EVERYMAN

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

William Shakespeare

Edited by John F. Andrews
former editor of the *Shakespeare Quarterly*
Foreword by Kevin Kline

The Everyman Shakespeare is the most authoritative, up-to-date paperback edition of the plays and poems.

Uniquely among existing editions it provides:

- face-to-face text and notes
- a chronology of Shakespeare's life and times
- a rich selection of critical and theatrical responses to the play over the centuries
- text derived from the earliest printings, often preserving puns and wordplay otherwise lost
- foreword by an actor or theatre director describing the play in performance
- up-to-date commentary on the structure, atmosphere and content of the play and on its sources and influences

Cover photograph: David Slater
Cover design: The Tango Design Consultancy

ISBN 0-460-87515-9

UK £2.99
USA $3.95
CAN $4.95

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

THE EVERYMAN SHAKESPEARE

Text © 1991 by Doubleday Book & Music Clubs, Inc.

Textual revisions, revisions to notes, introduction, note on text, chronology, and all end matter © J. M. Dent 1996 and Charles E. Tuttle Co. 1996

First published in Everyman by J. M. Dent 1996
Published by permission of GuildAmerica Books, an imprint of Doubleday Book and Music Clubs, Inc.

All rights reserved

J. M. Dent
Orion Publishing Group
Orion House
5 Upper St Martin's Lane
London WC2H 9EA
and
Charles E. Tuttle Co.
28 South Main Street, Rutland
Vermont 05701, USA

Photoset by Deltatype Ltd, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire
Printed in Great Britain by
The Guernsey Press Co. Ltd, Guernsey, C.I.

This book if bound as a paperback is subject to the condition that it may not be issued on loan or otherwise except in its original binding.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data is available upon request

ISBN 0 460 87515 9

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements vi
Note on the Author and Editor vii
Chronology of Shakespeare's Life and Times viii
Foreword to Much Ado About Nothing *by Kevin Kline* xiii
Editor's Introduction to Much Ado About Nothing xvii
The Text of the Everyman Shakespeare xxi
MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING 1
Perspectives on Much Ado About Nothing 206
Suggestions for Further Reading 249
Plot Summary 255

FOREWORD TO *Much Ado About Nothing*

George Bernard Shaw once suggested that trying to describe a theatre experience through words is as difficult as trying to describe the experience of a painting through dance.

Bearing that in mind, here are an actor's very subjective recollections of having prepared and performed the role of Benedick, opposite Blythe Danner's Beatrice, during the 1988 season at the Delacorte Theatre in Central Park. The New York Shakespeare Festival production was directed by Gerald Freedman and produced by Joseph Papp.

I had always believed *Much Ado About Nothing* to be a nearly indestructible crowd-pleaser, and I had wanted to play Benedick for many years, not so much from having read it in school as from having seen several productions over the past twenty years, both in the US and in Great Britain. Whenever I saw the play, I was struck not only by its unique interplay of comedy and romance but also by the scope of its tone, which fluctuates spasmodically between the very light and the quite dark. The trick to a successful production seemed to be in somehow reconciling these two extremes into one harmonious whole.

Taking our cue from the fact that most of the text is written in conversational prose rather than formal, heightened verse, we did not approach the play reverently in rehearsals. 'Screwball comedy' was a phrase which Gerald Freedman borrowed on a few occasions to describe the style of the production, which seemed to me very apt as it conjured images of those romantic, zany '30s movies in which the hero and heroine were strong-willed,

high-strung, madly in love with one another, and locked in a battle of complete denial of that love . . . adversaries doomed to end up together.

During rehearsals the actors portraying Don John, Borachio, and Conrade explored the extremes of their characters' darkness – which extremity had the felicitous result of revealing their hidden but seldom-realized comic potential. Don John's paroxysms of jealousy and rage were both believable and laughable. The Act IV, Scene 1 denunciation of Hero was played straightforwardly for all its dramatic values (with the possible exception of Benedick's ironical interjection, 'This looks not like a nuptial,' a line whose comedic capabilities, however ill-timed or tasteless, I made no attempt to squelch).

