**The Play (MAAN)**

- **Much Ado About Nothing** is generally considered one of Shakespeare’s best comedies, because it combines elements of great comedy with more serious themes dealing with honor, shame, and court politics.
- It was probably written in 1599, as Shakespeare was approaching the middle of his career.
- Though it has darker concerns, it is a joyful comedy that ends with multiple marriages and no deaths.

**The Nature of Comedies**

- Although one of the features of Shakespearean comedy is that no one dies, it would be a mistake to assume that death is absent from this genre.
- Often, Shakespeare’s comedies are more accepting of death than his tragedies, treating death as part of the natural cycle of life.
- Many of his comedies feature fake deaths or figurative deaths of main characters.
- **Much Ado About Nothing** is no exception, and Hero’s pretending to die of humiliation makes death more vividly present here than in any of Shakespeare’s other comedies.

**A Problem Comedy?**

- In this play, the line between tragedy and comedy is sometimes fuzzy.
- Many critics have noted that the plot of **Much Ado About Nothing** shares significant elements with that of Romeo and Juliet.
- Other critics call **MAAN** a problem comedy:
  - Hero stages a false death only to come back to life once her beloved has repented.

**Ah, Young… or is it… Old Love?**

- Although the young lovers Hero and Claudio provide the main impetus for the plot, the courtship between the older, wiser lovers Benedick and Beatrice is what makes **MAAN** so memorable.
- Benedick and Beatrice argue with delightful wit, and Shakespeare develops their journey from antagonism to sincere love and affection with a rich sense of humour and compassion.
- Since Beatrice and Benedick have a history, weight is added to their relationship.
  - They are older and more mature than the typical lovers in Shakespeare’s comedies, though their unhealthy competitiveness reveals them to be childish when it comes to love.
Don Pedro
- The Prince of Aragon (Spain).
- He has won victory over his illegitimate brother (Don John).
- He is visiting Messina on his way home.

Benedick
- A follower of Don Pedro.
- His name means 'the blessed one'.
- He has decided that he's a woman hater, and swears he shall never marry.

Claudio
- Don Pedro’s favorite soldier.
- Falls instantly in love with Hero.
- Is quick to believe the word of a villain (Don John) in accusing his beloved Hero of infidelity.
- A wuss.

Don John
- The illegitimate brother of Don Pedro.
- A stage direction in the play even refers to him as the 'Bastard', as does Benedick later in the play.
- He describes himself as a ‘plain-dealing villain’.

Don John’s Stooges
- Borachio
  - A follower and friend of Don John, and the originator of the plan to ruin Hero’s good name.
  - His name comes from the Spanish word for 'wine bottle'.

- Conrad
  - Another of Don John’s followers.
  - Is mean... period.
  - Part of the plot to ruin Hero’s name as well.

The Bad Boys of Messina
### Hero
- The daughter of Leonato.
- Described by Claudio as 'a modest young lady'.
- Dismissed by Benedick as 'too low for high praise and too little for great praise'.
- Attended by Margaret and Ursula.

### Beatrice
- Although Leonato is her 'uncle and her guardian', her household position isn't clear.
- She speaks and behaves with a lot of freedom, and her wit challenges the male characters.
- She has sworn never to marry.

### Dogberry
- Master Constable of Messina.
- Has a great opinion of himself and his office but cannot speak English very well.
- Speaks in malapropisms.
- Definite comic relief

### Verges
- Headborough or the under-constable.
- Dogberry's assistant.
- Lesser Role

### Brothers in Messina
- **Leonato**
  - The Governor of Messina.
  - Father of Hero.
  - He is flattered by the attentions of Don Pedro, and quick to believe whatever the prince tells him.
- **Antonio**
  - Leonato's brother.
  - Ready to murder Claudio on his brother's behalf.
  - Has a lesser role.

### Antonio and Leonato
Lesser Roles

- Balthasar
  - A servant to Don Pedro.
  - A co-conspirator in the romance plot between Benedick and Beatrice.
  - A singer.

- Friar Francis
  - A priest.
  - He is not as prone to over-emotional responses like other characters.
  - A co-conspirator in the plot to cover up Hero’s ‘death’ until her innocence is proven.

