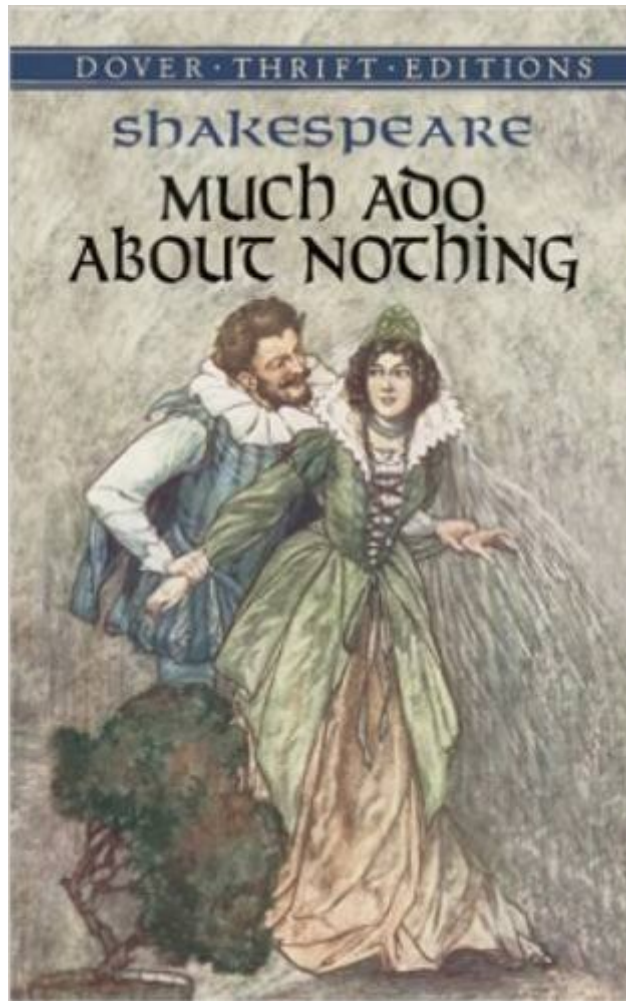


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Much Ado About Nothing (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

Much Ado About Nothing is one of Shakespeare's most imaginative and exuberant comedies, contrasting two pairs of lovers in a witty and suspenseful battle of the sexes. Attracted to each other, the maddeningly skeptical Beatrice and Benedick are dead-locked in a lively war of words until their friends hatch a plot to unite them. The mutually devoted Hero and Claudio, on the other hand, all too quickly fall victim to a malicious plot to part them. Near-fatal complications ensue, but with the help of the hilarious Constable Dogberry and his confederates, the lovers are ultimately united. First presented in 1598, Much Ado About Nothing is one of Shakespeare's last comedies. Its darker undercurrents foreshadow the playwright's growing concern with the frailties of human character that would dominate his late tragedies. But in its clever turns of plot, vivacious displays of wit, jovial conversations, and charming songs, this merry comedy is among Shakespeare's most artistic creations.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I am here to do my part in diminishing the value of all the one- and three- star reviews posted here, the authors of which are clearly the same person or all from the same class of children too young to read the play. visitors reading these should know two things: the reviewer is a twit, and this play is wonderful. I, for one, am a sucker for romances; if you are, Beatrice and Benedick will make the play worthwhile. Predictably be damned, they were an adorable couple. The main couple, Hero and Claudio, are boring; the other one will make you swoon. Beatrice and Benedick are funny, clever,

and stubbornly reluctant to admit they love each other. To wit, they're perfect for one another. I have read two contradictory criticisms regarding the language in the play on : that the language is too simple for Shakespeare's standards, and that the language is too difficult. The latter was from the kid's reviews; for everyone else, the language is not so difficult to decipher that you need to avoid it. The Folger edition, at least, has one page of notes for every page of text, noting both puzzling references to Elizabethan beliefs, such as that sighs draw blood from the heart, and language problems caused by the hundreds of years between Shakespeare's time and ours. The editors do all the work for you. You have no excuse. (Oh, and that the language is too simple: Bah. It's Shakespeare. That's impossible. I loved all the double entendres; this play was very witty.) One criticism I somewhat agree with is that the plot is boring. Hero and Claudio, being the main couple, get much time, and I didn't care much about Don John's vengeance, but at least half of my favorite couple was usually present, and by no means do Hero and Claudio's plot monopolize the story.

Claire McEachern's Introduction, notes and commentary on *Much Ado About Nothing* suffer from the decline in real scholarship over the last few years. Previous introductory materials in Arden edition have always built on the solid scholarship of the past, adding new ideas and research as integrated parts of the growing body of knowledge associated with Shakespeare scholarship. McEachern's abandons most of the valid accepted readings of this play to wander rather aimlessly down the tunnel of self-promoting feminist, postmodern eclecticism. As a college professor, I am dismayed to see Arden turn to such contemporary and popular approaches at the exclusion of real context. The Arden editions have always set the standard, but are now falling prey to the subjective, personalized, even vindictive vents of the academic few. The field of Shakespeare criticism, unfortunately, is in danger of collapsing in on itself, and becoming completely irrelevant to anything other than these marginalized interest. More specifically, McEachern's search for sources for the play becomes a labyrinthine expos  of speculative inference and unrelated texts, ignoring primary sources for a new historicist fascination with the obscure. The tenor of her subjective argument about the play is captured in her overdone attack on Benedick as misogynist and Beatrice's rendering as the shrew. The problem, obviously, is the imbalance here; the feminist objective reduces a complex and humorous interplay to victimizer and victim, both seen from one perspective. Ignoring the historical contexts of the play, she focuses instead on marginal texts that only partially relate to the central themes of the play, to the social context, and to the audience's understanding both of Shakespeare's environs and present-day concerns.

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