In early rehearsals I began by playing Benedick as a loud, loutish, even braggart soldier – a sort of third cousin of *Miles Gloriosus* – with little of the courtier about him. This obvious 'type' slowly gained some dimension, I think, as I discovered that beneath his swagger, his posturing and soldierly machismo, there dwelt a rather confused adolescent in search of his identity and wishing desperately to be loved. It was Benedick's search for his identity, in fact, which eventually became for me the explanation or motivation, if you will, for all of his contradictory behavior. He seemed to me to be trying on different masks, or personalities, until he found one that fit.

I began to see that what commonly is referred to as Benedick's wit is in fact a series of buffoonish bids for attention. And whenever his 'wit' is directed at Beatrice, it is desperately defensive, and always protesting too much.

'She speaks poniards, and every word stabs,' Benedick howls. If we hear his description literally rather than dismiss it as mere irony, we can sense just how much she gets to him and therefore how desperate his defense must be. To me, their verbal swordplay is of the broadsword variety. It has little in common with the witty repartee of such Restoration lovers as Mirabell and Millamant in Congreve's *The Way of the World*, where subtlety and obliqueness of phrase are so prized. The world of *Much Ado* is Italian, not English, and our sets, costumes, and music appropriately reflected that passionate Mediterranean spirit.

I saw the central action of Benedick's story to be that of falling in love, and I began to notice in the trajectory of that fall a progress: from denial to adolescent infatuation through narcissistic love to mature love.

But while there is much potential humor in this evolution alone, the comedy is intensified by the attendant struggle Benedick undergoes as he tries to reconcile his longstanding public image of confirmed misogynous bachelor with his new private posture of romantic lover.

This struggle is compounded by Benedick's categorical refusal to do anything halfway. His unswerving absoluteness may be the character's most endearing quality, as well as his most ridiculous. He is as unequivocal and definitive in the oaths he swears against marriage in Act I as he is in his Act II decision to requite Beatrice's love for him ('I will be horribly in love with her'), and as he is in his ultimate Act V pronouncement that 'Man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion.' It is, in fact, this 'conclusion' that finally frees Benedick from the prison of his consistency. (In Elizabethan usage, 'giddy' also meant 'changeable'.)

I eventually reached a similar conclusion about the play – that it was as mercurial and giddy in tone as is human nature itself. And the key to playing it seemed to be in giving both the light and dark tones their full due, alternately, and also allowing for their simultaneity.

An example of this is the exchange between Beatrice and Benedick in Act IV, Scene 1, after the denunciation of Hero. Early in the run, we played this scene, regrettably, only for comedy. But as our performances matured, this encounter became not only a comic scene but also a dramatic love scene: the audience continued to laugh at Beatrice and Benedick but also began to get a sense of their genuinely caring for one another.

During the Central Park engagement rain interrupted several performances, but the audience refused to leave. They steadfastly waited out the weather, demanding a resolution to the play – a tribute to the power of Shakespeare's storytelling.

And whenever the play was allowed to reach its conclusion, and Beatrice and Benedick finally kissed, the audience cheered, for they fully apprehended the extent of the journey these characters

had traveled. And in the meantime, Beatrice and Benedick had found not only one another but themselves as well.

Kevin Kline

KEVIN KLINE has appeared in a variety of leading roles with the New York Shakespeare Festival and The Acting Company, including Hamlet, Richard III, Henry V, and Benedick. Among his acting awards are two Tonys – Best Supporting Actor in a Musical for *On the Twentieth Century* (1978) and Best Actor in a Musical for *The Pirates of Penzance* (1980), The William Shakespeare Award for Classical Theatre (1989), and an Academy Award for *A Fish Called Wanda* (1989).