Setting:

- Don Pedro, the Prince of Aragon is returning from victory against his half-brother, the rebellious Don John, who tried to take over Aragon.
- One of Don Pedro’s officers, Claudio has distinguished himself greatly in this campaign.
- Though beaten, as part of the truce negotiated, Don John agreed to also come to Messina.

We Continue…

- As a courtesy for passing through his territory, Don Pedro visits the Governor of Messina, Leonato on his way home.
- In Messina, Claudio falls even more deeply in love with Hero, Leonato’s daughter.
- His officer, Benedick, trades barbs and witty insults with the Leonato’s niece, Beatrice.

The Plot Begins…

- Leonato notes the merry war of words these two have...
- In love with Hero, Claudio seeks Benedick’s opinion.
- Benedick teases him about her, making Claudio even more determined to marry her.
- Knowing Claudio loves Hero, Don Pedro nobly arranges to court Hero on Claudio’s behalf.
  - Seems a bit weird, doesn’t it?

PLOT SUMMARY

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By William Shakespeare

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The There’s More…

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But That’s Not All…

- Playing matchmakers, Don Pedro, Leonato and Claudio decide to try to make the lifelong bachelor Benedick fall in love with Beatrice, who is equally opposed to any marriage.
- Hero also helps to match-make with the aide of her waiting women, Ursula and Margaret.
- The plan is to trick both Benedick and Beatrice into thinking each has declared his/her deep love for the other!

But Don John is Not Happy…

- Meanwhile, Claudio’s marriage to Hero is planned but though Don Pedro has made peace with his brother Don John, Don John is:
  - Still not a nice guy
  - Jealous of Claudio’s reputation and determined to cause him harm...
- The same night during a masked party, Don John mischievously allows Claudio to overhear that he believes Don Pedro actually wants Hero for himself.
  - Claudio (the wuss) easily falls for Don John’s trick and pouts.
  - Devastated, Claudio runs off before Don Pedro can tell him the good news that Claudio and Hero will be married.
  - Beatrice finds Claudio and makes him see reason. The marriage will happen.

But Don John’s Not Done…

- Learning of Claudio and Hero, Don John is foiled.
  - He الثف (Margaret) and her aide Borachio to make it look like Hero is cheating on him.
- Claudio hears what he thinks is Hero (really Margaret) in the throes of passion with another man (Borachio).
- Claudio takes the bait, rejecting and denouncing a heartbroken Hero on the altar!

Hero’s Journey…

- Friar Francis, believing in Hero’s virtue, helps the grief-stricken Hero hide away with Leonato’s help.
  - After Leonato is convinced that Hero is innocent and not a ‘contaminated stale’
- Leonato then announces the death of his daughter from grief at being rejected by Claudio.
  - He must now play the role of grieving father. He doesn’t have to pretend to be angry, however.

The ‘Wine Bottle’ Speaks

- Borachio, however, has drunkenly boasted not only of his part in Don John’s plan but also about the ducats he’s received from his boss.
  - He reveals his bad deeds to Conrad in the middle of the town square and is apprehended by constables.
- His subsequent confession restored Hero’s virtue and good name. Too bad everyone thinks she’s dead!

Claudio’s Apology

- A public apology is demanded from Claudio by Leonato professing Hero’s good virtue.
  - He feels so bad about shunning her, that he’s willing to do anything in her honor.
- Additionally, an epitaph (a poem-lish cloth) is to be hung at Hero’s grave then sung by Claudio.
  - He gets Balthasar to do it since he’s a much better singer.
In return, Leonato allows Claudio to marry one of his ‘nieces’ instead of Hero as his punishment for his bad deeds.
- Of course, the niece is Hero in disguise.

The ‘niece’ just so happens to be an almost exact copy of his dead daughter.
- And she’s ready to forgive and forget Claudio’s poor behavior.

- This niece reveals herself to be none other than Hero.
- The planned wedding now has two couples:
  - Claudio and Hero;
  - Benedick and Beatrice.

The Final Thoughts

- At the wedding Benedick and Beatrice question why neither declared their love to each other directly.
  - They learn that they were tricked but realize they loved each other all along.

- Meanwhile news comes that Don John who had gone into hiding has been captured, the play ending with Benedick telling Don Pedro, now single amongst his friends to “Get thee a wife, get thee a wife!”
  - At the end of the play, Don Pedro seems sad. Is it because he’s lonely or that he’s going to miss his buddlies?