



Much Ado About Nothing

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Places Discussed

Leonato's house. Home of Leonato, the governor of Messina on the island of Sicily, which during the thirteenth century in which the play is set was an important European cultural center. The governor would have had rooms enough in his house lavishly to entertain and host nobles from the artistic and intellectual Italian cities of Florence and Padua, as well as the one of the most powerful independent kingdoms in medieval Spain, Aragon. Although most of the governor's guests are Italians, they are regarded as foreigners in Messina, and as such, are easily duped.

The grounds around the house contain an elaborate orchard described in act 1, scene 2, as having a "thick-pleached alley" or an arched walkway lined with trees whose boughs are interwoven. The thickness of the boughs would hide anyone who wanted to overhear a conversation; in this way, Shakespeare could present secrecy and comedic intrigue.

Bibliography:

Bloom, Harold, ed. *William Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing."* New York: Chelsea House, 1988. Contains eight significant articles from the 1970's and 1980's. See especially the essays by Richard A. Levin, who looks beneath the comedic surface to find unexpected, troubling currents, and Carol Thomas Neely, who contributes an influential feminist interpretation.

Evans, Bertrand. *Shakespeare's Comedies.* Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1960. Important critical study. Concludes that Shakespeare's comic dramaturgy is based on different levels of awareness among characters and between them and the audience. The comedy in *Much Ado About Nothing* reflects an intricate game of multiple deceptions and misunderstandings that the audience enjoys from a privileged position.

Hunter, Robert Grams. *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1965. Argues persuasively that the thematic core of several Shakespeare comedies derives from the tradition of English morality plays. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Claudio sins against the moral order by mistrusting Hero and is saved by repentance and forgiveness.

Macdonald, Ronald R. *William Shakespeare: The Comedies.* New York: Twayne, 1992. Compact introduction to Shakespeare's comedy that is both critically sophisticated and accessible to the general reader. Essay on *Much Ado About Nothing* reveals various subtextual relationships of class and gender by probing the characters' semantically complex and ironic verbal behavior.

Ornstein, Robert. *Shakespeare's Comedies: From Roman Farce to Romantic Mystery.* London: Associated University Presses, 1986. Award-winning book by a major Shakespeare scholar. The chapter on *Much Ado About Nothing* offers a sensitive, graceful analysis of the play that focuses primarily on characterization, plot, and moral themes.

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