

The first quarto edition of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*

William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*. London: Andrew Wise, 1600. 7 inches x 5 inches (178 mm x 127 mm), [72] pages, A–I4.

[ornament] | 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.* | [ornament] | London | Printed by V. S. for Andrew Wise, and | William Aspley. | 1600.

Shakespeare's quartos, so named because of their format (a single sheet folded twice, creating four leaves or eight pages), are the first printed representations of his plays and, as none of the plays survives in manuscript, of great importance to Shakespeare scholarship. Only twenty-one of Shakespeare's plays were published in quarto before the closure of the theaters and outbreak of civil war in 1642. These quartos were printed from either Shakespeare's "foul papers" (a draft with notations and changes that was given in sections to actors for their respective roles); from "fair copies" created from foul papers that presented the entire action of the play; from promptbooks, essentially fair copies annotated and expanded by the author and acting company to clarify stage directions, sound effects, etc.; or from a previously published quarto edition. The quartos were inexpensive to produce and were published for various reasons, including to secure the acting company's rights to the material and to bring in money during the plague years in London when the theaters were closed.

Much Ado About Nothing is a comedic story of two sets of lovers, mingled

together throughout the action of the play. Benedick and Beatrice, both happy in their single lives are reluctant to be involved with the other and vow never to marry; they are slowly tricked into believing they are the object of the other's desire and thus fall in love. The romance of Claudio and Hero is jeopardized by Claudio being convinced by a jealous companion that his lover Hero has been unchaste. Claudio and Hero are eventually brought together by the Friar's plan to unmask the slanderer by claiming that Hero died after hearing that Claudio thought she was a whore. The plot is revealed and both pairs happily prepare to be married.

This first quarto of *Much Ado About Nothing* was bound by the British Museum Bindery in nineteenth-century green sheep with gold tooling, which includes the crest of David Garrick on both boards. "SHAKESPEARE. MUCH ADOE ABOUT NOTHING. LOND. 1600." is lettered in gold up the spine. The turn-ins are gold tooled, and the top turn-in of the front board is signed "TUCKETT. BINDER. BRITISH MUSEUM." The leaves' edges are gilt.

Now in the British Library, this quarto was previously owned by David Garrick (1717–1779), an English actor whose unaffected performance in the title role of *Richard III* in 1741 brought him renown. Garrick, both as an actor and theatrical manager, exerted a tremendous influence on stage practices throughout the 18th century; as a friend and classics pupil of Samuel Johnson, he brought reputability to his trade. He began to collect early printed plays during the 1740s, at which time most collectors regarded stage scripts as popular works unfit for inclusion in serious libraries. Garrick, however, recognized their worth and, assisted by friends and knowledgeable

advisors, built his collection in the interest of scholarship and the enrichment of subsequent generations. He bequeathed the collection to the British Museum upon his death in 1779.

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