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William Shakespeare

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Dr. Beryl Rowland, *Introduction* / Lucy M. Fitzpatrick, *Notes*

AIRMONT SHAKESPEARE CLASSICS SERIES

Much Ado About Nothing

By

William Shakespeare

General Introduction by Dr. David G. Pitt

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HIS LIFE

The world's greatest poet and playwright, often called the greatest Englishman, was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, in the year 1564. The exact date of his birth is uncertain, but an entry in the *Stratford Parish Register* gives his baptismal date as April 26, and it is reasonable to assume that he was born on or about April 23—an appropriate day, being the feast of St. George, the patron saint of England.

His father, John Shakespeare, was a glover and dealer in wool and farm products, who had moved to Stratford from Snitterfield, four miles distant, some time before 1552. During his early years in Stratford his business prospered, enabling him to acquire substantial property, including several houses, and to take his place among the more considerable citizens of the town. In 1557 he married Mary, daughter of Robert Arden, a wealthy landowner of Wilmcote, not far from Stratford. Two daughters were born to them before William's birth—Joan, baptized in 1558, and Margaret, baptized in 1562—but both died in infancy. William was thus their third child, though the eldest of those who survived infancy. After him were born Gilbert (1566), another Joan (1569), Anne (1571), Richard (1574), and Edmund (1580).

Very little is positively known about Shakespeare's boyhood and education. We know that for some years after William's birth his father's rise in Stratford society and municipal affairs continued. Many local offices came to him in rapid succession: ale-taster, burgess (a kind of constable), assessor of fines, chamberlain (town treasurer), high bailiff (a kind of magistrate), alderman (town councilor), and chief alderman in 1571. As the son of a man of such eminence, Shakespeare undoubtedly attended the local Grammar School. This he was entitled to do free of charge, his father being a town councilor. We do not know how good a pupil he was nor what subjects he studied. It is probable that he covered the usual Elizabethan curriculum: an "A B C book," the catechism in Latin and English, Latin grammar, the translation of Latin authors, and perhaps some Greek grammar and translation as well. But family circumstances appear to have curtailed his formal education, for shortly before William reached his fourteenth birthday his father's rising fortunes abruptly passed their zenith.

About the year 1578, having gone heavily into debt, John Shakespeare lost two large farms inherited by his wife from her father. Thereafter, he was involved in a series of lawsuits, and lost his post on the Stratford town council. Finally, in 1586, he was declared a bankrupt.

In 1582, Shakespeare married Anne, daughter of Richard Hathaway (recently deceased) of the village of Shottery near Stratford. The *Episcopal Register* for the Diocese of Worcester contains their marriage record, dated November 28, 1582; he was then in his eighteenth year and his wife in her twenty-sixth. On May 26 of the following year the *Stratford Parish Register* recorded the baptism of their first child, Susanna; and on February 2, 1585, the baptism of a twin son and daughter named Hamnet and Judith.

How Shakespeare supported his family, how long he continued to live in Stratford, we do not know for certain. Tradition and conjecture have bestowed on him many interim occupations between his marriage and his appearance in London in the early fifteen-nineties: printer, dyer, traveling player, butcher, soldier, apothecary, thief. Perhaps only the last-named "pursuit" requires some explanation. According to several accounts, Shakespeare fell into bad company some time after his marriage, and on several occasions stole deer from the park of Sir Thomas Lucy, a substantial gentleman of Charlecote, near Stratford.

However he may have occupied himself in the interim, we know that by 1592 Shakespeare was already a budding actor and playwright in London. In that year Robert Greene in his autobiographical pamphlet *A Groatsworth of Wit*, referring to the young actors and menders of old plays who were, it seemed to him, gaining undeserved glory from the labours of their betters (both by acting their plays and by rewriting them), wrote as follows:

> Yes trust them not: for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tygers heart, wrapt in a Players hyde, supposes he is as well able to bombast out blanke verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes factotum*, is in his owne conceit the onely Shakescene in a countrey.

"Shakescene" is clearly Shakespeare. The phrase "upstart Crow" probably refers to his country origins and his lack of university education. "Beautified with our feathers" probably means that he uses the older playwrights' words for his own aggrandisement either in plays in which he acts or in those he writes himself. "Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hyde" is a parody of a line in III *Henry VI*, one of the earliest plays ascribed to Shakespeare. And the Latin phrase *Johannes*

factotum, meaning Jack-of-all-trades, suggests that he was at this time engaged in all sorts of theatrical jobs: actor, poet, playwright, and perhaps manager as well.

