

INTRODUCTION

Sources

Stories of the calumny of a chaste woman, as in the plot concerning Hero, are many and ancient. The story of Susanna and the Elders in the Biblical Apocrypha is one of the best-known. The version of this motif to which *Much Ado* is most closely related is found in the twenty-second story of Matteo Bandello's collection of *Novelle* printed in Lucca in 1554; this was not, so far as is known, translated into English until the end of the nineteenth century. Bandello's story in its turn may depend directly or indirectly on the late Greek romance by Chariton, *Chaereas and Callirrhoe*.¹ A translation and expansion by Belleforest was published in French in the third volume of his *Histoires Tragiques* in 1569, but it seems most likely that Shakespeare was working from the Italian rather than the French – unless he had some other source no longer known to us. From Bandello's story of Timbreo and Fenecia come the main plot, the setting in Messina and the names of important subsidiary characters: King Piero of Arragon as the local source of authority and Messer Lionato de' Lionati as the father of the heroine. However there are significant differences. The presence of King Piero in Sicily is a sequel to the 'Sicilian Vespers' – when 'the Sicilians, no longer able to endure French domination, rose one day at the hour of Vespers and . . . murdered all the French in Sicily'.² His triumph in Messina follows a sea-victory against King Carlo II of Naples. Don Pedro of Arragon's war is only hazily adumbrated, but seems to have been a revolt by his bastard brother Don John. Sir Timbreo di Cardona (the Claudio figure) is a 'baron of great esteem', not a very young man who has been recognised for his precocious prowess in the recent war. He is well above the lady Fenecia (Hero) in rank, for Messer Lionato is a (comparatively) poor gentleman, though of ancient family. It is only after Timbreo realises that he will not be able to seduce Fenecia that he resolves to marry her, and makes the proposal which is accepted with alacrity by her father. The defamation is engineered by Sir Gironde Olerio Valenziano, a friend of Sir Timbreo, and also in love with Fenecia. He uses this means to break off the intended match, so that he will be able to marry her himself. His agent is a young courtier, 'more pleased with evil than with good' (Bullough, II, 115), who tells Sir Timbreo that Fenecia has had a lover for many months past. He claims that his motive is to protect Sir Timbreo from dishonour, and he sets up a situation where Sir Timbreo sees a servant, dressed and perfumed like a gentleman, climb a ladder and enter a window of a distant and little-used part of Lionato's house. There is no impersonation of Fenecia by a female servant wearing her clothes. Sir Timbreo is enraged and sends a messenger to Lionato, accusing Fenecia of unchastity, and breaking off the engagement. Fenecia swoons, and is apparently dead; when she revives she is sent secretly to the country

¹ Furness, p. 344. The connection was first suggested by Konrad Weichberger in *SJ* 34 (1898), 34.

² Bullough, II, 112. Later references in brackets in the text.

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house of her uncle Girolamo, where she can assume a different identity. Meanwhile her funeral goes ahead with all due ceremony. The story of her unchastity is not believed, but is assumed to be a pretext by Sir Timbreo to get out of a marriage which on mature consideration had seemed too socially demeaning. But Sir Timbreo himself is struck by remorse and realises that he has jumped to conclusions on dubious evidence. Sir Gironde is also grief-stricken and much troubled in his conscience. A week after the funeral he takes Sir Timbreo to visit Fenecia's tomb, and there confesses, offering Sir Timbreo his dagger and inviting him to kill him in revenge. Timbreo forgives him and the two gentlemen confess to Lionato and are forgiven, on condition that Timbreo, when he comes to marry, will take a wife on Lionato's recommendation. Fenecia spends a year in the country and becomes even more beautiful and scarcely recognisable as the same person. Then Lionato tells Timbreo that he has found a wife for him and takes him to meet her. Sir Timbreo marries the beautiful Lucilla (as she is now called) but does not recognise her. At the wedding breakfast he recounts with deep grief the story of Fenecia and the true identity of his new bride is then revealed to him. To bring everything to a satisfactory conclusion Sir Gironde asks, and is granted, the hand of Fenecia's younger sister Belfiore, who is only not the most beautiful girl in the world because Fenecia is. After the double wedding King Piero bestows a splendid dowry on each of Lionato's daughters.

