

## BY THE NUMBERS

It is estimated that MUCH ADO  
ABOUT NOTHING was written  
in **1598-99.**

**72%**  
of the full text is prose,  
while  
**28%**  
is verse.

This is HVSF's **4<sup>th</sup>**  
production of MUCH ADO.

The word 'love' appears in  
this production approximately **112**  
times.

photo by Richard Termine

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

1. This production uses  
visual and aural references  
to mid-20th century America.  
How did this decision affect  
your perception of the  
characters and story?

2. Do you think Beatrice and  
Benedick were in love from the  
start, or that they gradually fell  
in love?

3. Were you more drawn to the story  
of Hero and Claudio, or that of  
Beatrice and Benedick? What aspects  
of this story were more compelling  
than the other?

4. Many of Shakespeare's comedies  
end with weddings. Do you believe  
that the characters who got married  
at the end of MUCH ADO should  
have done so?

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## MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

*dramaturgical information*

HUDSON  
VALLEY  
SHAKESPEARE  
FESTIVAL

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# INFLUENCES

The storyline in which a woman is wrongfully accused of disloyalty was already common by the time Shakespeare wrote *MUCH ADO*. There are some texts, however, that are often considered to be direct influences of Hero and Claudio's story: Most notable are the 22nd novella in Matteo Bandello's 1554 *LA PRIMA PARTE DE LE NOUELLE* and canto 5 of Ludovico Ariosto's *ORLANDO FURIOSO*. While these texts are both linked to Shakespeare through specific story elements, the Bandello version of the tale includes characters with names similar to their Shakespearean counterparts.

Beatrice and Benedick's story is widely believed to be of Shakespeare's own invention.

## Where? **MESSINA, SICILY**

More specifically, scenes take place in Leonato's household, as well as in the streets of the town, a prison-house, a church, and a graveyard.

## When?

The plot begins in the aftermath of Don Pedro's victorious military campaign over his half-brother Don John. There is a tense, postwar atmosphere in Messina.

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# Who's Who?

## RETURNING FROM WAR:

- \* Benedick: A young lord of Padua who claims he will never fall in love. Engaged in a war of wits with Beatrice.
- \* Claudio: A young lord of Florence who falls in love with Hero.
- \* Don Pedro: Prince of Arragon, staying in Messina for a month following his victory in battle.
- \* Don John: The bastard half-brother of Don Pedro, to whom he recently lost in battle.
- \* Borachio, Conrade: Followers of Don John.

## RESIDENTS OF MESSINA:

- \* Beatrice: Niece to Leonato, who is engaged in a war of wits with Benedick.
- \* Hero: Daughter to Leonato, who is wrongly accused of disloyalty.
- \* Leonato: Governor of Messina. Father to Hero and uncle to Beatrice.
- \* Antonio: Brother of Leonato.
- \* Friar Francis: Assists Hero when false accusations are made.
- \* Margaret, Ursula: Attendants to Hero.

## MESSINA'S WATCHMEN:

- \* Dogberry: A constable seeking to uncover Don John's schemes.
- \* Verges: Assists Dogberry in his interrogations.
- \* Sexton: Joins Dogberry and Verges in the interrogations.
- \* Moliere, Oatcake, Seacole: Watchmen

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## THEMES TO LOOK OUT FOR

*the power of words*  
*deception*  
*honor*  
*love*

## A NOTE ON NOTHING

The inclusion of the word "nothing" in this play's title is often questioned. To what does "nothing" refer?

Some argue that "nothing" only implies a matter of small importance. Many others, however, believe a double meaning may be implied if "nothing" is substituted with the word "noting" (meaning in this context to observe, overhear, or perceive).

Consider how in Elizabethan England the words "nothing" and "noting" were likely pronounced the same way. Perhaps Shakespeare intended for *MUCH ADO*'s title to also reference the tendencies of the play's characters to gossip and overhear information, regardless of the information's validity.

Sources: ESSENTIAL SHAKESPEARE HANDBOOK, by Leslie Dunton-Downer and Alan Riding; THE SHAKESPEARE NAME DICTIONARY, by J. Madison Davis and Daniel A. Frankforter; CliffsNotes, "About Nothing" (Web); Royal Shakespeare Company, "MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING" (Web)

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