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Much Ado About Nothing

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

WITH DETAILED NOTES FROM THE WORLD'S LEADING CENTER FOR SHAKESPEARE STUDIES

EDITED BY BARBARA A. MOWAT AND PAUL WERSTINE

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From the Director of the Library

For over four decades, the Folger Library General Reader's Shakespeare provided accurate and accessible texts of the plays and poems to students, teachers, and millions of other interested readers. Today, in an age often impatient with the past, the passion for Shakespeare continues to grow. No author speaks more powerfully to the human condition, in all its variety, than this actor/playwright from a minor sixteenth-century English village.

Over the years vast changes have occurred in the way Shakespeare's works are edited, performed, studied, and taught. The New Folger Library Shakespeare replaces the earlier versions, bringing to bear the best and most current thinking concerning both the texts and their interpretation. Here is an edition which makes the plays and poems fully understandable for modern readers using uncompromising scholarship. Professors Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine are uniquely qualified to produce this New Folger Shakespeare for a new generation of readers. The Library is grateful for the learning, clarity, and imagination they have brought to this ambitious project.

Werner Gundersheimer,
Director of the Folger Shakespeare
Library from 1984 to 2002

Editors' Preface

In recent years, ways of dealing with Shakespeare's texts and with the interpretation of his plays have been undergoing significant change. This edition, while retaining many of the features that have always made the Folger Shakespeare so attractive to the general reader, at the same time reflects these current ways of thinking about Shakespeare. For example, modern readers, actors, and teachers have become interested in the differences between, on the one hand, the early forms in which Shakespeare's plays were first published and, on the other hand, the forms in which editors through the centuries have presented them. In response to this interest, we have based our edition on what we consider the best early printed version of a particular play (explaining our rationale in a section called "An Introduction to This Text") and have marked our changes in the text—unobtrusively, we hope, but in such a way that the curious reader can be aware that a change has been made and can consult the "Textual Notes" to discover what appeared in the early printed version.

Current ways of looking at the plays are reflected in our brief prefaces, in many of the commentary notes, in the annotated lists of "Further Reading," and especially in each play's "Modern Perspective," an essay written by an outstanding scholar who brings to the reader his or her fresh assessment of the play in the light of today's interests and concerns.

As in the Folger Library General Reader's Shakespeare, which this edition replaces, we include explanatory notes designed to help make Shakespeare's language clearer to a modern reader, and we place the

notes on the page facing the text that they explain. We also follow the earlier edition in including illustrations —of objects, of clothing, of mythological figures—from books and manuscripts in the Folger Library collection. We provide fresh accounts of the life of Shakespeare, of the publishing of his plays, and of the theaters in which his plays were performed, as well as an introduction to the text itself. We also include a section called "Reading Shakespeare's Language," in which we try to help readers learn to "break the code" of Elizabethan poetic language.

For each section of each volume, we are indebted to a host of generous experts and fellow scholars. The "Reading Shakespeare's Language" sections, for example, could not have been written had not Arthur King, of Brigham Young University, and Randal Robinson, author of *Unlocking Shakespeare's Language*, led the way in untangling Shakespearean language puzzles and generously shared their insights and methodologies with us. "Shakespeare's Life" profited by the careful reading given it by S. Schoenbaum, "Shakespeare's Theater" was read and strengthened by Andrew Gurr and John Astington, and "The Publication of Shakespeare's Plays" is indebted to the comments of Peter W. M. Blayney. We, as editors, take sole responsibility for any errors in our editions.

