

Cambridge University Press

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William Shakespeare

Excerpt

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MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ¹.

DON PEDRO, prince of Arragon.
 DON JOHN, his bastard brother.
 CLAUDIO, a young lord of Florence.
 BENEDICK, a young lord of Padua.
 LEONATO, governor of Messina.
 ANTONIO, his brother.
 BALTHASAR, attendant on Don Pedro.
 CONRADE, } followers of Don John.
 BORACHIO, }
 FRIAR FRANCIS.
 DOGBERRY, a constable.
 VERGES, a headborough.
 A Sexton.
 A Boy.

HERO, daughter to Leonato².
 BEATRICE, niece to Leonato.
 MARGARET, } gentlewomen attending on Hero.
 URSULA, }

Messengers, Watch, Attendants, &c.

SCENE—*Messina*.

¹ DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.] First given by Rowe.

² See note (i).

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ACT I.

SCENE I. *Before LEONATO'S house.*

Enter LEONATO, HERO, and BEATRICE, *with a Messenger.*

Leon. I learn in this letter that Don Peter of Arragon comes this night to Messina.

Mess. He is very near by this: he was not three leagues off when I left him.

Leon. How many gentlemen have you lost in this action? 5

Mess. But few of any sort, and none of name.

Leon. A victory is twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers. I find here that Don Peter hath bestowed much honour on a young Florentine called Claudio.

Mess. Much deserved on his part, and equally remembered by Don Pedro: he hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age; doing, in the figure of a lamb, the feats of a lion: he hath indeed better bettered expectation than you must expect of me to tell you how. 10

Leon. He hath an uncle here in Messina will be very much glad of it. 15

Mess. I have already delivered him letters, and there appears much joy in him; even so much, that joy could not show itself modest enough without a badge of bitterness.

Leon. Did he break out into tears? 20

SCENE I. Before L.'s house] Capell. 1, 8. *Peter*] Q Ff. *Pedro* Rowe.
 A court before L.'s house. Pope. 8. *numbers*] *number* F4.
 Enter...] See note (1).

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Mess. In great measure.

Leon. A kind overflow of kindness: there are no faces truer than those that are so washed. How much better is it to weep at joy than to joy at weeping!

Beat. I pray you, is Signior Mountanto returned from the wars or no? 25

Mess. I know none of that name, lady: there was none such in the army of any sort.

Leon. What is he that you ask for, niece?

Hero. My cousin means Signior Benedick of Padua. 30

Mess. O, he's returned; and as pleasant as ever he was.

Beat. He set up his bills here in Messina and challenged Cupid at the flight; and my uncle's fool, reading the challenge, subscribed for Cupid, and challenged him at the bird-bolt. I pray you, how many hath he killed and eaten in these wars? But how many hath he killed? for, indeed, I promised to eat all of his killing. 35

Leon. Faith, niece, you tax Signior Benedick too much; but he'll be meet with you, I doubt it not.

Mess. He hath done good service, lady, in these wars. 40

Beat. You had musty victual, and he hath holp to eat it: he is a very valiant trencher-man; he hath an excellent stomach.

Mess. And a good soldier too, lady.

Beat. And a good soldier to a lady: but what is he to a lord? 45

Mess. A lord to a lord, a man to a man; stuffed with all honourable virtues.

Beat. It is so, indeed; he is no less than a stuffed man: but for the stuffing,—well, we are all mortal. 50

Leon. 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.

35. *bird-bolt*] Theobald. *but-bolt* *victual*] Capell. *vittaille* Q.
 Id. conj. *burbolt* Q Ff. *victuall* F₁ F₂ F₃. *victuals* F₄.

37. *promised*] *promise* F₄. *eat*] F₃F₄. *cate* Q F₂. *ease* F₁.

39. *be*] om. F₃ F₄. 42. *he is*] Q. *he's* Ff.

meet] *met* Capell. 50. *stuffing*, — *well*] Theobald

40. *these*] Q F₁. *those* F₂ F₃ F₄. (Davenant's version). *stuffing well*,

41. *Beat.*] Mes. F₂. Q Ff.

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Beat. Alas, he gets nothing by that! In our last conflict four of his five wits went halting off, and now is the whole man governed with one: so that if he have wit enough to keep himself warm, let him bear it for a difference between himself and his horse; for it is all the wealth that he hath left, to be known a reasonable creature. Who is his companion now? He hath every month a new sworn brother. 60

Mess. Is't possible?

Beat. Very easily possible: he wears his faith but as the fashion of his hat; it ever changes with the next block.

Mess. I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your books.

Beat. No; an he were, I would burn my study. But, I pray you, who is his companion? Is there no young squarer now that will make a voyage with him to the devil? 65

Mess. He is most in the company of the right noble Claudio.

Beat. O Lord, he will hang upon him like a disease: he is sooner caught than the pestilence, and the taker runs presently mad. God help the noble Claudio! if he have caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand pound ere a' be cured. 70

Mess. I will hold friends with you, lady. 75

Beat. Do, good friend.

Leon. You will never run mad, niece.

Beat. No, not till a hot January.