Greene died shortly after making this scurrilous attack on the young upstart from Stratford, and so escaped the resentment of those he had insulted. But Henry Chettle, who had prepared Greene's manuscript for the printer, in his *Kind-Harts Dreame* (1592), apologized to Shakespeare for his share in the offence:

> I am as sory as if the originall fault had beene my fault, because my selfe have seene his demeanor no lesse civill, than he excelent in the qualitie he professes: Besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approoves his Art.

Thus, because of an attack upon him by an irascible dying man, we learn that Shakespeare at this time was held in high regard by "divers of worship," that is, by many of high birth, as an upright, honest young man of pleasant manners and manifest skill as actor, poet, and playwright.

Although Shakespeare by 1593 had written, or written parts of, some five or six plays (I, II, and III *Henry VI*, *Richard III*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and perhaps *Titus Andronicus*), it was as a non-dramatic poet that he first appeared in print. *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, long narrative poems, both bearing Shakespeare's name, were published in 1593 and 1594 respectively. But thereafter for the next twenty years he wrote almost nothing but drama. In his early period, 1591 to 1596, in addition to the plays named above, he wrote *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard II*, and *King John*. Then followed his great middle period, 1596 to 1600, during which he wrote both comedies and history-plays: *The Merchant of Venice*, I and II *Henry IV*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night*. The period of his great tragedies and the so-called "dark comedies" followed (1600-1608): *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Timon of Athens*, and *Coriolanus*. The last phase of his career as dramatist, 1608 to 1613, sometimes called "the period of the romances," produced *Pericles*, *Prince of Tyre*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, parts of *Henry VIII*, and perhaps parts of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Long before his death in 1616 his name held such magic for the public that

merely to print it on the title page of any play assured its popular acclaim. The "upstart Crow" had come a long way since 1592.

He had come a long way, too, from the economic straits that may well have driven him to London many years before. We know, for example, from the records of tax assessments that by 1596 Shakespeare was already fairly well-to-do. This is further borne out by his purchasing in the following year a substantial house known as New Place and an acre of land in Stratford for £60, a sizable sum in those days. In 1602 he made a further purchase of 107 acres at Stratford for £320, and a cottage and more land behind his estate at New Place. But his life during this time was not quite unclouded. His only son, Hamnet, died in 1596 at the age of eleven years, his father in 1601, and his mother in 1608. More happily he saw, in 1607, the marriage of his daughter Susanna to Dr. John Hall, an eminent physician of Stratford, and, in the following year, the baptism of his granddaughter, Elizabeth Hall.

Shakespeare's retirement to Stratford appears to have been gradual, but by 1613 he seems to have settled there, though he still went up to London occasionally. Of the last months of his life we know little. We do know that in February, 1616, his second daughter, Judith, married Thomas Quiney. We know that on March 25 Shakespeare revised and signed his will, among other bequests leaving to his wife his "second best bed with the furniture." A month later he was dead, dying on his fifty-second birthday, April 23, 1616. He was buried in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church, Stratford, on April 26.

HIS TIMES

Shakespeare lived during the English Renaissance, that age of transition that links the Mediaeval and the Modern world. Inheriting the rich traditions of the Middle Ages in art, learning, religion, and politics, rediscovering the great legacies of classical culture, the men of the Renaissance went on to new and magnificent achievements in every phase of human endeavor. No other period in history saw such varied and prolific development and expansion. And the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603), Shakespeare's age, was the High Renaissance in England.

The universe grew in immensity as men gradually abandoned the old Ptolemaic view of a finite, earth-centered universe, accepting the enormous intellectual challenge of the illimitable cosmos of Copernicus' theory and Galileo's telescope. The earth enlarged, too, as more of its surface was discovered and charted by explorers following the lead of Columbus, Cabot, Magellan, and Vespucci. England itself

expanded as explorers and colonizers, such as Frobisher, Davis, Gilbert, Raleigh, Grenville, Drake, and others, carried the English flag into many distant lands and seas; as English trade and commerce expanded with the opening of new markets and new sources of supply; as English sea power grew to protect the trading routes and fend off rivals, particularly Spain, the defeat of whose Invincible Armada in 1588 greatly advanced English national pride at home, and power and prestige abroad.