We are grateful to the authors of the "Modern Perspectives"; to Leeds Barroll and David Bevington for their generous encouragement; to the Huntington and Newberry Libraries for fellowship support; to King's College for the grants it has provided to Paul Werstine; to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which provided him with a Research Time Stipend for 1990–91; to R. J. Shroyer of the University of Western Ontario for essential computer support; to Penny Gill and Eva Mary Hooker for insightful conversa-

tions about the language of *Much Ado About Nothing;* to Skiles Howard and Scott Reiss for advice on Renaissance music and dance; and to the Folger Institute's Center for Shakespeare Studies for its fortuitous sponsorship of a workshop on "Shakespeare's Texts for Students and Teachers" (funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and led by Richard Knowles of the University of Wisconsin), a workshop from which we learned an enormous amount about what is wanted by college and high-school teachers of Shakespeare today.

Our biggest debt is to the Folger Shakespeare Library —to Werner Gundersheimer, Director of the Library, who made possible our edition; to Jean Miller, the Library's Art Curator, who combs the Library holdings for illustrations, and to Julie Ainsworth, Head of the Photography Department, who carefully photographs them; to Peggy O'Brien, Director of Education, and her assistant, Molly Haws, who continue to give us expert advice about the needs being expressed by Shakespeare teachers and students (and to Martha Christian and other "master teachers" who used our texts in manuscript in their classrooms); to Jessica Hymowitz, who provides expert computer support; to the staff of the Academic Programs Division, especially Mary Tonkinson, Lena Cowen Orlin, Toni Krieger, Amy Adler, Kathleen Lynch, and Carol Brobeck; and, finally, to the staff of the Library Reading Room, whose patience and support are invaluable.

Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine

Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*

Much Ado About Nothing is one of Shakespeare's more popular comedies, with a long history of success on the stage. Much of its appeal lies in its two stories of romantic love with their quite different journeys to comedy's happy ending. Hero and Claudio fall in love almost at first sight; their union has the blessing of the older generation (in the persons of Hero's father, Leonato, and Claudio's prince, Don Pedro). All should be well. But from the outside comes the virulent force of Don John, who acts with the kind of malice that strikes out at whatever promises to make someone else happy. For Hero and Claudio to find happiness, they must go beyond Don John's treachery, Claudio's own weak jealousy, Don Pedro's touchy sense of his own honor, and Leonato's too credulous paternal fury. It takes a second (unlikely) outside force in the guise of the bumbling, officious Dogberry to offer any hope of bringing Hero's truth to light.

The story of Beatrice and Benedick is quite other. They are kept apart not by a vicious outsider but by their pride in their own brilliance and by their mutual antagonism and distrust. Both express aversion to marriage; each finds particular pleasure in attacking the other. To outsiders, they seem an ideal pair. So the outsiders decide to play Cupid.

Over the centuries the Beatrice-Benedick plot has most captivated audiences and readers. King Charles I, in his copy of Shakespeare's plays, crossed out the play's title and renamed it "Beatrice and Benedick," and a prefatory poem in a 1640 edition of Shakespeare's sonnets says, "Let but *Beatrice* / And *Benedick* be seene,

Map of Spain, France, and Italy.

From Giovanni Botero, *Le relationi vniuersali* . . . (1618).

lo, in a trice / The Cockpit, Galleries, Boxes all are full." And Berlioz's opera version of *Much Ado* is named *Béatrice et Bénédict.* It is generally agreed that Beatrice and Benedick are the model for the witty lovers in comic drama of later centuries; and it can be argued that they led as well to Jane Austen's Elizabeth and Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* and to Scarlett and Rhett in *Gone With the Wind.*

It is, however, the conjunction of the Beatrice and Benedick story with the story of Hero and Claudio that makes *Much Ado* so rich and rewarding a play. Beatrice and Benedick, faced with humiliating descriptions of what they had considered their most prized character traits, learn to "suffer love" and to "eat their meat without grudging"; simultaneously, Claudio and Hero are forced into an experience that acquaints them first with life's darkness (with treachery, betrayal, vicious jealousy, public shaming, and abandonment) and then with quite unexpected joy (with the recovery of the irrevocably lost, with discovery at the unlikely hands of the play's "shallow fools"). It can be argued that, while the play calls itself "Much Ado About *Nothing,*" its stories are actually much ado about life at its most important.