Mess. Don Pedro is approached.

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

D. Pedro. Good Signior Leonato, you are come to meet your trouble: the fashion of the world is to avoid cost, and you encounter it. 80

57. *warm*] *from harm* Warburton. 79. *Enter... Don John*] *Enter... John the Bastard.* Q Ff.
 58. *wealth*] *wearth* Hanmer. 80. SCENE II. Pope.
 65, 161, 170 and *passim.* *an*] Theo- 80, 81. *you are...trouble:*] Ff. *are*
and Q Ff. *if* Pope. *you...trouble:* Q. *are you...trouble?*
 73. *Benedick*] *Benedict* Q F₁. Collier.
 74. *a'*] a Q₁. *he* F₁. *it* F₂F₃F₄.
 77. *never*] Q. *ne're* Ff.

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MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING. [ACT I.

Leon. Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your Grace: for trouble being gone, comfort should remain; but when you depart from me, sorrow abides, and happiness takes his leave. 85

D. Pedro. You embrace your charge too willingly. I think this is your daughter.

Leon. Her mother hath many times told me so.

Benc. Were you in doubt, sir, that you asked her? 90

Leon. Signior Benedick, no; for then were you a child.

D. Pedro. You have it full, Benedick: we may guess by this what you are, being a man. Truly, the lady fathers herself. Be happy, lady; for you are like an honourable father. 95

Benc. If Signior Leonato be her father, she would not have his head on her shoulders for all Messina, as like him as she is.

Beat. I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior Benedick: nobody marks you. 100

Benc. What, my dear Lady Disdain! are you yet living?

Beat. Is it possible disdain should die while she hath such meet food to feed it, as Signior Benedick? Courtesy itself must convert to disdain, if you come in her presence.

Benc. Then is courtesy a turncoat. But it is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted: and I would I could find in my heart that I had not a hard heart; for, truly, I love none. 105

Beat. A dear happiness to women: they would else have been troubled with a pernicious suitor. I thank God and my cold blood, I am of your humour for that: I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me. 110

Benc. God keep your ladyship still in that mind! so some gentleman or other shall 'scape a predestinate scratched face.

Beat. Scratching could not make it worse, an 'twere such a face as yours were. 115

87. *too*] Q F₁. *more* F₂ F₃ F₄.
most Rowe.

90. *sir*] (j). om. Ff.

92. *we*] *you* Rowe (ed. 2).

110. *pernicious*] *pertinacious* Grey
conj.

116. *wee*] om. Collier MS.

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Benc. Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.*Beat.* A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours.*Bene.* I would my horse had the speed of your tongue, and so good a continuer. But keep your way, i' God's 120 name; I have done.*Beat.* You always end with a jade's trick: I know you of old.*D. Pedro.* That is the sum of all, Leonato. Signior Claudio and Signior Benedick, my dear friend Leonato 125 hath invited you all. I tell him we shall stay here at the least a month; and he heartily prays some occasion may detain us longer. I dare swear he is no hypocrite, but prays from his heart.*Leon.* If you swear, my lord, you shall not be forsworn. 130
[*To Don John*] Let me bid you welcome, my lord: being reconciled to the prince your brother, I owe you all duty.*D. John.* I thank you: I am not of many words, but I thank you.*Leon.* Please it your Grace lead on? 135*D. Pedro.* Your hand, Leonato; we will go together.[*Exeunt all except Benedick and Claudio.*]*Claud.* Benedick, didst thou note the daughter of Signior Leonato?*Benc.* I noted her not; but I looked on her.*Claud.* Is she not a modest young lady? 140*Bene.* Do you question me, as an honest man should do, for my simple true judgement; or would you have me speak after my custom, as being a professed tyrant to their sex?*Claud.* No; I pray thee speak in sober judgement.*Bene.* Why, i' faith, methinks she's too low for a high 145120. *i'*] Capell. *a* Q Ff. *o'* Warburton.124. *That ... all, Leonato.*] *That ...all: Leonato, Q. This...all: Leonato, Ff. This...all: Don John, Hammer.* See note (11).126. *tell him*] Q F₁ F₂. *tell you* F₃ F₄.131, 132. Q Ff place a comma after *lord* and a colon or semicolonafter *brother.*136. [*Exeunt...*] *Exeunt. Manent ... Q. [Exeunt. Manent... Ff.*

137. SCENE III. Pope.

143. *their*] *her* Capell conj.144. *pray thee*] Q F₁. *prethee* F₂ F₃ F₄.145. *a high*] *a hie* Q F₁ F₂. *an high* F₃ F₄.

praise, too brown for a fair praise, and too little for a great praise: only this commendation I can afford her, that were she other than she is, she were unhandsome; and being no other but as she is, I do not like her.

Claud. Thou thinkest I am in sport: I pray thee tell 150
me truly how thou likest her.

Bene. Would you buy her, that you inquire after her?

Claud. Can the world buy such a jewel?

Bene. Yea, and a case to put it into. But speak you this with a sad brow? or do you play the flouting Jack, to tell us 155
Cupid is a good hare-finder, and Vulcan a rare carpenter? Come, in what key shall a man take you, to go in the song?

