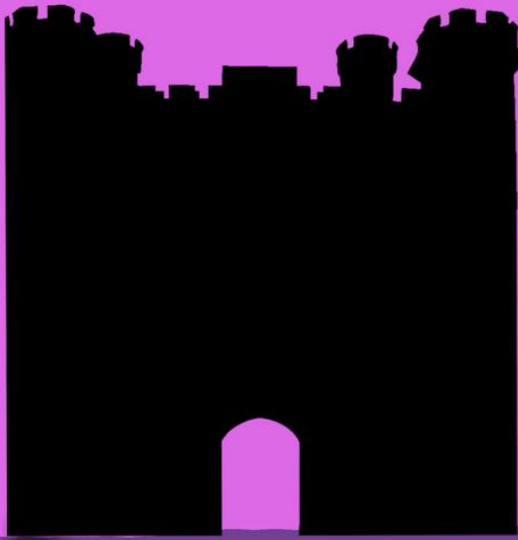


WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Lancaster Castle 31st May and 3rd - 5th June 7pm



English Literature
and Creative Writing

Lancaster
University



An Introduction to *Much Ado About Nothing*

Plot Summary

Following victory in battle, Don Pedro the Prince of Aragon and his men arrive in Messina, Italy, to visit the governor Leonato. Among Don Pedro's soldiers, his favourite Claudio, quickly falls in love with Leonato's daughter Hero. By contrast, the lifelong bachelor Benedick continues his long-standing 'battle of wits' with Hero's cousin Beatrice. At Leonato's welcoming masquerade ball, Don Pedro arranges the engagement of Claudio and Hero, despite the attempts of Don John, the Prince's bastard brother, to thwart the match.

Don Pedro's match-making plots now turn to bringing Benedick and Beatrice into 'a mountain of affection' with each other. He stages a conversation with Leonato and Claudio to convince the eavesdropping Benedick that Beatrice is in love with him. Hero and her waiting gentlewoman Ursula play the same trick on Beatrice who overhears that Benedick is in love with her. Both determine to abandon their frosty resistance to marriage and to each other. Meanwhile, the villain Don John continues his destructive plot to break the match between Hero and Claudio. On the night before their wedding, he arranges for Claudio and Don Pedro to overhear Borachio, wooing his mistress Margaret at Hero's bedroom window above, calling Margaret by the name of 'Hero'. Claudio is convinced that Hero has been unfaithful and vows to shame her the following morning in the church.

Borachio and Conrade are arrested by the Watch who overhear them discussing the success of Don John's plot, but not in time to prevent the disastrous consequences. On the wedding morning, Claudio rejects Hero at the altar, claiming she has been unfaithful, and she collapses from shock. Claudio and Don Pedro leave and even Leonato initially disowns his daughter but is convinced by the Friar to prove her innocence with the help of Beatrice and Benedick. They conspire to pretend Hero died from grief so Claudio will be filled with remorse and repent his mistake. Beatrice and Benedick's first opportunity to confess their love for each other is also disrupted when Beatrice insists that Benedick prove his love by killing the villain, Claudio. Fortunately, the ridiculously pompous Dogberry, head of the constabulary in Messina, interrogates Borachio and Conrade who confess their involvement in the plot, thus confirming Hero's innocence. Claudio is forced to declare Hero is chaste in an ostentatious ceremony of mourning and then to marry an unknown bride, Leonato's supposed niece, on trust. At this second ceremony, Hero and Claudio, Beatrice and Benedick are united, though not without protests from the latter couple. Don John is caught as he flees from Messina.

Cast



Maggie Wignall: Beatrice

Maggie Wignall has been working as an actor for 9 years and plays Beatrice in this production. Maggie has a real passion for early modern texts with a career highlight being her role as Musella in Lady Mary Wroth's *Love's Victory* in Peshurst Place. She played the titular character in last year's LU *Henry V* and has also joined the Shakespeare Speakeasy team to play Banquo in *Macbeth* as part of York International Shakespeare festival. Maggie acts and directs for The Smashed Project GB, a global educational theatre project about underage drinking. She is most looking forward to the skirmish of wit between Beatrice and Benedick and understanding what is behind Beatrice's comedic front.



Adam Perrott: Benedick

Adam Perrott is an actor and comedian from Manchester who plays Benedick in this production. His favourite roles to date include Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Touchstone in *As You Like It*, Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*, Banquo and Porter in *Macbeth* and, of course, Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*. As a stand-up comedian he reached the semi-final of So You Think You're Funny and the regional final of the BBC New Comedy Awards available on iPlayer. Adam is looking forward to working at the beautiful Lancaster Castle with this amazing cast and crew and getting to enjoy the wonderful dialogue in this play.