Another story of this type, in which the servant is beguiled into appearing in her mistress's clothes, is found in the fifth book of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. This was translated into 'English heroic verse' by Sir John Harington in 1591. Renaldo, shipwrecked on the coast of Scotland, is told of Genevra, the King of Scotland's daughter, who has been accused of unchastity and

on this point the lawes are so expresse,
Except by combat it be prov'd a lie,
Needs must *Genevra* be condemned to die.¹

No champion has appeared to defend her, so Renaldo at once sets off for the Scottish court. On the way he comes across two villains trying to murder a young woman; he saves her and as they travel on together she tells him of her unwitting responsibility for Genevra's situation. She was a maid of honour to Genevra, and had fallen in love with Polynesso, Duke of Alban, 'the second person in the land', and become his mistress. Polynesso aspired to marry the princess, and persuaded Dalinda, the maid, to assist him. But Genevra loved the noble Ariodante, and the rejected Polynesso devised a plan to destroy the princess's reputation. He persuaded Dalinda to dress in Genevra's clothes and imitate her hair-style as a preparation for one of their assignations – which often took place in the princess's rooms in the palace. He then told Ariodante that he was Genevra's lover, and offered him ocular proof on condition that he never revealed the secret. Ariodante concealed himself where he would see Polynesso secretly welcomed to Genevra's bedroom, but he did not trust his rival, so stationed his brother Lurcanio where he could see nothing, but could hear and come to his help if he was attacked. Lurcanio, worried by

¹ *Orlando Furioso*, trans. Sir John Harington (1591), Book V, Canto IV stanza 66.

Ariodante's deep distress, did not stay where he was placed, but came much nearer. They saw Polynesso welcomed by Dalinda – whom they both assumed, because of her clothes, to be Geneva. Lurcanio prevented Ariodante from killing himself on the spot, but he disappeared soon after, and a peasant later brought a message that he had leaped into the sea. Lurcanio, who had not recognised Polynesso, blamed Geneva for his brother's death, and accused her of unchastity. No challenger appeared to defend her. Dalinda became frightened and Polynesso proposed that she should go away to a castle of his until after Geneva's case was ended, when he would marry her. Instead he planned her murder, and this was only prevented by Renaldo's arrival.

When Renaldo and Dalinda arrive at the court of Scotland, they discover that an unknown champion has appeared to defend Geneva, and the combat is even then in progress. Renaldo begs the King of Scotland to stop it, and tells Dalinda's story. He then fights and defeats Polynesso, who, at the point of death, confesses his wickedness. The unknown defender turns out to be Ariodante, who had thought better of suicide on hitting the cold water; hearing of Geneva's danger he loved her so much that he came to challenge his own brother to save her, even though he believed in her guilt. All ends well – and Dalinda retires to a nunnery.

Harington attributes a version of the story of Ariodante and Geneva to George Turbervile, but no such poem is known. There is *The Historie of Ariodonto and Jenevra*, by Peter Beverley, which was entered in the Stationers' Register in 1566.¹ It elaborates Ariosto's story in lumbering fourteeners. There is a similar story, but with a tragic outcome, in Book Two of *The Faerie Queene*. In Canto IV Sir Guyon rescues Phedon from Furor and Phedon then tells his story. He grew up with Philemon, and they were faithful friends for many years. Phedon loved the Lady Claribell and their marriage was soon to be celebrated when Philemon told him that she was unfaithful, and that her paramour was a groom of low degree,

Who used in a darksome inner bowre
Her oft to meet: which better to approve,
He promised to bring me at that houre,
When I should see, that would me nearer move,
And drive me to withdraw my blind abused love. (stanza 24)

Philemon had seduced Claribell's maid Pyrene, and persuaded her that to demonstrate how much more beautiful she was than her mistress she should array herself in Claribell's 'most gorgeous gear'. Pyrene did so, Phedon observed the lovers' dalliance in the 'darksome inner bowre' and assumed that it was Claribell with the groom of low degree. He departed 'chawing vengeance all the way' and when he next saw Claribell he killed her. When she heard his reason for doing so, Pyrene confessed 'how Philemon her wrought to change her weede'. Phedon poisoned Philemon, and then pursued Pyrene with his sword drawn to kill her too. It was in this pursuit that he fell into the hands of Furor and his mother Occasio, from whom Sir Guyon had saved him.

¹ The only known copy is in the Huntington Library. It was reprinted by C. T. Prouty in *The Sources of 'Much Ado About Nothing'*, 1950.