The world of ideas changed and expanded, too. The rediscovery and reinterpretation of the classics gave a new direction and impetus to secular education. During the Middle Ages theology had dominated education, but now the language, literature, and philosophy of the ancient world, the practical arts of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and training in morals, manners, and gymnastics assumed the major roles in both school and university—in other words, an education that fitted one for the life in the world here and now replaced one that looked rather to the life hereafter.

The Mediaeval view of man was generally not an exalted one. It saw him as more or less depraved, fallen from Grace as a result of Adam's sin; and the things of this world, which was also "fallen," as of little value in terms of his salvation. Natural life was thought of mainly as a preparation for man's entry into Eternity. But Renaissance thought soon began to rehabilitate man, nature, and the things of this life. Without denying man's need for Grace and the value of the means of salvation provided by the Church, men came gradually to accept the idea that there were "goods," values, "innocent delights" to be had in the world here and now, and that God had given them for man to enjoy. Man himself was seen no longer as wholly vile and depraved, incapable even of desiring goodness, but rather as Shakespeare saw him in *Hamlet:*

> What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals!

And this is the conception of man that permeates Elizabethan thought and literature. It does not mean that man is incorruptible, immune to moral weakness and folly. Shakespeare has his villains, cowards, and fools. But Nature framed him for greatness, endowed him with vast capacities for knowledge, achievement, and delight, and with aspirations that may take him to the stars. "O brave new world, That has such people in 't!"

HIS THEATRE

There were many theatres, or playhouses, in Shakespeare's London. The first was built in 1576 by James Burbage and was called the *Theatre*. It was built like an arena, with a movable platform at one end, and had no seats in the pit, but had benches in the galleries that surrounded it. It was built of wood, and cost about £200. Other famous playhouses of Shakespeare's time included the Curtain, the Bull, the Rose, the Swan, the Fortune, and, most famous of them all, the Globe. It was built in 1599 by the sons of James Burbage, and it was here that most of Shakespeare's plays were performed.

As its name suggests, the Globe was a circular structure (the second Globe, built in 1614 after the first burned down, was octagonal), and was open to the sky, somewhat like a modern football or baseball stadium, though much smaller. It had three tiers of galleries surrounding the central "yard" or pit, and a narrow roof over the top gallery. But most interesting from our viewpoint was the stage—or rather *stages*—which was very different from that of most modern theatres.

The main stage, or *apron* as it was called, jutted well out into the pit, and did not extend all the way across from side to side. There was an area on either side for patrons to sit or stand in, so that actors performing on the apron could be viewed from three sides instead of one. In addition, there was an inner stage, a narrow rectangular recess let into the wall behind the main stage. When not in use it could be closed by a curtain drawn across in front; when open it could be used for interior scenes, arbor scenes, tomb and anteroom scenes and the like. On either side of this inner stage were doors through which the main stage was entered. Besides the inner and outer stages, there were no fewer than four other areas where the action of the play, or parts of it, might be performed. Immediately above the inner stage, and corresponding to it in size and shape, was another room with its front exposed. This was used for upstairs scenes, or for storage when not otherwise in use. In front of this was a narrow railed gallery, which could be used for balcony scenes, or those requiring the walls of a castle or the ramparts of a fortress. On either side of it and on the same level was a window-stage, so-called because it consisted of a small balcony enclosed by windows that opened on hinges. This permitted actors to speak from the open windows to others on the main stage below. In all, it was a very versatile multiple stage and gave the dramatist and producer much more freedom in staging than most modern theatres afford.

The dramatist's words and the imagination of the audi-

ence supplied the lack of scenery. No special lighting effects were possible since plays were performed in the daylight that streamed in through the unroofed top of the three-tiered enclosure that was the playhouse. Usually a few standard stage props were on hand: trestles and boards to form a table, benches and chairs, flagons, an altar, artificial trees, weapons, a man's severed head, and a few other items. Costumes were usually elaborate, though no attempt was made to reproduce the dress of the time and place portrayed in the play.

But we need have no doubts about the audience's response. They came, they saw, and the dramatist conquered, for they kept coming back for more and more. And despite the opposition that the theatre encountered from Puritans and others, who thought it the instrument of Satan, the theatre in Shakespear's time flourished as one of the supreme glories of a glorious age.