Abigail Price: Claudio

Abigail Price is a third year English Literature and Theatre student who plays Claudio in this production. She is an avid Shakespeare-lover but a first-time Shakespeare performer who is excited to explore Shakespeare's words in the beautiful venue of Lancaster Castle. Abigail has been involved in theatre for most of her life but is excited to develop her diction and pronunciation through this production. She is delighted to explore the complicated nature of Claudio's character.



Grace Thompson: Hero

Grace Thompson is a third year English Literature and Theatre student who plays Hero in the production. She has experience in all facets of theatre, from her degree to her work in amateur theatre. Grace is excited to explore Shakespearean acting for the first time, making the transition from passively to actively engaging with Shakespearean language. She has enjoyed exploring the hidden strengths of Hero in both comedic and tragic moments.



David Findlay: Leonato

David Findlay is an experienced actor who plays Leonato in this production, his second time playing the character. David made his professional debut in 1986 in the award-winning *Bouncers*. David has toured Britain and Ireland with a range of companies and is no stranger to Shakespeare or performing at Lancaster Castle. Lancaster audiences may recognise him from his work with Bingo Dragon on *Twelfth Night* and *Macbeth*. This is David's fourth LU production, having previously performed in *Twelfth Night*, *Edward III*, and *Henry V*.



Andrew Dobel: Antonio

Andrew Dobel has over twenty-five years of performance experience and plays Antonio in this performance. Andrew has performed for various companies in roles such as Michael in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Frank in *84 Charing Cross Rd*, and Toad in *The Wind in the Willows*. He is delighted to finally be playing a character that is roughly his age and is thrilled that the bard continues to amaze and challenge actors.



Helen Logan: Don Pedro

Helen Logan plays Don Pedro in this performance and she belongs to West End Players where she writes, directs, and performs community theatre. This is Helen's first experience of playing a major character, but she is excited to be back performing at Lancaster Castle, her third performance at the venue. She also plays and sings in local music groups and takes part in the Bay Fringe, performing a 'one woman' show on various themes.



Milly Roe: Don John

Milly Roe is a third year English Literature and Creative Writing student who plays Don John in the production. She has been involved in theatre intermittently and has always been drawn to the more villainous characters because they are the most fun to act. Milly sees this as an opportunity to get back on the stage and to build her confidence, both on and offstage. She hopes her experience of performing will give her new insights into Shakespeare.



Meg Fairley: Ursula

Meg Fairley is a third year English Literature and Theatre student who is playing Ursula, one of Hero's waiting-gentlewomen, and choreographing the dances for the production. She has always loved performing, being in multiple plays throughout her time at school and even directing a play in sixth form. This is Meg's second Shakespeare production, having performed the role of Helena in a school production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. She is looking forward to gaining a deeper, more complex understanding of the play through this performance.



Francesca Singh: Margaret

Francesca Singh plays Margaret, a waiting gentlewoman to Hero, in the production. She attended performing arts groups since childhood, completing LAMDA drama exams from grades 2-8; she also performed in numerous productions at Durham University, most notably as Enobarbus in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Francesca has found the role of Margaret to be immense fun and has enjoyed being able to understand the play in greater detail through her role.



Phil Chandler: Borachio

Phil Chandler is a staff member at Lancaster University, a frequent collaborator with director Emma Rucastle, and plays Borachio in this production. He is an experienced stage actor, having played Vanya in *Uncle Vanya*, Faust in *Faust*, and Creon in *Antigone*. Phil played Benedick in a 2015 production of *Much Ado About Nothing* and Don Pedro in a 2018 production, making this his third time performing the play. He has enjoyed being able to play different characters in the same play over a period of time because he has new insights into the play through each perspective.



Amelia Blackwell: Conrade

Amelia Blackwell is an experienced actor and plays Conrade in this production. Amelia trained at East 15 Acting School and began her theatre journey with Emma and ElArt when she was 17. She has experience in a range of styles from contemporary works, such as her performance as Isobel in Mike Bartlett's *Bull*, to classical theatre such as the work she has done with the London-based Theatre Company Thiasos who specialise in Ancient Greek tragedy. This is Amelia's return to Shakespeare, and she is excited to work with Emma again, a director she sees to bring freedom and exploration to her productions.



David J Novell: Friar Frances

David J Novell is an experienced actor who plays Friar Frances in this performance. David is no stranger to Shakespeare, having acted in *The Tempest*, *Edward III*, and *Henry V*. He has also starred in *Oliver Twist*, *The Crucible*, and *The Memorandum*, and has frequently acted under the direction of Emma. David is delighted to be working amongst such an enthusiastic cast and performing at a venue as exciting as Lancaster Castle further adds to his admiration of the bard's work.



Bethany Henwood: Balthasar

Bethany Henwood is a third year English Literature and Creative writing student who plays Balthasar and has organised the music for the production. This is her first time performing Shakespeare, but Bethany has helped backstage on a Shakespeare production with the Dukes Theatre. Bethany loves Shakespeare and loves music, making her excited to be part of a production that encompasses acting, dancing, and singing Shakespeare. Although Balthasar is a smaller role, Bethany is excited to make the most out of a comedic side character.