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In George Whetstone's *The Rock of Regard* (1576), among other heavily moralised stories and poems is a 'Discourse of Rinaldo and Giletta', which combines parts of the stories of Ariosto and Bandello.

Obviously this tale owes much to Ariosto. The trick is watered down, but the hero tries to commit suicide and then disappears. Nearer to Bandello are the general tone and the novella method, and maybe the fact that misunderstanding is caused mainly by overhearing. The maid's part is less central than in Ariosto, and there is no friendship between Rinaldo and Frizaldo as in both Italian sources. (Bullough, II, 67)

There are a number of dramatic versions of similar stories, none of them particularly close to *Much Ado*, but indicating the wide popularity of stories of Bandello's type. *Il Fedele* by Luigi Pasqualigo (1579) was imitated by Abraham Fraunce in his Cambridge Latin play *Victoria* and by M. A. [Anthony Munday] in *Fedele and Fortunio* (1585).¹ Della Porta's *Gli Duoi Fratelli Rivali* is quite close to Bandello, though the rival lovers are brothers and the method of deception is different. It remained in manuscript until 1911. Jacob Ayrer's play *Die Schoene Phaenicia* was probably written in Nuremberg about the same time as *Much Ado*; it derives from Belleforest's version of the story and is much closer to its source than Shakespeare's play. There is no direct connection between them, nor does either of them correspond closely with the Dutch play of *Timbre de Cardone* by I. I. Starters (1618) which seems independently derived from Belleforest.² On New Year's Day 1575 the Earl of Leicester's Men performed a 'matter of Panecia', no other trace of which survives, and it has been suggested that this may be an error for Fenecia or Phaenicia, and the play based on Bandello's story. More obviously related to Ariosto – perhaps, as Prouty suggests, via Beverley's poem – is *Ariodante and Genevra*, performed at court on 12 February 1583 by the boys of the Merchant Taylors' School under Richard Mulcaster,³ but this play too is lost.

It is clear that the Claudio–Hero plot of *Much Ado* makes use of episodes and actions which are closely related to Ariosto's poem and Bandello's novel and that these stories were popular, widely known and much imitated. Where Shakespeare departs from the pattern of these sources and analogues, the variations all tend in one direction. There is a reduction in the status of the lovers, and in their power to act, and a lessening of the difference of social status between them. Genevra is the king's daughter, and Ariodante owes his prestige at the Scots court to the king's favour; he is clearly her inferior. In Bandello the situation is reversed, and it is a condescension for Sir Timbreo to propose marriage to Messer Lionato's daughter. The lovers in Ariosto discover their love for each other, and Genevra remains firm in spite of Polynesso's suit and urgings from Dalinda. Fenecia recognises that Timbreo is in love with her and begins 'to watch him and bow discreetly to him' (Bullough, II, 113). Claudio says not a word to Hero, and

¹ *Victoria* survives in a single manuscript, which was edited by G. C. Moore Smith for Bang's *Materialien* (Louvain), 1906. It is most unlikely that it could have been known to Shakespeare. *Fedele and Fortunio*, ed. Percy Simpson, was printed by the Malone Society in 1906.

² Accounts of and extracts from both are available in Furness, pp. 329–39.

³ A. Feuillerat, *Documents Relating to the Office of the Revels in the Time of Queen Elizabeth* in Bang's *Materialien* (Louvain), 1908; *Panecia* on p. 238, *Ariodante and Genevra* on p. 350. The connection of *Panecia* with *Much Ado* was first suggested by F. S. Boas in his edition in 1916, p. xiii.

has the prince to do his courting for him. Hero makes no expression of her feelings until Claudio is actually presented to her – and earlier in the same scene she, with all her family, is happily expecting a proposal from Don Pedro. Fenecia's father is not wealthy – the king provides her dowry after the wedding. Claudio is concerned from the start with Hero's expectations: 'Hath Leonato any son, my lord?' (1.1.220). The opposition to the match in both source stories comes from a rival lover of equal status (Girondo) or even greater power (Polynesso). In *Much Ado* it is the spiteful machination of a minor villain; and one of his hangers-on is substituted for the Duke of Albany as the lover of the lady's maid. There is no threat against Margaret's life, and disclosure comes not from the errant champion Renaldo, nor from the confession of the grief-stricken Girondo, but, in spite of the bungling of Dogberry, from the drunken boasting of Borachio. It is worth noting, too, that the effects proposed by Friar Francis for his plan do not occur.

