

**MUCH ADO ABOUT
NOTHING: FROM
HUDSON'S SCHOOL
SHAKESPEARE. PP. 67-138**

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Much Ado about Nothing: From Hudson's School Shakespeare. pp. 67-138 by Henry N. Hudson

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HENRY N. HUDSON

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FROM

HUDSON'S SCHOOL SHAKESPEARE.

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

JULIUS CESAR.

HAMLET.

THE TEMPEST.

MACBETH.

HENRY VIII.

KING LEAR.

AS YOU LIKE IT.

HENRY IV.

ROMEO AND JULIET.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

OTHELLO.

Published separately for 40 cents each.

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INTRODUCTION TO MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

THIS play was entered at the Stationers' in August, 1600, and was published in quarto the same year, with the words, "As it hath been sundry times publicly acted," in the title-page; which would naturally infer the piece to have been written in 1599. All the internal marks of style bear in favour of the same date; the play being in this respect hardly distinguishable from *As You Like It*. After the one quarto of 1600, the play is not met with again till it reappeared in the folio of 1623. As the text of the folio differs but in two or three slight particulars from that of the quarto, the probability is that the later was reprinted from the earlier copy. And perhaps none of the Poet's plays has reached us in a more satisfactory state; the printing being such as to leave little room for doubt as to the true text.

As with many of the author's plays, the plot and story of *Much Ado About Nothing* were partly borrowed. But the same matter had been so often borrowed before, and run into so many variations, that we cannot affirm with certainty from what source the Poet directly drew. So much of the story as relates to Hero, Claudio, and Don John, bears a strong resemblance to the tale of Ariodante and Ginevra in the fifth and sixth books of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. Still there is little if any likelihood that the Poet took his borrowed matter from that source. A connection between the play and one of Bandello's novels is much more distinctly traceable from the similarity of names and incidents. In the novel, Fenicia, the daughter of Lionato, a gentleman of Messina, is betrothed to Timbreo de Cardona, a friend of Piero d'Aragona. Gironde, a disappointed lover of the lady, goes to work to prevent the marriage. He insinuates to Timbreo that she is disloyal, and then to make good the charge arranges to have his own hired servant in the dress of a gentleman ascend by a ladder of ropes and enter the house of Lionato at night, Timbreo being placed so as to witness the proceeding. The next morning Timbreo accuses the lady to her father, and rejects the alliance. Fenicia sinks down in a swoon; a dangerous illness follows; and, to prevent the shame of her alleged trespass, Lionato has it given out that she is dead, and a public funeral is held in confirmation of that report. Thereupon Gironde becomes so harrowed with remorse, that he confesses his villainy to Timbreo, and they both throw themselves on the mercy of the lady's family. Timbreo is easily forgiven, and the reconciliation is soon followed by the discovery that the lady is still alive, and by the marriage of the parties.

This brief statement marks the nature and extent of Shakespeare's obligation to Bandello. The parts of Benedick and Beatrice, of Dogberry and Verges, and of several other persons, are altogether original with him; at least no traces of them have been found in any other book or writing: so that he stands responsible for all the wit and humour, and for nearly all the character, of the play. As no translation of Bandello has been discovered of so early a date as the play, it does not well appear how the Poet could have become acquainted with the novel except in the original. But the Italian was then the most generally studied language in Europe; educated Englishmen were probably quite as apt to be familiar with it as they are with the French in our day; Shakespeare, at the time of writing this play, was thirty-five years old; and we have many indications of his having known enough of Italian to be able to read such a story as Bandello's in that language.

The play has a large variety of interest, now running into grotesque drollery, now bordering upon the sphere of tragic elevation, now revelling in the most sparkling brilliancy. The piece is indeed aptly named: we have several nothings, each in its turn occasioning a deal of stir and perturbation; yet there is so much of real flavour and spirit stirred out into effect, that the littleness of the occasions is scarcely felt or observed; the thoughts being far more drawn to the persons who make the much ado than to the nothing about which the much ado is made. The excellencies, however, both of plot and character, are rather of the striking sort, involving little of that hidden or retiring beauty which shows just enough on the surface to invite a diligent search, and then enriches the seeker with generous returns. Accordingly the play has always been very effective on the stage; the points and situations being so shaped and ordered that, with fair acting, they tell at once on an average audience; while at the same time there is enough of solid substance beneath to justify and support the first impression; so that the stage-effect is withal legitimate and sound as well as quick and taking.