Gracie Flynn: Dogberry

Gracie Flynn is a third year English Literature and Theatre student who plays Dogberry. Gracie is an experienced actor, having performed nationally and internationally for a range of audiences, including royalty. She is excited to perform Shakespeare at the wonderful Lancaster Castle and to bring her infectious energy to the company. Gracie is delighted to gain experience in performing Shakespeare and to understand the performative nature of the words on the page.



Ben Brighthouse: Verges

Ben Brighthouse has been an actor for over thirty years and plays Verges of the Watch in this production. This is Ben's eighth Shakespeare production and sixth full production at the Castle, yet Ben hopes to perform even more Shakespeare in future. He has been a collaborator with the director, Emma, for fifteen years and enjoys playing comedic roles in her productions. Not only is Ben no stranger to comedic roles, but this is also his second role as a member of a watch, having played George the Watcher in Vaclav Havel's *Memorandum*. Ben is delighted to play a comedic role and cannot wait for the audience's reaction.



Dorian Ralston: George Seacoal and Costuming

Dorian Ralston plays George Seacoal, a member of the Watch, and created costumes for the production. They have a Level 3 acting qualification (Grade 6 LAMDA) and are now with West End Players. This is their second Shakespeare production, having played Orleans, Rambures, and Grey in last year's LU production of Henry V. Dorian really enjoyed performing in Henry V and undertaking small repairs on the costumes.



Charlotte Boulo: Hugh Oatcake and Costuming

Charlotte Boulo is an exchange student from France, studying English Literature for the year at Lancaster University. She is part of the costume team and plays Hugh Oatcake, a member of the Watch. Whilst Charlotte has no previous experience on stage, she is excited to bring the play to life both as an actor and through her work offstage. She believes her work on the production will help her future aspirations of getting into teaching.



Matthew Armitage: Watchman 1

Matthew Armitage plays Watchman 1 in this production of *Much Ado About Nothing*. He has recently taken up acting and has starred in Emma Rucastle's production of *Faust* as Mighty Warrior 1 and as Private Jonas in Warton Drama Group's production of *Antigone*. He is excited to perform at Lancaster Castle and to develop his acting skills for future productions.



James France: The Messenger and the Boy

James France has been acting since he was a child and plays the Messenger in this production. James has been a part of many drama companies and studied theatre all the way through degree level. This is James' first production performed at Lancaster Castle but is not his first Shakespeare production; he performed Shakespeare whilst at university. James is delighted to be performing a Shakespeare play he has never performed before, seeing it as a fantastic piece of theatre.

Production Crew



Rachel Collins: Stage Manager

Rachel Collins is a third year English Literature student who is the stage manager for this production. Although Rachel has never worked as a stage manager, she has directed a short film as part of her degree and is delighted with the opportunity to expand her experience to stage management. She expects her role to aid her understanding of the true power of Shakespeare's theatricality, as well as gaining a greater appreciation for the theatre craft.



Lilly Mae Dunlop-Marriott: Costuming

Lilly Mae Dunlop-Marriott is a third year English Literature student who is part of the costume team for the production. She has previous experience of drama productions for her course and is excited to explore the foundation of theatrical production through her role in costuming. Lilly has enjoyed working on masks and costumes and having the opportunity to work within a the company.



Jennifer Cordes: Marketing and Publicity

Jennifer Cordes is a third year English Literature student who has done the marketing and publicity for the production. Whilst Jennifer has no experience of marketing a production, she has enjoyed each facet of the marketing process, from the initial design of the poster to designing the programme and creating social media content. She has appreciated the opportunity to take Shakespeare's themes from the page of the text and adapt them to promote the performance.



Rebecca Halliwell: Front of House

Rebecca Halliwell is in her second year of an English Literature PhD on Shakespearean comedy and bibliotherapy, and she is part of the front of house team for the performance. Rebecca has been performing Shakespeare since she was twelve, having extensive LAMDA training, and starred as Olivia in LU's 2022 production of *Twelfth Night*, at the Castle. She has loved *Much Ado About Nothing* ever since she watched the RSC's live broadcast of the play in 2015. Rebecca is delighted to be involved with this production and hopes to gain an understanding of fellow cast and crew's experiences with Shakespeare.



Emma Rucastle: Director

Emma is a Lancaster-based theatre and creative professional with particular interests in site-specific theatre, Shakespeare, early-modern women writers, verbatim storytelling and community arts, playfulness and wellbeing.