When he shall hear she died upon his words
 Th'idea of her life shall sweetly creep
 Into his study of imagination,
 And every lovely organ of her life,
 Shall come apparelled in more precious habit,
 More moving-delicate, and full of life,
 Into the eye and prospect of his soul
 Than when she lived indeed: then shall he mourn,
 If ever love had interest in his liver,
 And wish he had not so accusèd her:
 No, though he thought his accusation true. (4.1.216–26)

Claudio's callous jesting in 5.1 shows not a trace of remorse, or even mild regret, at the supposed death of Hero. Both Girondo and Timbreo are deeply distressed by the news of Fenecia's death, and this remorse leads to confession – first by Girondo to Timbreo, and then by both to Lionato – and forgiveness. Ariodante in Ariosto's story loves Genevra so much that – though he thought the accusation true – he is prepared to challenge his brother to mortal combat to defend her life and honour. Perhaps Friar Francis had been reading too many Italian novellas. On the other hand, by his diagnosis, it appears that love never did have interest in Claudio's liver.

In Shakespeare's play there is a systematic reduction of the attitudes of characters in cognate stories. Romantic infatuation and violent jealousy are to be found in the immature: Claudio's youth is stressed, and while Hero's age is not stated (Fenecia was sixteen) she is clearly small ('Leonato's short daughter', 1.1.158) and as a 'very forward March-chick' (1.3.41) must be assumed young. The Princess Genevra seems a mature person, and the knights in both stories are seasoned soldiers. At the same time as the power and status of Claudio are reduced from the sources, his reaction is made more objectionable. Sir Timbreo sends a private messenger to Lionato with the accusation of unchastity; Lurcanio makes his accusation against Genevra to protect his brother's reputation, and it is in the nature of a challenge to all comers which he will defend with his life. Claudio repudiates Hero in the most public and sensational way, and there is no one – until Benedick undertakes it – to challenge him to maintain her honour: Hero has no relations but two old men and her cousin Beatrice and has

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even been deprived of the mother and sister who support Fenecia. It seems unlikely, in view of this systematic departure from the tendency of well-known analogues, that Claudio was intended as a particularly admirable or sympathetic character.

It is notorious that critical interest in the play has concentrated on Beatrice and Benedick (apart from wondering whether or not Claudio is a cad),¹ and that these two also provide the parts that make actors and actresses famous. There is no obvious source for their story: it seems – like the Petruchio–Katherina plot of *The Taming of the Shrew* in its departure from the brutality of traditional ‘shrew’ stories² – to be Shakespeare’s own invention. It provides a strong contrast to the Claudio–Hero plot in many ways. It is not a traditional (or an archetypal) story. Beatrice and Benedick have been seen as the forerunners of the ‘witty couple’ of Restoration comedy, with their banter, the assumption by Beatrice of intellectual and sexual equality, and their distrust of the attitudes and also the language of conventional lovers. At the same time they demonstrate in action a genuineness and strength of feeling that shows up the superficiality of the other characters. Hero is rejected by her lover with scarcely a protest – on evidence, however circumstantially convincing, presented by a man he knows to be his enemy. She is rejected by her father on hearsay alone, and he falls at once into the platitudes of anti-feminism. It is her cousin who defends her, and does it on the simplest and most obvious grounds: Beatrice *knows* Hero, and knows, consequently, that the accusation is absurd. Friar Francis defends her because he observes her response to the accusation, and sees that it is one of innocence, not guilt. Benedick shows an immediate concern for Hero, and becomes her champion because, essentially, he trusts Beatrice’s judgement. These things again reflect back on the source stories. None of Fenecia’s family believes the accusations of Sir Timbreo; Ariodante is prepared to fight to defend the honour of Genevra, even though he believes her guilty.

Although no specific source has been located for the plot of the double gulling of Beatrice and Benedick, hints, parallels and anticipations can be found. The sparring witty lovers are anticipated by Shakespeare himself at a rumbustious level in *The Taming of the Shrew* and more elegantly in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* – particularly in the pair Berowne and Rosalind. The rapid, elegantly articulated prose and the equally matched lovers have precedents in the comedies of John Lyly. M. A. Scott long ago drew attention to Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano* as a model of courtly conversation, where wit and raillery could be maintained in a good-humoured war of the sexes.³ Bullough extends this by citing a passage which, without providing the plot, suggests that people might come to be in love with each other by hearing it confidently reported that this was the case.⁴

¹ In spite of its stage popularity *Much Ado* has had a good deal less critical discussion than some plays – *Measure for Measure*, for example – which are less frequently performed. This may be changing, since *Much Ado* seems amenable to certain kinds of criticism that have recently become more widely practised: for example, Anthony B. Dawson, ‘Much ado about signifying’, *SEL* 22.2 (1982), 211–21; or Keir Elam, ‘Much ado about doing things with words (and other means): some problems in the pragmatics of theatre and drama’, *Australian Journal of French Studies* (Sydney, NSW), 20 (1983), 261–77.

