

Shakespeare's character Dogberry, the constable from his play *Much Ado About Nothing*, is very confused. A master of malapropisms, he consistently misuses and misunderstands words. His character suggests that people who don't understand words can't really comprehend the world around them. We see his scattered thinking from his first appearance in the play, when he instructs his deputies to "comprehend all vagrom men" (3.3.25). Clearly, he actually means they should *apprehend* the vagrants of Messina, the town where the play is set. And when he orders the guards to "bid any man to stand in the Prince's name," one of the watch asks him what they should do if a man "will not stand?" (25-27). Dogberry nonsensically responds that in such a case, they should "take no note of him" (28). In the same conversation, he claims the best way to deal with a thief is to "let him...steal out of your company" (57-58). The constable thinks his officers should allow thieves to flee from the scene? Dogberry doesn't even understand his role as head of the watch.

And his confusion continues when he comes to inform Leonato that the guards have "comprehended" (again, he means *apprehended*) "two auspicious persons" (3.5.44). Perhaps he means these persons were *suspicious*. This conversation takes place on the morning of Hero and Claudio's ill-fated first wedding, so Leonato, who's busy preparing for the big event, becomes impatient with Dogberry's long-winded nonsense and calls him "tedious" (16). Dogberry misses the insult and promises--generously, he thinks--that if he were as "tedious as a king," he would give all his tediousness to Leonato (20-21). More silliness from the constable!

Maybe the funniest scene in all of Shakespeare's plays comes later when the arrested men are examined by the magistrate (called Sexton), with Dogberry providing distinctly unhelpful advice. He opens the scene by asking if the "dissembly" has arrived, that is if they're *assembled*

(4.2.1). And when the Sexton asks him to identify the “malefactors”--the accused men-- Dogberry confidently asserts, “Marry, that am I and my partner” (3.4). Dogberry’s malapropisms come fast and furious in his part of the examination. When he becomes frustrated with the lack of respect he receives from the men being examined, he demands that they “suspect” his age and his “place,” and he angrily condemns them to “everlasting redemption” (73,55). Dogberry tells them to go to...*heaven*.

This mini-essay is not complete.