

SYNOPSIS OF TNT and ITCL production of MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

William Shakespeare directed and edited by Paul Stebbings

Pre show scene:

A battle – the forces of Don Pedro defeat the forces of his treacherous brother, Don John. Don John is captured by Claudio and told that only if he truly repents will he be forgiven by his brother.

Scene 1

Leonato, governor of Messina for the ruler (Duke Don Pedro) waits with his daughter (Hero) and his niece (Beatrice) for news of the battle. It is good news. Beatrice asks about Benedick and Hero asks about Claudio – have they survived the battle? Beatrice mocks Benedick as a hot aired boaster. Hero discovers that Claudio has been the best warrior in the battle and that he is now Benedick's constant companion.

Don Pedro Claudio and Benedick enter in triumph. They all agree that they should spend the next month at Leonato's enjoying his hospitality.

Beatrice and Benedick do not seem so happy with each other's presence – they mock each other and fight with words.

When the two men are alone Claudio confesses to Benedick that he loves Hero – this annoys Benedick who says he hates all love and will never marry – and now his best friend wants to forget about the life of a soldier and become husband. Don Pedro arrives and encourages Claudio to fall in love – much to Benedick's disgust.

Don Pedro seeing that Claudio is shy, says he will woo Hero at the evening's masked ball - in the name of Claudio. Claudio is delighted.

Scene 2

– a spy reports the news to Leonato – who mistakenly believes that the Duke wants to marry his daughter.

Scene 3

Don John and his evil accomplice Boraccio discuss the wedding. They want to stop Claudio marrying Hero – as a revenge for Claudio defeating Don John. So they plan to make Claudio believe that Don Pedro will trick him at the masked ball and run off with Hero.

Scene 4

Leonato tells his daughter to accept Don John if he proposes to her. Hero is upset and she prefers Claudio. Beatrice encourages Hero to rebel and says that women should be able to choose their husbands – but that she, Beatrice, will never marry.

Scene 5

The masked ball. In the confusion of the masked ball, Beatrice insults Benedick – and Don Pedro woos Hero in Claudio's name, and Don John uses the masks to lie to Claudio and say that Don Pedro is tricking him and really wants to run off with Hero.

Claudio falls into despair – it seems all is lost but then the truth is revealed and Hero and Claudio united – so Don John's plot fails. Leonato agrees to the marriage of Hero and Claudio and it is set to happen in a few days.

Meanwhile the rift between Benedick and Beatrice is even deeper – Benedick is furious at her insults.

Seeing the success of the engagement of Hero and Claudio – Don Pedro proposes to Claudio, Leonato and Hero that they should do all in their power to make Beatrice and Benedick fall in love with each other. Even though they are so opposed to each other it is clear that Beatrice and Benedick are very similar! They all agree to try.

Scene 6

Don John is furious that his plot has failed and attacks Boraccio – but Boraccio says he has second, better, plan. He is having an affair with Margaret, Hero's maid, he will get Margaret to stand at Hero's window at night and then kiss her there and be seen to enter her bedroom. He will invite Claudio and Don Pedro to witness the scene. He will then have "proved" that she is unfaithful to Claudio and not a virgin bride fitted for Count Claudio. Don John agrees to set up the plan. He will have his revenge.

Scene 7

Leonato Claudio and Don Pedro meet in the orchard, they know that Benedick is hiding there. They call for a sad love song which irritates the love-hating Benedick.

Then the three plotters speak to each other, knowing that Benedick can hear them. They say they know that Beatrice is madly in love with Benedick but dare not tell him so. Benedick is amazed and also flattered. He desperately tries to get closer to hear more – and the three men oblige.

Alone, Benedick, reflects on what he has heard and realises that he does indeed love his greatest tormentor – Beatrice.

Beatrice is sent in to ask Benedick to dinner. Benedick thinks her simple request is proof of her love for him – Beatrice is just puzzled by Benedick's new behaviour.

Scene 8

Here and her maid servant Margaret set a love trap for Beatrice. She too overhears that Benedick loves her – and is in turn amazed and then melts at the idea. She too has to madly chase around the orchard to overhear the two plotters talking of Benedick's true love for her.