After you have read the play, we invite you to turn to the back of this book and read *"Much Ado About Nothing:* A Modern Perspective," by Professor Gail Kern Paster of George Washington University.

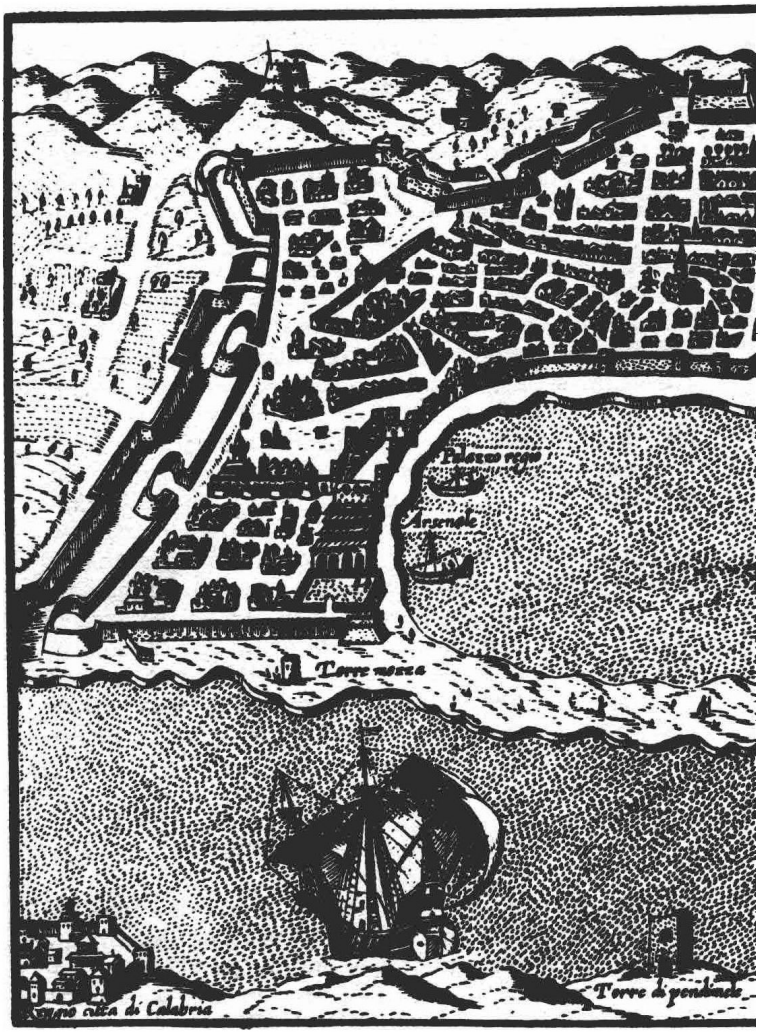
Reading Shakespeare's Language: *Much Ado About Nothing*

For many people today, reading Shakespeare's language can be a problem—but it is a problem that can be