—DAVID G. PITT
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INTRODUCTION TO
Much Ado About Nothing

DATE AND SOURCE

Much Ado About Nothing was written about 1598-9. It is an exuberant lighthearted work concerning itself, as do Shakespeare's early and mature comedies in general, with the nature of the experience of love. It is perhaps, of all Shakespeare's comedies, the most acceptable to modern taste because the spirit of the love relationship between Beatrice and Benedick is modern. It is also a play of wit, and is therefore more taxing than is often allowed. George Bernard Shaw remarked of *Much Ado About Nothing* that, "like all Shakespeare's comedies it contains nothing beyond the capacity of a child, except the indecencies of its badinage." It is true that the plot is simple, but the badinage demands verbal perception and mental dexterity. It is, in fact, a play for the culturally sophisticated.

Even the title may serve as a warning. The Elizabethans did not always make such a clear distinction between "t" and "th" as we do to-day. In the orchard scene when Balthasar sings, there appears to be a pun on *noting* and *nothing*. Balthasar says: "Note this before my notes—There's not a note of mine that's worth the noting." Don Pedro replies: "Why, these are very crotchets [i.e. "eccentric ideas" or "quarter notes in music"] that he speaks; "Note, notes, forsooth, and nothing!" This pun may be implied in the title. In this play there may be much ado about nothing, but the activity, however spurious, is the result of *noting*: Beatrice and Benedick become lovers through noting what others say about them; Claudio suspects Hero because of what he notes; and the plot is discovered through the noting of the watchman. The play ends with the notes of a dance.

Nearly all great dramatists borrow their plots, and Shakespeare is no exception. The story of the maiden falsely accused is a very old one. In the sixteenth century it was popularized by Matteo Bandello in his *Nouvella* (1554), and

by Ariosto in the *Orlando Furioso*. Bandello's version was known in England both in the original Italian and in the French of Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques* (1569); Ariosto's version was retold by Peter Beverley as the *Historie of Ariodanto and Ieneura* (1566) and by Spenser in the *Faerie Queene* (1590). Richard Mulcaster presented a play called *A Historie of Ariodante and Geneuora* before the Queen in 1583, and Ariosto's version was translated into English in 1591.

But these sources account for little more than sensational elements of the plot and even here Shakespeare makes modifications. In Bandello's tale, the motive for the accusation of immortality is the disappointment of another lover, and when the accuser believes he has caused her death, he confesses his villainy. Shakespeare creates his own villain whose actions are prompted by malice and jealousy. He also shifts the focus of the story. He makes it serve as a foil for the warm, irrepressible courtship of lively, fallible characters of his own creation, whose dialogue examines, in comic yet penetrating fashion, serious questions of courtship, love, and marriage. Melodrama is minimized and the two love affairs reach contrasting climaxes in the same scene, with Hero's tragedy serving to break down the reserve which has kept Beatrice and Benedick apart.

Shakespeare also provides a comic element of another dimension which not only assists in the plot but contrasts with the emotional tensions of the Hero-Claudio situation and the merry skirmishings of the Beatrice and Benedick wooing. Into the exotic Sicilian city, he audaciously introduces an English village constable and his Watch, stupid but kindly men who, for all their humorous ineptitude, succeed in doing their duty and exposing villainy.

THE STORY

In this comedy two plots are interwoven, the story of Claudio and Hero, and that of Benedick and Beatrice. It is in three movements: the development of the love-relationship between the two couples; the stratagem whereby Claudio, on the eve of his wedding, is made to believe that Hero is unfaithful to him; the unmasking of the villain of the plot with

the restoration of Hero to Claudio and the uniting of Beatrice and Benedick.

It is set in Messina, where the Governor Leonato welcomes Don Pedro, Prince of Arragon, and his Italian troops returning after a victorious campaign. One of Pedro's favorites, Claudio, wishes to marry Leonato's daughter, Hero; another, Benedick, asserts rather too vehemently that he does *not* wish to marry Leonato's spirited niece, Beatrice. Through the good offices of Don Pedro, Claudio's marriage to Hero is fixed for seven days hence. To amuse itself until then, the company lightheartedly tries to persuade Beatrice and Benedick that their militant relationship conceals the most passionate affection.

