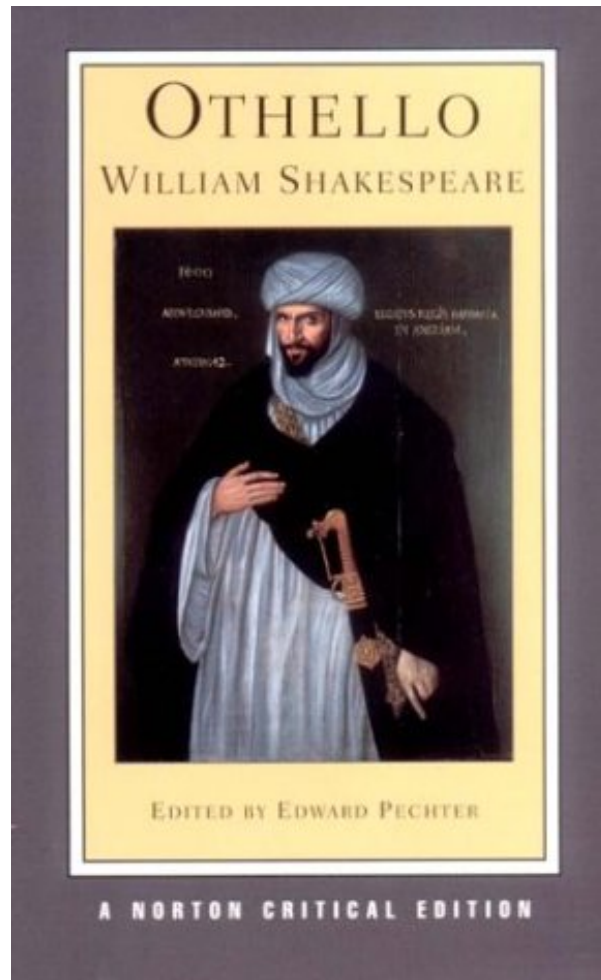


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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



EDITED BY EDWARD PECHTER

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

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## From the Inside Flap

Set in a courtly world of masked revels and dances, this play turns on the archetypal story of a lady falsely accused of unfaithfulness, spurned by her bridegroom, and finally vindicated and reunited with him. Villainy, schemes, and deceptions threaten to darken the brilliant humor and sparkling wordplay-but the hilarious counterplot of a warring couple, Beatrice and Benedick, steals the scene as the two are finally tricked into admitting their love for each other in Shakespeare's superb comedy of manners.

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The text of this Norton Critical Edition is that of the First Folio, printed in 1623. Additions and emendations adopted from the First Quarto (1622) appear in the Textual Notes that follow the play. Othello is accompanied by detailed explanatory annotations.

“Sources and Contexts” reprints the sixteenth-century story by Giraldi Cinthio that Shakespeare used for the plot of Othello and for many of its details. Edward Pechter’s essay provides context for readers through its discussion of the play’s central topics?Moors, Turks, Venetians, marriage and domesticity, fathers and daughters, and female sexuality.

Seventeen wide-ranging interpretive essays are reprinted. Contributors include Samuel Johnson, William Hazlitt, T. S. Eliot, Kenneth Burke, Lynda E. Boose, Mark Rose, and Patricia Parker.

An annotated Selected Bibliography is also included.

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Most helpful customer reviews

28 of 31 people found the following review helpful.

An excellent book!

By Megan

I was assigned to read "Much Ado About Nothing" for my block class, and my initial thought was, Oh, how boring. I don't want to read Shakespeare. I won't even be able to understand it. Let me tell you, I was very wrong! This book was excellent- one of the best I've ever read. It contained romance, humor, comedy, and drama- so many diverse qualities that I rarely find in books these days! The main characters, Beatrice and Benedick, add humor and warmth to the book. They argue and insult each other, yet they are really in love. Hero and Claudio are the lovebirds, but the evil Don John tries to get in the way of this with a deceitful plan. Even though this book was written centuries ago, the main themes still apply to today, (such as the Beatrice and Benedick theme). That is why this book is a classic. Oh, and understanding it isn't a problem, either. This was my first Shakespeare book ever (I'm only 14), and I understood the plot, characters, and the theme. I enjoyed it at the same time. So order this book today. You won't regret it!

41 of 50 people found the following review helpful.

What is with you people?

By Brianna Rhywhen

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. Amazon 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. Predictability 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 Amazon: 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. Much Ado About Nothing is often genuinely entertaining, which is what kept me interested. The plot's not the point here, it's the dialogue.

In sum, the language is poetic, but not so much so that it reads like Klingon, the romance will make you sigh, and the plot is at least good enough to keep Beatrice or Benedick in most of the time. Don't let the previous reviewers deter you: Read it.

54 of 67 people found the following review helpful.

Unusable and Eclectic Ideas Ruin this Important Edition

By Desertmartin

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 exposé 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. McEachern eventually backs herself into ridiculous corners, such as pages of arguing how women of the period who were too talkative (such as Beatrice) were labeled promiscuous, only to concede that Beatrice is never so labeled or even considered such. Her complete overblown fascination with the few humorous "cuckold" references in the play channel her criticism into a reductive and extremely limited analysis of minor factors in the play, while she completely avoids the important social considerations of marriage, challenges to gender roles, and the place of female intelligence in Shakespeare's society. It is a sign of the worst kind of scholarship, that her introduction to Much Ado About Nothing runs to nearly 145 pages, once the length of only the Hamlet introduction among the Arden editions (the only play, because of its complexity, demanding such a lengthy explication). Ego gets the better of scholarship here, and buries the important and necessary social, political and cultural ideas associated with this play. If McEachern's editing and commentary is a sign of things to come from Arden, they can expect to lose readers on all levels who find such marginalized approaches to important scholarship outside the interest of students and professionals alike.

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