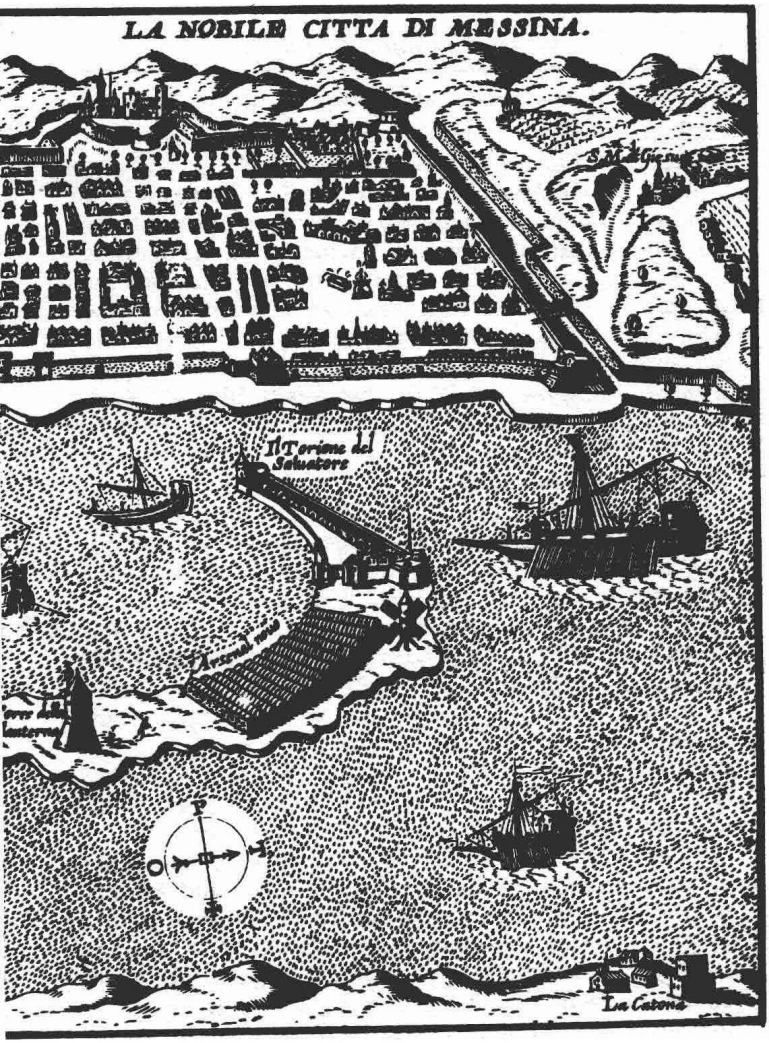
solved. Those who have studied Latin (or even French or German or Spanish), and those who are used to reading poetry, will have little difficulty understanding the language of Shakespeare's poetic drama. Others, though, need to develop the skills of untangling unusual sentence structures and of recognizing and understanding poetic compressions, omissions, and wordplay. And even those skilled in reading unusual sentence structures may have occasional trouble with Shakespeare's words. Four hundred years of "static" intervene between his speaking and our hearing. Most of his immense vocabulary is still in use, but a few of his words are *not*, and, worse, some of his words *now* have meanings quite different from those they had in the sixteenth century. In the theater, most of these difficulties are solved for us by actors who study the language and articulate it for us so that the essential meaning is heard—or, when combined with stage action, is at least *felt*. When reading on one's own, one must do what each actor does: go over the lines (often with a dictionary close at hand) until the puzzles are solved and the lines yield up their poetry and the characters speak in words and phrases that are, suddenly, rewarding and wonderfully memorable.

Shakespeare's Words

As you begin to read the opening scenes of a play by Shakespeare, you may notice occasional unfamiliar words. Some are unfamiliar simply because we no longer use them. In the opening scenes of *Much Ado About Nothing*, for example, you will find the words *squarer* (i.e., fighter, quarreler), *methinks* (it seems to me), *recheat* (the notes of a hunting horn), *baldrick* (a belt for holding bugles, swords, etc.), and *arras* (a hanging



Messina.



From Pietro Bertelli, *Theatrum vrbium Italicarum* . . . (1599).

screen of rich tapestry fabric). Words of this kind are explained in notes to the text and will become familiar the more of Shakespeare's plays you read.

In *Much Ado About Nothing,* as in all of Shakespeare's writing, more problematic are the words that we still use but that we use with a different meaning. In the opening scenes of *Much Ado,* for example, the word *tax* has the meaning of "take to task, criticize," *stomach* is used where we would say "appetite," *halting* where we would say "limping," *sad* where we would say "serious," and *winded* where we would say "sounded, blown." Such words will be explained in the notes to the text, but they, too, will become familiar as you continue to read Shakespeare's language.