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO *Much Ado About Nothing*

Much Ado About Nothing has been described as the most down-to-earth of Shakespeare's romantic comedies. The universe it depicts is a 'familiar' one (V.iv.70), devoid of implausible features such as the allegorical quests of *The Comedy of Errors*, the fairy-world metamorphoses of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the magic caskets of *The Merchant of Venice*, the cross-dressed pages of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Twelfth Night*, and the 'strange Events' (V.iv.135) of *As You Like It*. Through special effects that parody the seemingly miraculous reversals in other plays of the same genre, the obstacles that impede erotic and spiritual fulfilment in *Much Ado About Nothing* are ultimately dissolved in 'Wonder'. But by permitting the audience to observe the contrivances that have been designed to produce a sequence of happy issues, Shakespeare ensures that none of us will depart from the theatre with any illusion that the 'Amazement' we've witnessed (V.iv.67–71) is a phenomenon which must be ascribed to supernatural causes.

Like *The Merry Wives of Windsor* but unlike most of the playwright's other works, which tend to alternate between a major 'verse plot' and a supporting 'prose plot', *Much Ado About Nothing* is predominantly in prose. Only rarely does its dialogue partake of the heightening of metre, let alone rhyme, and when it does so the characters defined by these dramaturgical media come across as comparatively 'artificial': reserved, formal, effete, or otherwise straitened by fashion's norms.

The personalities who command our keenest attention are Beatrice and Benedick. Their discourse scintillates with metaphorical flourishes, but under ordinary conditions it eschews the rhetorical resources of verse. The three significant exceptions to this rule occur in the final speech of III.i (where Beatrice responds to what she has just overheard in the second of the comedy's garden scenes), in the early segments of IV.i (where the solemnity of a ceremonial occasion bestows Sunday manners upon an entire congregation prior to the moment when Messina's sharpest critics of convention are left alone to revert to the prose they employ in all but the most constraining situations), and in everything but the culminating dialogue of V.iv (where the decorum befitting a climactic wedding ceremony imposes an uncommonly dignified bearing on Benedick and Beatrice as well as on the rest of the company).

Meanwhile, of the two dramatis personae who impress us as least capable of deviation from their traditionally prescribed roles, Claudio and Hero, one or the other participates in every scene that includes rhymed poetry or blank verse.

Nothing is a word of haunting ambiguity in Shakespeare (the playwright would later explore its potential most profoundly in the 'Nothing will come of Nothing' that constitutes the essence of *King Lear*), and in *Much Ado About Nothing* its implications include the possibilities inherent in the Elizabethan homonym, or near-homonym, *Noting*. Through the machinations of the surly Don John, who twice tricks Claudio into 'noting' things that undermine his faith in those he must learn to trust, an innocent maiden is spurned at the altar by a young lord who believes his honour to have been sullied. Fortunately, Don John's accomplices have themselves been 'noted' by the most ineffectual Watch that ever patrolled a precinct; and despite the incompetence of their asinine Constable, these dedicated but doltish servants of the Duke succeed in bringing the malefactors to justice. In the interim the Friar who was officiating at the truncated nuptial has 'noted' in the scorned bride a behaviour that persuades him of her chastity, and he sets in motion a process that will lead to reconciliation through ritual re-enactments of both the Crucifixion and the Resurrection.

The 'notings' that have always given the most delight to audiences, however, are the ones we see engineered by the friends of Benedick and Beatrice. Despite the 'merry War' (I.i.63) with which they try to mask their attraction to each other, these two wit-crackers convince their well-wishers that they belong together. Accordingly, in a brace of eavesdroppings that have never failed to set theatres aroar with laughter, the most stubborn of Love's heretics succumb to an 'inraged Affection' (II.iii.110) that neither can quite disclose to the other in a manner than would permit them to 'woo peaceably' (V.ii.77–78). Eventually Benedick concedes that 'the World must be peopled' (II.iii.257–58), and in due course Beatrice yields to his suit 'upon great Persuasion' (V.iv.95). But it is anything but clear that these charming competitors do so much as exchange a kiss before the dance that lightens their hearts and our own at the consummation of their final 'Skirmish of Wit' (I.i.65).

