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SELECT PLAYS. MUCH
ADO ABOUT NOTHING**

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & WILLIAM ALDIS WRIGHT

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CLARENDON PRESS SERIES

ENGLISH CLASSICS

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

W. A. WRIGHT

HENRY FROWDE, M.A.
PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
LONDON, EDINBURGH
NEW YORK AND TORONTO

CLARENDON PRESS SERIES

SHAKESPEARE

SELECT PLAYS

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

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AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

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PREFACE

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING first appeared in print in the quarto edition of 1600 with the following title: 'Much adoe about Nothing. *As it hath been sundrie times publikely acted by the right honourable, the Lord Chamberlaine his seruants. Written by William Shakespeare.* LONDON Printed by V. S. for Andrew Wise, and William Aspley, 1600.'

As it is not mentioned by Meres (*Palladis Tamia*) in 1598 among the plays of Shakespeare, it was probably written in 1599 or 1600 not long before the quarto was published. Among the entries at Stationers' Hall we find, under the date 23 August, 1600,

ANDREW WISE Entred for their copies vnder the handes of the wardens Two
WILLIAM ASPLEY bookes, the one called *Muche a Doo about nothinge*. Another
*the second parte of the history of kinge Henry the iiiith with
the humours of Sir JOHN FALLSTAFFE*: Wrytten by
MASTER SHAKESPEARE. xij⁴.

In a previous entry, which apparently belongs to the same year, under the date of the 4th of August, *Much Ado* is, with *As You Like It*, *Henry V*, and Ben Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour*, among the books which were for some reason or other 'to be staied.' Besides the quarto of 1600 no other edition of this play appeared till it was included in the first folio of 1623.

As to the source from which the plot was derived, there can be little doubt that it was the twenty-second novel of the first part of Bandello's *Novelle*, which was certainly translated into French and included in Belleforest's *Histoires*

Tragiques, and was also most probably translated into English, although no copy of the translation is known to exist. The scene of the novel is laid in the year 1283 at Messina. The hero, Timbreo di Cardona, an officer in the victorious army of Piero d' Aragona, and a favourite with the king, was enamoured of Fenicia, the daughter of Lionato de' Lionati, a gentleman of Messina, and by the help of a friend obtained her father's consent to their marriage. But a rival admirer of Fenicia, one Girondo, a young cavalier of noble family, determined to break off the match and win the lady for himself. He had served in the same campaigns as Timbreo, and but for their rivalry in love there was the most brotherly affection between them. Girondo communicated his intentions to a friend, who readily lent himself to assist him. His first step was to poison the mind of Timbreo by assuring him that Fenicia was unworthy of his regard, inasmuch as she was known to receive the visits of a gentleman of Messina three nights in the week without the knowledge of her parents. Of this Timbreo is furnished with what he supposes to be ocular proof, and one night from a post of concealment sees a man enter the house of Lionato by means of a ladder placed against one of the windows. On the following morning he employs the same friend who had acted for him in bringing about the marriage, and sends him to Lionato's house to repudiate his daughter for her misconduct. The charge came upon the assembled family like a thunderbolt. Fenicia swooned and remained for some time as one dead. Her father, who regarded the story as an invention of Timbreo's in order to avoid marrying into a family of decayed fortunes, dismissed the messenger. Fenicia revived for a time and then apparently died in reality, and preparations were made for her funeral on the following day. But signs of life appeared, and she came out of the swoon to the great joy of her parents, who resolved to carry her into the country to the house of Lionato's brother, and to allow the funeral ceremony to proceed as if she were

really dead. Gironde, filled with compunction at the disastrous result of his plot, confessed to Timbreo at the grave of Fenicia the falsehood of which he had been guilty, and the two then resorted to the house of Lionato and related all the circumstances, which completely cleared the good fame of Fenicia. Timbreo, by way of atonement for the part he had taken, was willing to submit to any penance which Lionato might impose upon him, and this was to accept a wife of Lionato's choice. In the end of course he marries Fenicia, and lives happily ever after.

From this brief outline of the story it seems clear that, through whatever medium it may have come to him, Shakespeare must have been acquainted with it. The substantial identity of the plot, the scene laid at Messina, the names of Piero d' Aragona under whom the hero served, and of Lionato the father of the injured lady, are coincidences too striking to admit of any other conclusion. It is true that in Spenser's *Fairy Queen*, Book ii. canto 4, st. 17, &c., there is the story of Claribella, who was personated by her maid Pryene, and was the victim of the same stratagem; but this is of no value except as an illustration of a literary commonplace, which Spenser may have borrowed from the story of Ariodante and Genevra in the fifth book of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. A translation of Ariosto by Sir John Harington appeared in 1591, and in a note he remarks, 'The tale is a prettie comicali matter, and hath beene written in English verse some few yeares past (learnedly and with good grace) though in verse of another kind, by M. George Turberuil.' It is not certain whether Turberville's name is a mistake for that of Peter Beverley, who did translate the story from Ariosto in 1565-6, though it is improbable that Sir John Harington should have made such an error, but in any case Shakespeare can only have borrowed from this source the incident of the part taken in the plot of the waiting-maid who personates her mistress. The motive of the action is entirely different. In the novel of *Bandello*, as