

The character of
dogberry in william
shakespeare's play
"much ado about
nothing"



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Dogberry is a secondary character found in William Shakespeare's comedic yet dark play *Much Ado About Nothing*. His character may be easy to overlook along with his comedic blubbing as simply another method of Shakespeare's to provide relief in a play that rolls downhill as it leads up to its final acts, but that is not all that he is. Dogberry's character is complex in that he may resemble an ordinary member of society but Shakespeare employs him as a foil to several of the primary characters and as the one to uncover the culprits behind Hero's ruined reputation and "death."

A constable was a caricature that resembled a peace officer, in that it had limited training and power that resulted in a lack of respect from the citizens of the small town they were employed in. At least in the case of Dogberry, who was the constable of the town of Messina located in Sicily. Dogberry may have had little training but his knowledge of the law is not as inadequate as it seems. When considering his choice of deputies he makes sure to pick those who can read and write, asks them, "Are you good men and true?" and advises them to, "keep your fellows' counsel and your own."

While Dogberry is not a professional in his line of work he does understand that he is responsible for keeping trouble out of his small town and assures his men that to wake him for any "matter of weight" is more than acceptable. The text alludes to the possibility that Dogberry is illiterate, unable to read or write through the repeated lines "write that down" which would normally be considered a problem in this line of work but is not for Dogberry, as his deputies and the Sexton take down the charges and testimonies of prisoners.

One problem that Dogberry does have is his poor memory for the nature of words, although he is aware of what they signify. Dogberry suffers from what is known as malapropism, or the mistaken use of a word in place of a similar sounding one, which often results in an unintentionally amusing effect.

Dogberry's linguistic performance or rather incompetence is what reveals Shakespeare's brilliant manipulation of language through the maiming of said constable's lines.

The humor that Dogberry brings to the storyline through his careless use of words is different from that of Benedick's and Beatrice, who are in their own way humorous with their sophisticated puns, play on words and wit. It differs from Claudio and his purposeful, wrath filled words that are intent on destroying Hero. Dogberry's humor is one that comes from a character who simply has trouble conveying his thoughts because he mixes up his words.

One scene in particular demonstrates Dogberry's unintentional hilarity and transformation from a man who " would not hang a dog by my will, much more a man that hath any honesty in him", into a man with a strong character, unwilling to keep quiet when a villain dare call him an ass.

Dogberry, Verges and the Sexton prepare to examine Borachio and Conrade who have been accused of being " false knaves", an accusation they deny.

The watchmen who witnessed Borachio's and Conrade's crime, present their accusation and details of what they overheard but Dogberry does not seem to understand the importance of this.

Fortunately, the Sexton realizes what the three watchmen are implying and comes to the conclusion that they have stumbled upon a treacherous plot

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that Borachio and Conrade are key players in. The Sexton orders Dogberry and Verges to tie up the villains so that they may be taken to Leonato and then departs, however, when Dogberry attempts to lay his hands on Conrade, he dismisses them calling Verges a fool. Dogberry wishes the Sexton would have been there to write down the insult which prompts Conrade to declare, " Away! You are an ass, you are an ass".

Dogberry takes great offence and speaks what is recognized as one of the greatest comedic yet dramatic speeches in literature, full of malapropisms that add to the effect. " Dost thou not suspect my place?," he asks, " Dost thou not suspect my years?" Dogberry is regretful of the lack of the Sexton's presence and skill to, " write me down an ass!" and take a written account of him denouncing a villain who is " full of piety". Nonetheless, with or without the Sexton and his job to record, Dogberry assures himself and the villains that their crime will be " proved upon thee by good witness".

Dogberry refuses to be labeled an ass and continues on to defend and simultaneously celebrate his honor: I am a wise fellow; and which is more, an officer; and which is more, a householder; and which is more, as pretty a piece of flesh as any is in Messina, and one that knows the law, go to! and a rich fellow enough, go to! and a fellow that hath had losses; and one that hath two gowns and everything handsome about him. Bring him away. O that I had been writ down an ass! He mistakenly misuses " suspect" in place of " respect" and " piety" instead of " impiety", which is just one way that he contributes to his own slander, that and his continuous wishing that the Sexton were around to be " writ down an ass."

No matter, Dogberry becomes alite with passion in his own defense! He perceives Conrade's comment as a critique on his class and while Dogberry is not a nobleman, he owns his own home, is a possessor of two gowns and a law abiding citizen. In fighting for his own honor, Dogberry makes himself look like an ass. Dogberry and Verges do not keep to themselves the newly found information that they have obtained. With the villains in tow they seek out Don Pedro and Claudio who recognize the men as henchmen who worked for Don John, the mastermind behind the entire affair, who ran off like a coward. Wondering what the men could have committed in order to be restrained, Dogberry attempts to explain their roles in all that has transpired.

Unfortunately, Dogberry's explanation is unclear and Don Pedro asks Borachio what he has done. Borachio confesses his wrong doing and outs Don John for the conniving man that he is. Dogberry interrupts the scene by ordering the accused away but not without mistakenly calling them "plaintiffs." He informs the men that the Sexton went searching for Leonato to share their discoveries. As the villains are being taken Dogberry says, "when time and place shall serve, do not forget that I am an ass." Dogberry is adding to the list of the villains crimes by informing the men that they called him an ass, he considers this just as much of a crime compared to the scandal and wrongful death they have caused.

Much Ado About Nothing is a comedic play with a dark plot written by William Shakespeare, that is brimming with linguistic performances. In the case of Dogberry, the constable, there was much "ado" to keep up with the linguistic sophistication that the primary characters were fluent in. His lack of finesse with language did not stop him from being a key secondary character <https://assignbuster.com/the-character-of-dogberry-in-william-shakespeares-play-much-ado-about-nothing/>

throughout the play that was essential in discovering the treacherous plotting of Don John, Borachio and Conrade. He may be an ass to some but he is more than that, he is an underappreciated constable with a unique way of bringing to light what has been hidden in the dark.