When Shakespeare wrote *Much Ado About Nothing*, evidently in 1598 or early 1599, he could have borrowed from a number of antecedents for the story of Hero and Claudio, among them passages in Lodovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516) that had been Englished by Sir John Harington (1591) and adapted by Edmund Spenser in Book II of *The Faerie Queene* (1590). But he probably drew principally upon a story in the *Novelle* of Matteo Bandello (1554) – either in the original Italian or in a French version included in François de Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques* (1569) – and from *Fedele and Fortunato*, a 1585 English play (anonymous, but now widely attributed to Anthony Munday) that seems to have been a recasting of Luigi Pasaquaglio's *Il Fedele* (1579).

For the sparring of Benedick and Beatrice, Shakespeare may have derived some details from a passage in Baldasare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (probably in Sir Thomas Hoby's 1561 translation of *The Courtier* from Italian). But it seems more than likely that the playwright also returned to Petruchio's wooing of the fiery Katherina in his own *Taming of the Shrew* (1593–94).

For Dogberry and the Watch, Shakespeare almost certainly profited either from his own observations or from conversations

he would have had with his neighbours. According to one of his early biographers, the author of *Much Ado About Nothing* modelled his ineffable Constable upon an actual officer who lived in Buckinghamshire, not far from the Warwickshire that Shakespeare always regarded as his home.

THE TEXT OF THE EVERYMAN SHAKESPEARE

Background

THE EARLY PRINTINGS OF SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS

Many of us enjoy our first encounter with Shakespeare when we're introduced to *Julius Caesar* or *Macbeth* at school. It may therefore surprise us that neither of these tragedies could ever have been read, let alone studied, by most of the playwright's contemporaries. They began as scripts for performance and, along with seventeen other titles that never saw print during Shakespeare's lifetime, they made their inaugural appearance as 'literary' works seven years after his death, in the 1623 collection we know today as the First Folio.

The Folio contained thirty-six titles in all. Of these, half had been issued previously in the small paperbacks we now refer to as quartos.* Like several of the plays first published in the Folio, the most trustworthy of the quarto printings appear to have been set either from Shakespeare's own manuscripts or from faithful copies of them. It's not impossible that the poet himself prepared some of these works for the press, and it's intriguing to imagine him reviewing proof-pages as the words he'd written for actors to speak and embody were being transposed into the type that readers would filter through their eyes, minds, and imaginations. But, alas, there's no indisputable evidence that Shakespeare had any direct involvement with the publication of these early editions of his plays.

What, then, about the scripts that achieved print for the first

* Quartos derived their name from the four-leaf units of which these small books were comprised: large sheets of paper that had been folded twice after printing to yield four leaves, or eight pages. Folios, volumes with twice the page-size of quartos, were put together from two-leaf units: sheets that had been folded once after printing to yield four pages.

and when the old man's daughter spurns him and his religious heritage, elopes with a frivolous Gentile, and finances a lavish honeymoon with a casket of her father's treasure. We no longer delight in the derision the moneylender suffers when he laments the loss of his 'Ducats' and recoils at a report that the disrespectful Jessica has pawned a precious heirloom from her mother in exchange for a monkey. Above all, we no longer suspend our discomfort when we observe the proceedings of a kangaroo court in which the aggrieved Shylock falls victim to a clever 'Judge' who can manipulate the statutes of Venice at will, spring a defendant who has already entered a guilty plea, and convict and sentence the infuriated but law-abiding man who has come to the bar as plaintiff.

No, these are aspects of *The Merchant of Venice* that invariably raise questions in the minds of today's readers and playgoers. But the moment that causes us the most difficulty is one that was evidently meant to be viewed in Shakespeare's time as a display of compassion and generosity: the redeemed Merchant's pronouncement that he will spare his defeated accuser's life and forgive half his fine if Shylock will bestow his blessing on the daughter and son-in-law who have wronged him and forthwith 'become a Christian'.