On the general character of the play, I have met with no remarks better suited to the purpose of this Introduction than Schlegel's. "The mode," says he, "in which the innocent Hero, before the altar at the moment of the marriage, and in the presence of her family and many witnesses, is put to shame by a most degrading charge, false indeed, yet clothed with every appearance of truth, is a grand piece of theatrical effect in the true and justifiable sense. The impression would have been too tragical, had not Shakespeare carefully softened it in order to prepare for a fortunate catastrophe. The discovery of the plot against Hero has been already partly made, though not by the persons interested; and the Poet has contrived, by means of the blundering simplicity of a couple of constables and watchmen, to convert the arrest and examination of the guilty individuals into scenes full of the most delightful amusement. There is also a second piece of theatrical effect not inferior to the first, where Claudio, now convinced of his error, and in obedience to the penance laid on his fault, thinking to give his hand to a relative of his injured bride, whom he supposes dead, discovers, on her unmasking, Hero herself. The extraordinary success of this play in Shakespeare's own day, and ever since in England, is, however, to be ascribed more particularly to the parts of Benedick and Beatrice, two humoursome beings, who incessantly attack each other with all the resources of raillery. Avowed rebels to love, they are both entangled in its nets by a merry plot of their friends to make them believe that each is the object of the secret passion of the other. Some one or other, not overstocked with penetration, has objected to the same artifice being twice used in entrapping them: the drollery, however, lies in the very symmetry of the deception. Their friends attribute the whole effect to their own device; but the exclusive direction of their raillery against each other is in itself proof of a growing inclination. Their witty vivacity does not abandon them even in their avowal of love: and their behaviour only assumes a serious appearance for the purpose of defending the slandered Hero. This is exceedingly well imagined: the lovers of jesting must fix a point beyond which they are not to indulge their humour, if they would not be mistaken for buffoons by trade."

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

DON PEDRO, Prince of Arragon.	DOGBERRY, } Two Officers.
JOHN, his bastard Brother.	VERGES, }
CLAUDIO, a young Lord of Florence.	FRANCIS, a Friar.
BENEDICK, a young Gentleman of Padua.	A Sexton.
LEONATO, Governor of Messina.	A Boy.
ANTONIO, his Brother.	HERO, Daughter to Leonato.
BALTHAZAR, Servant to Don Pedro.	BEATRICE, Niece to Leonato.
BORACHIO, } Followers of John.	MARGARET, } Gentlewomen attending
CONRADE, }	URSULA, } on Hero.

Messengers, Watchmen, and Attendants.

SCENE, Messina.

ACT I. SCENE I. *Messina. Before LEONATO'S House.*

Enter LEONATO, HERO, BEATRICE, with a Messenger.

Leon. I learn in this letter that Don Pedro of Arragon comes this night to Messina.

Mess. He is very near by this: he was not three leagues off when I left him.

Leon. How many gentlemen have you lost in this action?

Mess. But few of any sort, and none of name.

Leon. A victory is twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers. I find here that Don Pedro hath bestowed much honour on a young Florentine called Claudio.

Mess. Much deserv'd on his part, and equally remembered by Don Pedro. He hath borne himself beyond the promise of his age; doing, in the figure of a lamb, the feats of a lion: he hath, indeed, better better'd expectation than you must expect of me to tell you how.

Leon. He hath an uncle here in Messina will be very much glad of it.

Mess. I have already delivered him letters, and there appears much joy in him; even so much, that joy could not show itself modest enough without a badge of bitterness.¹

Leon. Did he break out into tears?

Mess. In great measure.

Leon. A kind overflow of kindness: there are no faces

¹ This is an idea which Shakespeare apparently delighted to introduce. It occurs in *Macbeth*: "My plenteous joys, wanton in fulness, seek to hide themselves in drops of sorrow."

truer than those that are so wash'd. How much better is it to weep at joy than to joy at weeping!

Beat. I pray you, is Signior Montanto² return'd from the wars or no?

Mess. I know none of that name, lady: there was none such in the army of any sort.³

Leon. What is he that you ask for, niece?

Hero. My cousin means Signior Benedick of Padua.

Mess. O, he's return'd; and as pleasant as ever he was.

