TEXT AND PERFORMANCE

General Editor: Michael Scott

The series is designed to introduce sixth-form and undergraduate students to the themes, continuing vitality and performance of major dramatic works. The attention given to production aspects is an element of special importance, responding to the invigoration given to literary study by the work of leading contemporary critics.

The prime aim is to present each play as a vital experience in the mind of the reader – achieved by analysis of the text in relation to its themes and theatricality. Emphasis is accordingly placed on the relevance of the work to the modern reader and the world of today. At the same time, traditional views are presented and appraised, forming the basis from which a creative response to the text can develop.

In each volume, Part One: *Text* discusses certain key themes or problems, the reader being encouraged to gain a stronger perception both of the inherent character of the work and also of variations in interpreting it. Part Two: *Performance* examines the ways in which these themes or problems have been handled in modern productions, and the approaches and techniques employed to enhance the play's accessibility to modern audiences.

A synopsis of the play is given and an outline of its major sources, and a concluding Reading List offers guidance to the student's independent study of the work.

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Peter Holding

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Text and Performance

PAMELA MASON

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For Keith

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

For many years a mutual suspicion existed between the theatre director and the literary critic of drama. Although in the first half of the century there were important exceptions, such was the rule. A radical change of attitude, however, has taken place over the last thirty years. Critics and directors now increasingly recognise the significance of each other's work and acknowledge their growing awareness of interdependence. Both interpret the same text, but do so according to their different situations and functions. Without the director, the designer and the actor, a play's existence is only partial. They revitalise the text with action, enabling the drama to live fully at each performance. The academic critic investigates the script to elucidate its textual problems, understand its conventions and discover how it operates. He may also propose his view of the work, expounding what he considers to be its significance.

Dramatic texts belong therefore to theatre and to literature. The aim of the 'Text and Performance' series is to achieve a fuller recognition of how both enhance our enjoyment of the play. Each volume follows the same basic pattern. Part One provides a critical introduction to the play under discussion, using the techniques and criteria of the literary critic in examining the manner in which the work operates through language, imagery and action. Part Two takes the enquiry further into the play's theatricality by focusing on selected productions of recent times so as to illustrate points of contrast and comparison in the interpretation of different directors and actors, and to demonstrate how the drama has worked on the modern stage. In this way the series seeks to provide a lively and informative introduction to major plays in their text and performance.

MICHAEL SCOTT

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Leonato, Governor of Messina, welcomes Don Pedro and his men who return from a war in which Don John, bastard brother to Don Pedro, has been defeated. The two brothers have become reconciled. A young officer called Claudio falls in love with Hero, Leonato's daughter, and Don Pedro undertakes to woo her on his behalf. Their friend, Benedick, defiantly asserts that he is a confirmed bachelor. He and Hero's cousin, Beatrice, who had similarly declared herself against marriage, have the reputation for quarrelling whenever they meet. Such is the antipathy they express that their friends seek amusement in contriving scenes in which first Benedick and then Beatrice will 'overhear' how the other is desperate with unrequited passion.

Don John, a malcontent and a 'plain-dealing villain', decides to wreck Claudio's marriage. His man, Borachio, persuades Margaret to dress up in Hero's clothes and talk to him through her bedroom window the night before the wedding. Don Pedro and Claudio are led to believe that they are witnessing Hero's infidelity. The following day in church Claudio rejects Hero, publicly denouncing her innocence as a façade. Hero collapses. Friar Francis has faith in her innocence and he persuades Leonato to announce that she has died, believing that this may restore Claudio's love. Benedick and Beatrice declare their love for each other and Beatrice demands that Benedick kill Claudio. A challenge is issued.

Meanwhile, Don John's villainy has been discovered by the Watch and is being investigated by the blundering constable Dogberry. When Don Pedro and Claudio learn of the deception they ask Leonato for forgiveness. Claudio offers to do whatever Leonato may decide by way of retribution and he is instructed to appear the following day prepared to marry Leonato's niece. That night Don Pedro and Claudio lead the others in a solemn mourning ritual at Hero's tomb as public

evidence of their remorse. Claudio accepts the veiled lady before it is revealed that she is, in fact, Hero.

When confronted in public about their love, Beatrice and Benedick initially deny that their regard for each other was prompted by anything more than pity. Letters they have each written are produced as evidence of the truth of their mutual passion and both couples celebrate in a dance. The play ends with the news of Don John's capture. He has been brought back to Messina and is to be punished, but not until 'tomorrow'.

SOURCES

The story of Claudio and Hero was current in romantic fiction and can be traced back to a fifth-century Greek tale. There are many Renaissance versions including Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516, translated into English by Sir John Harington, 1591), and Matteo Bandello's *Novelle* (1554, adapted into French by Belleforest, 1569). To the best of our knowledge, Shakespeare created the characters of Beatrice and Benedick, though the tradition of lovers using verbal sparring as an expression of sexual attraction was well established. The overhearing device to bring Beatrice and Benedick together had been foreshadowed by Castiglione in 1508. The characters of Dogberry, Verges, and the Watch are firmly English in the tradition of Bottom and the mechanicals.