² See Ann Thompson’s discussion in her edition of *The Taming of the Shrew*, 1984, pp. 27–8.

³ ‘*The Book of the Courtier*, a possible source of Beatrice and Benedick’, *PMLA* 16 (1901), 475–502.

⁴ Bullough, II, 79; the passage is quoted here from the Everyman edition, 1975, of Sir Thomas Hoby’s translation (1561), p. 248. In the second line Bullough reads ‘they heard say’: ‘she heard say’ seems preferable.

I have also seen a most fervent love spring in the heart of a woman, toward one that seemed at the first not to bear him the least affection in the world, only for that she heard say, that the opinion of many was, that they loved together. And the cause of this (I believe) was that so general a judgement seemed a sufficient witness, that he was worthy of her love. And it seemed (in a manner) that report brought the ambassador on the lover's behalf much more truer and worthier to be believed, than he himself could have done with letters or words, or any other person for him: therefor sometime this common voice not only hurteth not, but farthereth a mans purpose.

In her edition of *Much Ado* Barbara Lewalski argues strongly for a more pervasive influence from Castiglione in 'the play's evident debt to the Neoplatonic love philosophy, one classic source of which is Bembo's discourse in Book IV of *The Courtier*', and also that the 'thematic centre' of the drama – 'as in Bembo's discourse – is the relation of kinds of loving or longing to ways of knowing' (p. xiv). The parallels here, though, are very much more distant than those for the Claudio–Hero plot, and can have provided no more than hints to be developed, if they were consciously remembered in the process of composition at all. The idea of a benignly intended falsehood interacting in a double plot with the malicious falsehood to lead the witty lovers to a fuller state of awareness is an elegant and effective variation on the well-worn theme of the calumniated and redeemed good woman, and it also provides a drastic criticism of the values implicit in such stories. Shakespeare's real originality is not so much in inventing the Beatrice and Benedick plot as in the way he uses it to comment on the story that he borrows from Bandello and Ariosto.

The Date of the Play

The quarto of *Much Ado About Nothing* was printed in 1600. The fact that the names Kemp and Cowley appear as speech headings in 4.2 means that the composition must precede Will Kemp's departure from the Lord Chamberlain's company early in 1599.¹ A date after which the play was written is less easily established, but it is not mentioned in Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia*, which was entered in the Stationers' Register on 7 September 1598. Towards the end of this book of moral reflections Meres lists the works of the major English writers of his day and compares them with the Greek, Latin and Italian poets. His comment on Shakespeare, 'the most excellent in both kinds for the stage', is well known. The 'kinds' are tragedy and comedy, and of the latter Meres names 'his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Love's Labour's Lost*, his *Love's Labour's Won*, his *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and his *Merchant of Venice*'.² That *Much Ado* is not named is in no way conclusive that it was not in

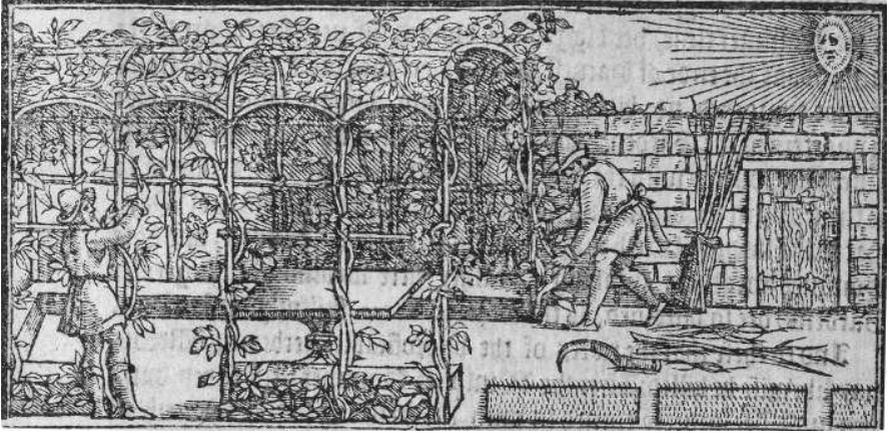
¹ It was on 'the first Monday in clean Lent' of 1599 that Kemp set off on his *Nine Days Wonder*. The record of his morris dance from London to Norwich was published in 1600.