Some words are strange not because of the "static" introduced by changes in language over the past centuries but because these are words that Shakespeare is using to build a dramatic world that has its own geography and history and background mythology. *Much Ado About Nothing,* for example, through references to Messina, Venice, and Padua, to "thick-pleached alleys" and "orchards," creates a location on a wealthy estate in Italy. Through military language—*action* (i.e., military engagement), *sort* (i.e., rank), and *sworn brother* (i.e., brother-in-arms)—it places itself in time, just at the end of a war. Through complicated references to Cupid and his arrows and to Hercules (a mythological figure prominent both for his massive strength and for his helplessness when trapped by love), it also builds a world in which warfare and romantic love are intricately intertwined. These "local" words and references (each of which will be explained in notes to this text) help to build the world that Beatrice, Benedick, Hero, and Claudio inhabit, and will become increasingly familiar to you as you read further into the play.

Shakespearean Wordplay

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Shakespeare plays with language so often and so variously that the entire play can be read and heard as brilliant repartee: witty punning, elaboration of commonplaces, highly figured verbal structures. In the play's opening scene, the Messenger delivers his report of the just-ended war in elaborate verbal figures. He reports that Claudio "hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age, doing in the figure of a lamb the feats of a lion," thus contrasting Claudio's lamblike youth and apparent helplessness with his lionlike ferocity in battle. He then uses figured language to report Claudio's uncle's reception of the news of Claudio's valor: "there appears much joy in him, even so much that joy could not show itself modest enough without a badge of bitterness." (*Badge* here means "sign" and *bitterness* means "anguish of heart, suffering.") These words are such a complicated way of saying "He was so happy he wept" that Leonato is forced to ask for clarification: "Did he break out into tears?" The Messenger's response, "In great measure," leads in turn to Leonato's punning response: "A kind overflow of kindness," where *kind* means both "natural" and "warmhearted" and *kindness* means both "kinship" and "affection."

Every major character in *Much Ado About Nothing* has his or her own way of playing with, elaborating, or misusing language. Two of the more intriguing are Beatrice and Benedick, whose linguistic tendencies define them for the other characters. Beatrice, in the prejudice of the time, is seen as "shrewish" or "curst" because of her "sharp tongue." Her first line in the play is to ask whether "Signior Mountanto" (i.e., Benedick) has returned from the war, jabbing at Benedick by

naming him with the fencing term *montant* (an upward blow or thrust). More typical of her wordplay is her response to the Messenger's "I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your books." The Messenger is, of course, using the phrase "in your books" figuratively, to mean "in your favor"; she takes the phrase literally and replies "No. An [i.e., if] he were, I would burn my study [i.e., library]." A few lines earlier we find her again taking a figurative phrase and interpreting it literally: when the Messenger describes Benedick as a man "stuffed with all honorable virtues," she responds "It is so indeed. He is no less than a stuffed man, but for the stuffing—well, we are all mortal." In the fourth scene of the play, when her uncle says to her "Well, niece, I hope to see you one day fitted with a husband," she builds an elaborate response by taking literally the more-or-less figurative biblical passage which reads that "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground" (Genesis 2:7). Combining a literal reading of this verse with the line in the marriage liturgy in which the woman promises to "obey" and "serve" the man she marries, Beatrice responds as follows to Leonato's wish that she find a husband: "Not till God make men of some other metal than earth. Would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a piece of valiant dust? To make an account of her life to a clod of wayward marl?" It is to such language that the male characters in the play respond: "By my troth . . . , thou wilt never get thee a husband if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue."

Benedick, too, uses wordplay centered in the double meanings of words (saying, for example, that Hero is "too low for a high praise, too brown for a fair praise, and too little for a great praise"). But his more characteristic wordplay is with metaphor—or, rather, with metaphoric figures. A true metaphor is a play on words in which one object or idea is expressed as if it were