Passionate about inclusive arts, she has worked on projects/performances with young offenders, the GRT community, the homeless, care home residents, SEND settings and more. *Much Ado About Nothing* is the third summer Shakespeare she has directed at Lancaster Castle, following *Edward III* (June 2023) and *Henry V* (June 2024) and she has also directed a series of Christmas shows in the castle's Shire Hall. Full details of her work can be found at www.elartproductions.co.uk and by following @elartpro on Instagram.



Alison Findlay: Producer and Dramaturg

Alison is Professor of Renaissance Drama at Lancaster University and strongly believes in the value of practice-based teaching and research. As well as writing books and essays on early modern drama, she has produced or directed site-specific stagings of plays by Shakespeare and early modern female playwrights, most recently Lady Rachel Fane's *May Masque* (1627) at Boston Manor House, London (2025). Full details can be found at <https://wp.lancs.ac.uk/shakespeare-and-his-sisters/> Alison is fascinated by how Shakespeare uses language to create characters and fictional worlds. She is co-author of the *Arden Encyclopedia to Shakespeare's Language: Plays and Characters* (2024). In this production, she plays the Sexton, who resolves the plot through his writing – a cameo of Shakespeare perhaps?

Much Ado About Nothing in Lancaster Castle

Romance and Restriction

Staging *Much Ado About Nothing* at Lancaster Castle gives a material reality to its mixture of chivalric romance and witty critique of forms of social restraint. Castle walls, arched cloisters, and windowed towers conjure up the continental romance tradition where soldiers return from battle and re-style themselves as courtly lovers. Benedick mocks Claudio for adopting the willow garland, the typical style of a lover 'being forsaken' by an elite, unreachable lady. Claudio praises Hero as 'a rich jewel' (1.1.171), the beautiful prize in his love-quest. The play's masked ball where characters play at adopting false identities recalls chivalric entertainments like *Henry VIII's* masked appearance with his knights of 'Ardent Desire' at Hampton Court to besiege ladies in a mock wooden castle called 'Chateau Vert'. Military language accompanies Don Pedro and his soldiers into the civic world of Messina with explosive consequences.

Restyling military honour in the confined space of Leonato's household is not easy for any of the male characters. Don John's line 'I have decreed not to sing in my cage' (1.3.31) is the most extreme rejection of restraint physicalised by the Castle as a prison. Claudio, feeling he has been trapped in a Castle Perilous of romance, claims that Hero is 'but the sign and semblance of her honour' (4.1.31), attempting to publicly defend his wounded honour in the church. Chivalric obligations to defend Hero's honour then lead to dangerous confrontations as Benedick, Leonato and Antonio challenge Claudio and Don Pedro to duels by the sword.

The conventions of chivalric romance are even more perilous for women since they are confined as idealised princesses to literal or symbolic towers where their honour is assaulted by suits of love or accusations of infidelity. Hero's name, which is spoken sixty-five times in the script, recalls the tragic lover from mythology who lit a torch in the window of her tower at Sestos, on the banks of the Hellespont, to guide Leander across the sea to make love to her. When the classical myth is mimicked as a game in the domestic world of Messina, it drives the plot of *Much Ado About Nothing* towards tragedy. Margaret, who longs to be a lady rather than being confined 'below stairs' (5.2.10), readily agrees to play the part of the mythical 'Hero' in her tower, for her lover Borachio, even borrowing her mistress's wedding dress to appear at Hero's chamber window. Just as the myth ends tragically – Hero throws herself from the tower to die with Leander – so Shakespeare's Hero is apparently 'done to death with slanderous tongues' (5.3.3), rejected at the altar for lascivious behaviour.

Benedick and Beatrice, who are 'too wise to woo peaceably' (5.2.67) wittily critique the chivalric conventions of courtly love as unjust restraints on their agency. Benedick claims 'I do suffer love, for I love thee against my will' (5.2.62). Beatrice protests her equality to men, claiming it would grieve her to be 'overmastered with a piece of valiant dust?' or subjected to the authority of a husband (2.1.53-3). The Castle's prison setting echoes the questions they raise about the play's comic drive towards marriage. As well as being safer, the everyday world of Messina may offer more opportunities for self-expression than the glamorous castles of chivalric romance. The play mocks the slow but sure operations of the law in the comic figures of the bungling Constable Dogberry, his deputy Verges, and the watchmen who 'will rather sleep than talk. We know what belongs to a watch'. Nevertheless, it is these self-directed citizens who recognise what is 'Deformed' (3.3.37-161) and determine the play's comic resolution.

Alison Findlay

Rehearsal Pictures



Practising the Pavane



Leonato confronts Borachio



Teaching the Watch



‘This looks not like a nuptial’



Benedick the bachelor



Mourning Hero in A Wing at Lancaster
Castle

Thanks

to:

Lancaster University's Department of English Literature and Creative Writing for your support.

Vicki Matthews

Castlegate Security



English Literature
and Creative Writing

Lancaster
University



Marketing and programme designed by Jennifer Cordes