farm where they have been raising their children and practicing sustainable agriculture together since 1988.