Meanwhile, a "plain-dealing villain," Don John, and his follower, Borachio, plan to thwart the marriage through sheer malice and envy of Claudio. Borachio arranges for Hero's gentlewoman, Margaret, to talk to him at night from Hero's window. Don John apprizes Don Pedro and Claudio to watch. They are convinced that Hero is immoral and, at her wedding, denounce her.

Ironically, the plot has already been discovered by the watchmen, but the constable and his assistant are so full of their own importance that they fail to disclose their information in time. Hero faints at the accusation and the kindly Friar who was to have married her reports that she is dead, hoping that by so doing he may more easily discover the truth of the situation. Brought close together by the tragedy, Beatrice and Benedick acknowledge their love and Benedick promises to kill Claudio for the wrong he has done to Hero. Fortunately, the action is not necessary. Borachio confesses his guilt. Don John flees and Claudio, stricken with remorse, agrees to marry Leonato's niece. After an expiation ceremony at Hero's "tomb," the ladies at Leonato's household appear veiled. Claudio swears to marry the lady proferred him, and to his astonishment he finds he is reunited with Hero. The play ends with the promise of a double wedding, news of the arrest of Don John, and dancing to the music of the pipes.

The Hero-Claudio story was well-known to the Elizabethans, and Shakespeare appears to assume that his audience was familiar with it. His plot has obvious weaknesses: not

only is the proxy wooing complication curtailed too soon to be effective but the unchastity story lacks conviction. Without investigating, a lover, seeing, as he supposes, his beloved talking with a man at her window after midnight, denounces her on the grounds that "she knows the heat of a luxurious bed." The gentlewoman who impersonates her mistress does not even realize that she has done any harm, even though her mistress is publicly disgraced the next morning. Shakespeare slides away from explanations. He minimizes the melodramatic elements, conventionalizes the young couple involved in them, and emphasizes, instead, the very plausible courtship of two lively lovers in such a way as to make them immortal.

THE CHARACTER GROUPINGS

Beatrice and Benedick are Shakespeare's own creations, and it is they who give the play its lasting vitality. Beatrice is the most sparkling of all Shakespeare's heroines. It is her spirit which holds the play together. Intelligent, witty, independent, she has a vitality and joy which, we would agree with her, seems to be innate. For if she was not born in a merry hour, certainly, as she herself says, "a star danced, and under that was I born" (II,i). It is because she responds so vigorously to life, because she is so confident of the generous rightness of her actions that she spars with Benedick, recognizing that this attractive but assertive young man might well threaten her personality if she succumbs to him without terms. Interestingly enough, Shakespeare resists the typically male impulse to make her surrender. It is, rather, Benedick who bends to her, and having been verbally outsmarted, finally resorts to stopping her mouth with a kiss.

Yet at time of crisis, Benedick proves to be calm, shrewd, and strong. He stays at the scene of catastrophe when others leave. His declaration of love is simple and touching: "I do love nothing in the world so well as you." Although he couches his disapproval in his customary, erudite wit, he shows that he will not reconcile himself easily to Claudio, despite Claudio's contrition (V,iv). Finally, with the social aplomb which he has demonstrated even in the sharpest situa-

tion, he, rather than the Duke, concludes the arrangements and calls for music.

In contrast, the other pair of lovers seem conventional figures, enlivened only by the dramatic roles in which they find themselves. Claudio is the correct young man, the executive type, who wants to marry right. His first question is illuminating: "Hath Leonato any son, my lord?" To discover that Hero is an only child and therefore an heiress must have been satisfactory to him. Content to allow Don Pedro to do his wooing for him, he does not react as the vigorous lover when he is led to suspect that Don Pedro is in fact wooing on his own behalf. His control of his emotions prepares us for his subsequent reaction to the slander of his lady. His contemptuous denunciation of her at the altar is cruelly premeditated, and later, when he believes that she is dead, he can joke at the indignation and distress of her father and uncle (V,i).

Hero's mildness is a contrast to Beatrice's exuberance. At her betrothal she says nothing and leaves Beatrice to interpret: "My cousin tells him in his ear that she is in his heart." Shakespeare never leaves Hero alone with Claudio. She is the epitome of modesty and docility, with just enough sparkle in her to take part in the matchmaking plot upon Beatrice, if it be "any modest office" (II,i). The gulling scene gives Hero her one opportunity for critical and lively comment:

> Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
> Mispraising what they look on; and her wit
> Values itself so highly, that to her
> All matter else seems weak: she cannot love,
> Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
> She is so self-endear'd. (III,i, p. 59)

But "gentle" Hero, as Don Pedro calls her, cannot sustain a harsh role. In her anxious forebodings before her marriage and in her anguished rebuttal at the church, she comes close to being a tragic figure, an anticipation of a later heroine of true tragic stature, Desdemona.