No matter how the Trial Scene is staged, Antonio's proviso will almost inevitably impress a modern audience as evidence that 'the Quality of Mercy' *is* 'strained' in the courtroom of Shakespeare's drama. What was intended, no doubt, as a manifestation of Grace is more likely to strike viewers of our time as yet another instance of the kind of 'Christian Example' that has driven Shylock to insist upon his pound of flesh in the first place.

So why do we continue to read and stage *The Merchant of Venice*? And how do we deal with ethical and theological premises that unmistakably locate the work in an earlier and less pluralistic epoch of Western civilization?

The answer to the first question resides in the enduring power of the play itself, in Shakespeare's eloquent exploration of dilemmas so basic to human nature that they are unlikely to be completely

resolved by any conceivable advance in cultural understanding or social and political justice. The answer to the second question resides in us, in our ability to exercise the historical sensibility required to carry ourselves back, if only for the duration of the dramatic action, to the presuppositions of a theatre quite different from our own.

Comment on the Play

Despite the vividness of its characters and the urgency of the drives that motivate them, the story detailed in *The Merchant of Venice* has at least as much to do with the abstract realms of fairy tale and religious allegory as it does with the everyday affairs of getting and spending in a flourishing Renaissance capital. Thus, if Portia is on the one hand a flesh-and-blood woman with a real human being's aspirations and desires, she is at the same time a symbolic ideal and the object of a romantic and spiritual adventure with analogies to Jason's legendary quest for the Golden Fleece. Portia presides over a setting whose name means 'Beautiful Mountain', and one of the laws of Belmont – as fundamental to the workings of this locale in the play as the laws of profit and loss are to the Venetian Rialto – is that only a deserving suitor will be able to find the key to the casket that contains this 'wondrous' Lady's portrait.

'I stand for Sacrifice,' Portia tells the wooer she would choose if her dead father's will permitted. In so doing she compares herself to a mythical maiden about to be offered to the gods. It follows that the bold Bassanio must show himself to be the Hercules who can win her love by releasing her from captivity. Cultivated Elizabethans would have known that the mighty Alcides (Hercules) was sometimes likened to Christ in terms of the Redeemer's victory over the power of sin, and they would therefore have found it fitting that Bassanio sets Portia free by selecting the casket that represents a commitment to 'give and hazard all'.

Far from being the profligate spendthrift his initial request for venture capital might make him appear, Bassanio is compelled to

demonstrate that he is the only kind of man who could possibly qualify for the benefits of Belmont: not one who is drawn to Portia solely for 'what many Men desire' (like Morocco, who opts for the gold casket and wins only a death's head), and not one who is puffed up with a proud sense of his own deservings (like Arragon, who picks the silver casket and garners a fool's head), but one who can perceive the underlying value of a 'meagre Lead' container whose 'Outward Show' only seems to be at odds with the Lady whose 'Golden Locks' it holds.

Appropriately, the motto Bassanio chooses identifies him, like Portia, as one who stands for 'Sacrifice'. And it is also 'Sacrifice' that associates both lovers with Bassanio's friend and benefactor, Antonio.

The Merchant is presented from the beginning as a man whose lot is 'a Sad one'. We may be curious about the causes of his melancholy, and we may find it difficult to reconcile his spiteful treatment of Shylock with his otherwise charitable behaviour. However, we have to admire the seemingly unconditional magnanimity with which Antonio volunteers to 'give and hazard all he hath' to underwrite the love-quest of a soul-mate who is already deeply in debt to him.

It is possible that we will think the Merchant imprudent in trusting all his resources to Fortune. Once the fickle goddess has exacted her terrible price, moreover, we may well wonder if Antonio's zeal for martyrdom isn't prompted in part by a desire to link Bassanio to himself in a timeless bond that will rival, if not surpass, the one that now ties Bassanio to Portia. When he is finally brought to the point of baring his breast to deliver the pound of flesh demanded by Shylock, however, there can be little doubt that Antonio's position is meant to remind us of the 'man of sorrows' (Isaiah 53:4) and his affirmation that 'greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (John 15:13).