Beat. He set up his bills⁴ here in Messina, and challeng'd Cupid at the flight;⁵ and my uncle's Fool, reading the challenge, subscrib'd for Cupid, and challeng'd him at the bird-bolt. — I pray you, how many hath he kill'd and eaten in these wars? But how many hath he kill'd? for indeed I promis'd to eat all of his killing.

Leon. Faith, niece, you tax Signior Benedick too much; but he'll be meet with you,⁶ I doubt it not.

Mess. He hath done good service, lady, in these wars.

Beat. You had musty victual, and he hath holp to eat it: he is a very valiant trencher-man; he hath an excellent stomach.

Mess. And a good soldier too, lady.

Beat. And a good soldier to a lady: — but what is he to a lord?

Mess. A lord to a lord, a man to a man; stuff'd with all honourable virtues.

Beat. It is so, indeed; he is no less than a stuff'd man: but for the stuffing,⁷ — well, we are all mortal.

Leon. You must not, sir, mistake my niece. There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signior Benedick and her: they never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them.

Beat. Alas, he gets nothing by that! In our last conflict

² *Montanto* is an old term of the fencing-school, humorously or sarcastically applied here in the sense of a *bravado*.

³ *Sort* is here used in the sense of *rank*. So in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, iii. 2: "None of nobler *sort* would so offend a virgin;" and in *Measure for Measure*, iv. 4: "Give notice to such men of *sort* and suit as are to meet him."

⁴ This phrase was in common use for affixing a printed notice in some public place, long before Shakespeare's time, and long after.

⁵ The *flight* was a long, slender, sharp arrow, such as Cupid shot with; so called because used for *flying* long distances, and to distinguish it from the *bird-bolt*, a short, thick, blunt arrow, used in a lower kind of archery, and permitted to fools. "A fool's bolt is soon shot," is an old proverb. See vol. i. page 188, note 7.

⁶ He'll be *even* with you; or, as we should say, he'll be *up with* you.

⁷ Mede, in his *Discourses on Scripture*, speaking of Adam, says, "He whom God had *stuff'd* with so many excellent qualities." Beatrice starts an idea at the words *stuff'd man*, and prudently checks herself in the pursuit of it, as leading to an indelicate allusion.

four of his five wits⁸ went halting off, and now is the whole man govern'd with one: so that if he have wit enough to keep himself warm, let him bear it for a difference⁹ between himself and his horse; for it is all the wealth that he hath left, to be known a reasonable creature. — Who is his companion now? He hath every month a new sworn brother.

Mess. Is't possible?

Beat. Very easily possible: he wears his faith but as the fashion of his hat; it ever changes with the next block.¹⁰

Mess. I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your books.¹¹

Beat. No; an he were, I would burn my study. But, I pray you, who is his companion? Is there no young squarer¹² now that will make a voyage with him to the Devil?

Mess. He is most in the company of the right noble Claudio.

Beat. O Lord, he will hang upon him like a disease: he is sooner caught than the pestilence, and the taker runs presently mad. God help the noble Claudio! if he have caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand pound ere he be cur'd.

Mess. I will hold friends with you, lady.

Beat. Do, good friend.

Leon. You'll ne'er run mad, niece.

Beat. No, not till a hot January.

Mess. Don Pedro is approach'd.

Enter Don PEDRO, Don JOHN, CLAUDIO, BENEDICK, BALTHAZAR, and others.

D. Pedro. Good Signior Leonato, you are come to meet your trouble. The fashion of the world is to avoid cost, and you encounter it.

Leon. Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your Grace: for, trouble being gone, comfort should remain; but, when you depart from me, sorrow abides, and happiness takes his leave.

D. Pedro. You embrace your charge too willingly. — I think this is your daughter.

⁸ In Shakespeare's time, *the five wits* was used to denote both the five senses, and the intellectual powers, which were thought to correspond with the senses in number. Here it means the latter.

⁹ This is an heraldic term. So Ophelia says, "You must wear your rue with a difference." See vol. i. page 507, note 31.

¹⁰ The mould on which a hat is formed. It is here used for *shape* or *fashion*. See vol. ii. page 488, note 19.

¹¹ A phrase from the custom of servants and retainers being entered in the books of those to whom they were attached. *To be in one's books* was *to be in favour*. That this was the sense of the phrase appears from Florio: "*Casso*. Cashier'd, crossed, cancelled, or put out of books and checke roule."

¹² That is, *quarreller*. *To square* was to take a posture of defiance or of resistance. See page 18, note 6. Also, vol. ii. page 598, note 7.