Another grouping in the play has contributed much to its popularity. Shakespeare's English clowns bring sanity and

realism to the melodramatic elements of the plot. Their presence gives a sense of stability which is rooted in the English village. The humor occasioned by Dogberry, Verges, and their assistants lies largely in their ignorance of their duties. Yet Shakespeare deliberately employs such obvious fools as these to resolve unwittingly the play's major crisis. The scenes are rich in comic perception: the Watch's appearance and drill approach farce; the trial scene parodies in detail accepted legal procedure. The worthy constable, despite the honesty of his intentions, almost subverts justice by his pomposity and muddle-headedness, and he denies the most sacred premise of British law by declaring a man guilty before proven (IV,ii). Appropriately, it is Dogberry's capacity for distorting meanings of words which leads to near-tragedy. In this respect, he provides a sharp contrast to the witty pair of lovers who misuse words with such imaginative skill. It is robust humor, rooted in the earth of the English countryside.

Of the senior figures, Don Pedro and Leonato have dominant roles. The Prince is adroit and sophisticated, at ease with his officers and gracious to the ladies, with his talk spiced with wit. He is on his dignity with Don John, and although he initially questions the slander, he supports his lieutenant Claudio even to the point of vengeance (III,ii). He is of course, Leonato's superior although he is younger. But in the scene where the injured brothers tackle Claudio and Don Pedro, Don Pedro behaves with dignity and firmness, without displaying Claudio's subsequent lightheartedness.

Leonato, an elderly gentleman appreciating high company, shares in the general wit and sophistication. Impatient as he is with Dogberry and Verges, he is nevertheless kindly, saying, as he dismisses them to go to the wedding, "Drink some wine ere you go" (III,v). It is not surprising that this urbane and worthy gentleman should jump to an obvious conclusion when his daughter is accused of being unchaste:

> Dear my lord, if you, in your own proof,
> Have vanquisht the resistance of her youth,
> And made defeat of her virginity . . .
> (IV,i, p. 87)

Nor is it unexpected that in the same scene he should

accept the apparent proof and indulge in recriminations and self-pity. In his distress, he retains dignity and shows courage in his challenging of Claudio. His subsequent role in which he gives the contrite Claudio another chance to marry his daughter is restrained and somewhat artificial. In a slighter role, his brother Antonio shows similar good sense and humanity.

Among the minor characters, Don John dominates. He finds everywhere "food to my displeasure" (I,iii), dislikes everyone, and says he could poison the lot. He has previously resisted his brother Don Pedro unsuccessfully, (I,iii) and he is thoroughly soured. Borachio, who assists him, is an adventurer with a zest for intrigue. He is apparently not without his attractions to women, is perceptive even when drunk (III,iii), and finally makes a very frank confession. Conrade seems to be the more prudent of the two. He offers Don John advice to dissemble (I,iii). He is not drunk when arrested and he behaves with more indignation.

Margaret, who helps to slander Hero, is innocent and flighty. Shakespeare has difficulty in preserving her innocence. She is ignorant of the plot, yet she wears Hero's clothes, impersonates her at her window, and is apparently able to forget the entire episode even when her mistress is disgraced by it. The presence of the Friar gives comfort to the audience as well as to Hero. In the turmoil of emotions, his plan of assumed mourning is given with clarity, and he impresses one as a man of humanity and good sense.

That Shakespeare's wittiest comedy should be largely in prose is not accidental. Prose here is chiefly the intellectual language, verse the emotional. We are hardly conscious of the medium used, but through it our emotions are skillfully manipulated, aroused or relaxed, according to the demands of the action. The prose, tense and economical, provides the utmost opportunity for prompt repartee. Its vitality impresses upon us that this is where the action is; the ancient tale of a maiden wronged becomes merely a burden to a spirited modern wooing and the fumblings of parochial officials.

What we see and hear is life, presented to us dramatically through the natural *rubato* of conversation. It is when the play comes close to tragedy that we have passionate, rhetorical