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

Bene. I can see yet without spectacles, and I see no 160
such matter: there's her cousin, an she were not possessed with a fury, exceeds her as much in beauty as the first of May doth the last of December. But I hope you have no intent to turn husband, have you?

Claud. I would scarce trust myself, though I had sworn 165
the contrary, if Hero would be my wife.

Bene. Is't come to this? In faith, hath not the world one man but he will wear his cap with suspicion? Shall I never see a bachelor of threescore again? Go to, i'faith; an thou wilt needs thrust thy neck into a yoke, wear the 170
print of it, and sigh away Sundays. Look; Don Pedro is returned to seek you.

Re-enter DON PEDRO.

D. Pedro. What secret hath held you here, that you followed not to Leonato's?

Bene. I would your Grace would constrain me to tell. 175

D. Pedro. I charge thee on thy allegiance.

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 154. <i>into</i>] <i>in too</i> Hanmer. | mer. Enter Don Pedro, John the |
| 158, 159. <i>ever I</i>] <i>I ever</i> Pope. | bastard. Q Ff. |
| 162. <i>with a</i>] <i>with such a</i> Rowe | 173. SCENE IV. Pope. |
| (ed. 2). | 174. <i>Leonato's</i>] Rowe (ed. 2). |
| 167. <i>this? In faith</i>] Q Ff. <i>this,</i> | <i>Leonatoes</i> Q F ₁ F ₂ . <i>Leonato</i> F ₃ F ₄ . |
| <i>in faith?</i> Pope. | <i>Leonato's house</i> Pope. |
| 172. <i>Re-enter Don Pedro.</i>] Han- | |

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Bene. You hear, Count Claudio: I can be secret as a dumb man; I would have you think so; but, on my allegiance, mark you this, on my allegiance. He is in love. With who? now that is your Grace's part. Mark how 180 short his answer is;—With Hero, Leonato's short daughter.

Claud. If this were so, so were it uttered.

Bene. Like the old tale, my lord: 'it is not so, nor 'twas not so, but, indeed, God forbid it should be so.'

Claud. If my passion change not shortly, God forbid it 185 should be otherwise.

D. Pedro. Amen, if you love her; for the lady is very well worthy.

Claud. You speak this to fetch me in, my lord.

D. Pedro. By my troth, I speak my thought. 190

Claud. And, in faith, my lord, I spoke mine.

Bene. And, by my two faiths and troths, my lord, I spoke mine.

Claud. That I love her, I feel.

D. Pedro. That she is worthy, I know. 195

Bene. That I neither feel how she should be loved, nor know how she should be worthy, is the opinion that fire cannot melt out of me: I will die in it at the stake.

D. Pedro. Thou wast ever an obstinate heretic in the despite of beauty. 200

Claud. And never could maintain his part but in the force of his will.

Bene. That a woman conceived me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks: but that I will have a recheat winded in my forehead, or hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick, all women shall pardon me. Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none; and the fine is, for the which I may go the finer, I will live a bachelor. 205

D. Pedro. I shall see thee, ere I die, look pale with love. 210

177. *can*] *cannot* F₄.

180. *With who?*] Q F₁. *With whom?* F₂ F₃ F₄.

181. *his*] *the* Collier MS.

182, 183. *Claud.* *If ... were it.*

Bene. *Uttered like the old tale ...* Johnson conj. See note (III).

193. *spoke*] Q. *speake* F₁ F₂.

speak F₃ F₄.

205. *recheat*] *recheate* Q Ff.

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Benc. With anger, with sickness, or with hunger, my lord; not with love: prove that ever I lose more blood with love than I will get again with drinking, pick out mine eyes with a ballad-maker's pen, and hang me up at the door of a brothel-house for the sign of blind Cupid. 215

D. Pedro. Well, if ever thou dost fall from this faith, thou wilt prove a notable argument.

Benc. If I do, hang me in a bottle like a cat, and shoot at me; and he that hits me, let him be clapped on the shoulder, and called Adam. 220

D. Pedro. Well, as time shall try:
'In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke.'

Benc. 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 such great letters as they write 'Here is good horse to hire,' let them signify under my sign 'Here you may see Benedick the married man.' 225

Claud. If this should ever happen, thou wouldst be horn-mad. 230

D. Pedro. Nay, if Cupid have not spent all his quiver in Venice, thou wilt quake for this shortly.

Benc. I look for an earthquake too, then.

D. Pedro. Well, you will temporize with the hours. In the meantime, good Signior Benedick, repair to Leonato's: commend me to him, and tell him I will not fail him at supper; for indeed he hath made great preparation. 235

Benc. I have almost matter enough in me for such an embassy; and so I commit you—

Claud. To the tuition of God: From my house, if I had it,— 240

D. Pedro. The sixth of July: Your loving friend, Benedick.

Benc. Nay, mock not, mock not. The body of your discourse is sometime guarded with fragments, and the guards are but slightly basted on neither: ere you flout old ends any further, examine your conscience: and so I leave you. 245

[*Exit.*]219. *hits*] *first hits* Collier MS.