In many respects Antonio's gesture of self-sacrifice is what differentiates the 'Spirit' of the Merchant of Venice, and of the play that bears his name, from the type of 'Law' embodied in an

adversary who would cut out his debtor's heart. 'I stand for Judgement,' proclaims Shylock at the beginning of the Trial Scene. He thereby defines himself not only in contrast with the 'Sacrifice' symbolized by Portia and Bassanio and now by Antonio, but also in distinction from those who acknowledge a need for Grace (a concept embedded in the very institution of sacrifice, as noted in such biblical passages as Psalm 51:17 and Hebrews 9:25–28). 'What Judgement shall I dread,' Shylock asks, 'doing no Wrong?' Then, disregarding Portia's gentle reminder of the warning implicit in Matthew 6:12, he proclaims 'My Deeds upon my Head; I crave the Law.'

These words turn out to be a snare, not only in light of the Christian doctrines that inform the play, but also according to the Hebraic teachings and rituals that Elizabethans would have seen as prototypes of the Sacrifice that fulfilled a Divine Law designed primarily to prove everyone guilty before God (Galatians 2–3). For Shakespeare's contemporaries it was a familiar message, one they heard repeated every Sunday and one that had figured in countless literary works and morality plays. Most of them would thus have seen Shylock not merely as a victim of injustice who errs by seeking to pervert the Law into an instrument of personal vengeance, but as a man naïve and presumptuous enough to believe himself capable of standing faultless before the supreme Court on the Day of Judgement.

For twentieth-century readers and theatregoers, touched as we quite rightly are by the tormented outcry in Shylock's famous 'Hath not a Jew Eyes?' speech, it is difficult to see beyond the moneylender's downfall to the play's celebration of the power of Love, both human and divine, in the scenes that follow the trial. But it should not escape our notice that the comedy shifts in tone as the action transfers from the conflict-riven court of Venice to a magical moonlit light in Belmont.

Shortly after Shylock's departure, the disguised Portia requests Bassanio's wedding ring as a token of recompense for the extraordinary services of 'the learned Judge'. Bassanio at first demurs; when urged by Antonio, however, he realizes that he

must be willing to 'give and hazard all' for the friend who has wagered everything for him. Portia's little test is only a game, of course, and it brings some much-needed levity to the concluding movement of the play. At the same time it completes a triad by asking Bassanio to 'stand for Sacrifice' in a new way, risking the fortunes he has won in order to reciprocate the man whose sunken assets have made the wooer's success possible.

What is sometimes referred to as the Ring Plot places Bassanio's love for Antonio, to whom he is 'infinitely bound', on an equal plane with Bassanio's love for Portia, to whom he is also infinitely bound, and to whom, without yet realizing it, Antonio is now infinitely bound as well. By connecting and highlighting a circuit that links Bassanio to Antonio, and Antonio to Portia, and Portia to Bassanio, the epilogic sequel to the play's earlier trials encourages us to view all three relationships as aspects of the 'sweet Harmony' alluded to in Jessica and Lorenzo's reflections on the celestial Music of the Spheres. In the final analysis it turns Portia's ring into a metaphor of the higher love (*agape* in Greek, *caritas* in Latin) that transfigures and unifies the romantic love (*eros*) and brotherly love (*philia*) that have been vying for dominance in the preceding scenes.

In accordance with this pattern it is thematically fitting that Antonio – who sacrifices himself one last time in Act V to ratify the marital ties of Bassanio and Portia – should alone remain unwedded. But it is equally apt that at the end he profits from a 'strange Accident' that restores to him the 'Life and Living' he thought he had lost when all his argosies disappeared at sea. With this 'Manna' dropped from Heaven, he will now be able to return to the Rialto as a Merchant renewed. If he has been genuinely changed by what has happened to him, he may be inspired to work towards a more cohesive social order in Venice, perhaps even one that will include an offer of genuine fellowship to the alien who has been forced to the baptismal font.