Don Pedro and Claudio tease Benedick – who tries to pretend he is not in love.

Scene 9

Don John's plot unfolds. He calls Claudio to his dark room and tell him that Hero is unfaithful and that even tonight – the day before the wedding – she will receive her lover. Don John invites Claudio to see the “proof”. Claudio foolishly accepts this and tells Don Pedro to go with him that night.

That same evening they watch Boraccio call Margaret – disguised as Hero – to Hero's bedroom window, kiss and enter. Claudio is consumed with pain and fury.

Interval

Scene 10

The watch, or local police force, is on patrol. They are commanded by a very foolish officer called Dogberry. They are all not much less foolish than Dogberry. Their main task seems to be to sleep on duty. Boraccio enters and drunkenly confesses to a woman he has found that he has earned 1000 gold ducats for betraying Hero and tricking Claudio. Even though they are stupid the watch overhear him and arrest him.

Scene 11

The wedding. Just as the marriage of Hero and Claudio is about to be completed Claudio steps forward and cruelly and in public accuses Hero of being a liar and a whore. Don Pedro backs up the accusation. Even Leonato is swayed by their “evidence” and poor Hero is unable to defend herself from all these powerful men in this patriarchal society – she collapses and faints. Only Beatrice defends her. Claudio and Don Pedro storm out. But the clever priest at the wedding intervenes – he does not believe that Hero is impure – he gradually persuades Leonato to believe in his daughter's innocence – and between them they decide to trick Claudio and Don Pedro and gather evidence. They publicise the fact that Hero died in the Church and that she will be buried tomorrow, not wedded today.

Benedick comes to the wedding late and then is drawn into the plot – alone with Beatrice they at last have an opportunity to declare their love for each other – but the shadow of the events hang over them. When Benedick declares he will do anything for Beatrice's heart she says: Kill Claudio. He hesitates then agrees because love means everything to him now.

Scene 12

A courthouse – Boraccio is tried for his part in the evil plot to trick Claudio and humiliate Hero – he is overwhelmed with remorse because now it seems that Hero has died as a result of his false accusations. Dogberry punishes him and they all agree that they must tell Leonato of this foul conspiracy of Don John – Don John has run away.

Scene 13

Leonato confronts Claudio and Don Pedro with his daughter's "death". They are not moved – they reveal their petty and selfish natures – honour is more important than life and love to them. Benedick enters. Claudio and Don Pedro want him to resume their jolly bachelor life – male jokes and fighting. But Benedick will have none of this and challenges Claudio to a duel to the death for Hero's honour. All, of course, because Benedick loves Beatrice,

But then Dogberry produces the prisoner Boraccio – Boraccio confesses all his plot and now Claudio and Don Pedro know that Hero was innocent – but they still believe she is dead. This is Leonato's revenge and his lesson for them. The accusers are overcome with remorse and beg forgiveness. Leonato says that their penalty is two fold: they must go to the tomb of Hero and announce to the world her innocence and Claudio must marry Leonato's brother's daughter – without even seeing what she looks like. Claudio and Don Pedro agree.

Scene 14

Hero's tomb. Night. Claudio and Don Pedro read aloud that Hero is innocent, mysterious dancing and singing figures accompany them. It seems that Hero's ghost rises from the grave and confronts Claudio with her betrayed innocence. Claudio is consumed by remorse.

Scene 15

Benedick, having challenged Claudio, now is fit for Beatrice's love – he does not know that Hero has been proved innocent or that Claudio has begged forgiveness. So Beatrice and Benedick kiss at last and agree to marry – but still their love is secret.

Scene 16

The final wedding – Claudio and Don Pedro come to the chapel in Leonato's house – the veiled mysterious woman is produced for Claudio to marry – he agrees to swear to marry her without seeing her. Then she lifts the veil and it is Hero – she says she died while her honour died and now is back to life. They embrace and are reconciled. They will marry – so too will Beatrice and Benedick – but they are still embarrassed to confess that they have changed their public positions and have to be forced to confess their true love. Only Don Pedro will now stay a bachelor. It all looks to end happily – then news is brought that the evil Don John has been captured. He is brought in chained and punished by Claudio. Then they all dance!