

## English 1102

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### "No Small Parts, Only Small Actors"

"There are no small parts, only small actors." Is this statement accurate? Minor characters, by simple definition, are characters who do not play a major role in a work of literature. However, every character serves a purpose. Simply because a character does not have many lines or appear in many scenes does not mean that he does not play a major part in the development of the plot. One such character is Borachio in William Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*. While Borachio appears in only six scenes, he is very important to the entire play. As a minor character, Borachio seems insignificant, but without his role in the play, there would be neither conflict nor a resolution.

Borachio's role is necessary for the development of the plot of *Much Ado about Nothing*. As a result of his friendship with Don John, Borachio tells him vital news about overhearing "it agreed upon that the Prince should woo Hero for himself, and having obtained her, give her to Count Claudio" (1.3.57-60). Borachio and Don John now know the real situation between Hero, Claudio, and Don Pedro: Claudio, and not Don Pedro, will get Hero for a wife; however, Borachio tells Claudio that Don Pedro "swore he would marry [Hero] tonight" (2.1.157). When Claudio hears this distortion of the truth, he becomes angry. After conflict arises, Borachio and Don John think that they have stopped the marriage of Claudio and Hero from taking place. Borachio has, by this action, already developed into a vital character in the play. Since Borachio is the only one who hears the truth about the expected marriage, only he is capable of corrupting the arrangement. Borachio acts directly to cause the conflict in the play, and his intention is to stop the future marriage of Claudio and Hero. It is for this reason that Borachio's role is necessary for the development of the plot of *Much Ado about Nothing*.

Though Borachio hears that Hero, Claudio, and Don Pedro settle the confusion and Claudio and Hero are still getting married, he still feels that there is time to create more conflict to prevent this seemingly inevitable marriage. Being the love interest of Margaret (Hero's waiting woman) allows Borachio to conjure up another plan to accomplish this task. After devising a plan to make it seem as though Hero is being unfaithful to Claudio, Borachio goes to Don John and advises him that Claudio and Don Pedro "will scarcely believe this without trial . . . hear me call Margaret Hero, hear Margaret term me Claudio" (2.2.40-44). Borachio and Margaret are at the window, and from Claudio's view, he cannot tell that it is Margaret, not Hero, in the window with Borachio. Henceforth, this mistaken identity causes the main conflict in the play, one where Borachio takes the role of the villain. Because Don John has a reason to hate his brother, Borachio's acts seem much more villainous because he has no direct motivation. Having the full intention to disrupt the marriage of Claudio and Hero, Borachio develops his plan on his own and is offered compensation from Don John subsequent to this development. Don John tells Borachio that his "fee is a thousand ducats" (2.3.53), making Borachio's only obvious direct motivation receiving full compensation for his villainous actions. Borachio's misleading act sets the stage for the rest of the play. Since Claudio and Don Pedro now think that Hero is impure, they destroy her reputation at the wedding. Because of Borachio, Hero loses her honor, and the wedding is canceled. Borachio devises his plan entirely by himself, and he also acts the plan out. Though not the only one responsible, he is the main character to blame for the false accusations

against Hero. Borachio's actions, once again, cause conflict in the play.

Continuing to play a major part, Borachio confesses to what he has done and to his misleading act. This confession leads to the play's resolution and also proves that Hero is innocent and removes all vestige of doubt. Once the watchmen, Dogberry and Verges, catch Borachio, he confesses to misleading Claudio and Don Pedro. Because he hears that Hero is dead, he feels guilty and responsible for Hero's supposed death and feels he deserves punishment. When Dogberry and Verges bring Borachio before Leonato to confess, Borachio no longer plays the villain but accepts full responsibility for his actions. He tells Leonato, "If you would know your wronger, look on me" (5.1.256). Without Borachio's confession, Hero's innocence cannot be proven undisputedly and no resolution can take place.

As the play unfolds, Borachio virtually disappears. His role in Shakespeare's play does appear that of a minor character; however, a closer look at the play shows how vital his role actually is. Without Borachio in the play, there would have been no conflict. Though Don John hates his brother, every scheme that is devised in this play is done by or with the help of Borachio. It is Borachio who hears the original plan that Claudio and Don Pedro devise so that Claudio will marry Hero. Borachio distorts this truth and causes conflict. When his first plan fails, he devises another plan in which he and his love, Margaret, can be seen so that it seems that Hero is cheating on Claudio. Borachio acts directly and spitefully throughout the entire play, and he has no direct motivation for his actions until after he devises the plan that misleads Claudio and Don Pedro. He is then offered compensation from Don John for his trouble in making Hero seem unfaithful. Borachio is a minor character, but his actions do affect the play significantly. Only because of his ideas and his actions can the plot be truly developed in *Much Ado about Nothing*. "There are no small parts." Borachio confirms this widely known statement without question.

#### Works Cited

Shakespeare, William. *Much Ado about Nothing*. Ed. A.R. Humphreys. New York: Routledge, 1994.