Date, Context, and Sources

The Merchant of Venice was probably written in 1596 or 1597. The reference to 'my wealthy Andrew' in I.i.26 was almost certainly an allusion to the *San Andrés*, a richly laden Spanish galleon that an English expedition under the command of the Earl of Essex had captured in Cadiz harbour in June of 1596. After its induction into the Queen's fleet, the *Andrew* was several times endangered by 'Shallows' and 'Flats' of the kind Salarino refers to, and it was thus a continual reminder of the risks involved not only in military navigation but also in the kind of merchant voyaging that figures so prominently in Shakespeare's play.

For his portrayal of Shylock Shakespeare borrowed a number of details from Christopher Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* (circa 1589), and he was no doubt influenced as well by the 1594 execution of a Jewish physician from Portugal, Roderigo Lopez, who had been tried and convicted of taking part in a conspiracy to poison his most famous patient, Queen Elizabeth. The playwright also incorporated material from a number of literary sources, among them Richard Robinson's 1577 translation of the medieval Latin collection known as the *Gesta Romanorum*, Anthony Munday's 1580 prose narrative *Zelauto, or the Fountain of Fame*, and, most important, Giovanni Fiorentino's Italian novelle *Il Pecorone* (written in the fourteenth century but not printed in Italy until 1588). Fiorentino's narrative combined the essential ingredients of Shakespeare's plot: the bond secured by a pound of flesh, the quest for a wealthy lady in Belmont, the disguised legal authority who saves the life of her husband's benefactor, and the ring-test that concludes the action. The *Gesta Romanorum* provided the idea for the caskets that serve in *The Merchant of Venice* as the means of sorting Portia's suitors. And the *Zelauto* story seems to have been the origin of the stipulation in the Trial Scene that the plaintiff may claim his penalty but must do so without spilling any of the defendant's blood.

As usual Shakespeare adapted his sources freely. Among other things, he took a lady of Belmont who drugged the wine of her

wooers to keep them from winning her hand by bedding her successfully, and metamorphosed her into a chaste maiden who could be obtained only by the man who demonstrated his suitability for her love by a display of wisdom and virtue. Meanwhile, he drew upon a variety of biblical texts, exegetical commentaries, and dramatic antecedents to produce a play that is far more subtle, and far more nuanced psychologically, than any of the works that lay behind it.

John F. Andrews, 1993

THE TEXT OF THE EVERYMAN SHAKESPEARE

Background

THE EARLY PRINTINGS OF SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS

Many of us enjoy our first encounter with Shakespeare when we're introduced to *Julius Caesar* or *Macbeth* at school. It may therefore surprise us that neither of these tragedies could ever have been read, let alone studied, by most of the playwright's contemporaries. They began as scripts for performance and, along with seventeen other titles that never saw print during Shakespeare's lifetime, they made their inaugural appearance as 'literary' works seven years after his death, in the 1623 collection we know today as the First Folio.

The Folio contained thirty-six titles in all. Of these, half had been issued previously in the small paperbacks we now refer to as quartos.* Like several of the plays first published in the Folio, the most trustworthy of the quarto printings appear to have been set either from Shakespeare's own manuscripts or from faithful copies of them. It's not impossible that the poet himself prepared some of these works for the press, and it's intriguing to imagine him reviewing proof-pages as the words he'd written for actors to speak and embody were being transposed into the type that readers would filter through their eyes, minds, and imaginations. But, alas, there's no indisputable evidence that Shakespeare had any direct involvement with the publication of these early editions of his plays.

* Quartos derived their name from the four-leaf units of which these small books were comprised: large sheets of paper that had been folded twice after printing to yield four leaves, or eight pages. Folios, volumes with twice the page-size of quartos, were put together from two-leaf units: sheets that had been folded once after printing to yield four pages.