² *Palladis Tamia*, ed. D. C. Allen, 1932, p. 282. Meres uses the form *Love Labours Lost* and *Love Labours Won*.

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 Excerpt
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1 An arbour in an Elizabethan garden, such as might have been the imagined location for Act 2, Scene 3 and Act 3, Scene 1



2 A stage-property arbour from the title page of the 1615 edition of Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*

existence, but the quality of the play makes it likely that had Meres known it he would have named it. It is most commonly held that the play was written in the latter part of 1598, and this fits in well with other circumstantial evidence and with the style. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Merchant of Venice* are usually dated in 1595–6, followed by the two *Henry IV* plays and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in 1597–8. Meres lists 'his *Henry the 4*' among the tragedies. In 1599 come *As You Like It* and *Henry V*; and *Touchstone* in *As You Like It* is the first part Shakespeare wrote for Robert Armin's more intellectual and gentle style of comedy, after Armin took Kemp's place in the company. *Love's Labour's Won* in Meres's list presents a mystery and it has been argued – originally by A. E. Brae in *Collier, Coleridge, and Shakespeare*, 1860 (pp. 131 ff.) – that this title refers to *Much Ado*. The case was never more than speculative: Quiller-Couch wrote in 1923 that Bray's (*sic*) 'ingenious arguments . . . serve sundry good by-purposes while missing to convince us on the main' (NS, p. viii). The discovery in 1953 of a list dating from 1603 of the stock of Christopher Hunt, a London bookseller, made the theory even less tenable, for the list includes *Love's Labour's Won* three years after the publication of *Much Ado About Nothing*.¹

There have also been revision theories – the most influential being that of Dover Wilson (NS, pp. 102 ff.) – which attempt to account for the problems of the quarto text by postulating an 'old' play on the Claudio–Hero plot on to which the 'new' material of Beatrice and Benedick was (sometimes clumsily) cobbled. In this view the verse parts of the play belong to the earlier strata while the vigorous colloquial prose of Beatrice and Benedick represents the later work. Such 'explanations' can never prove anything.²

Stage History

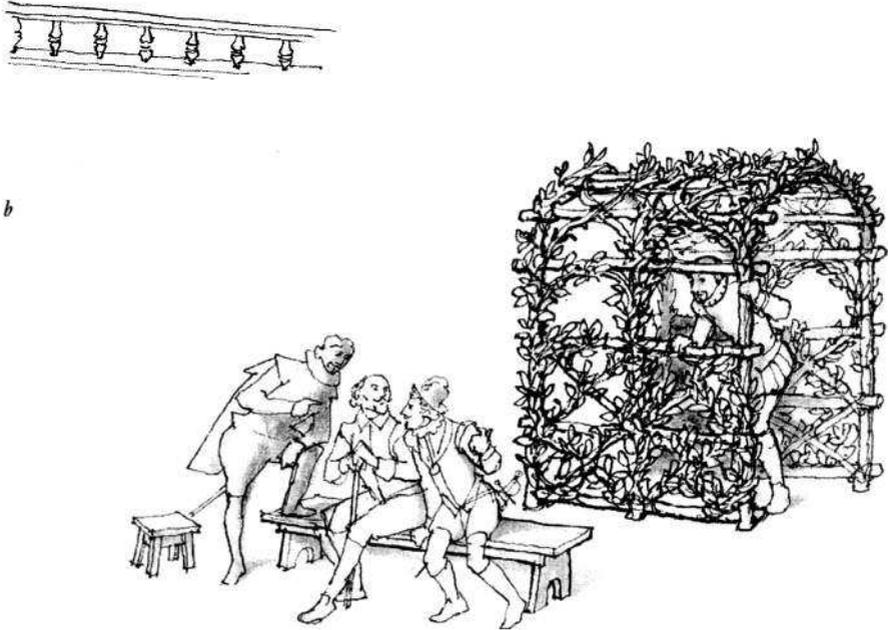
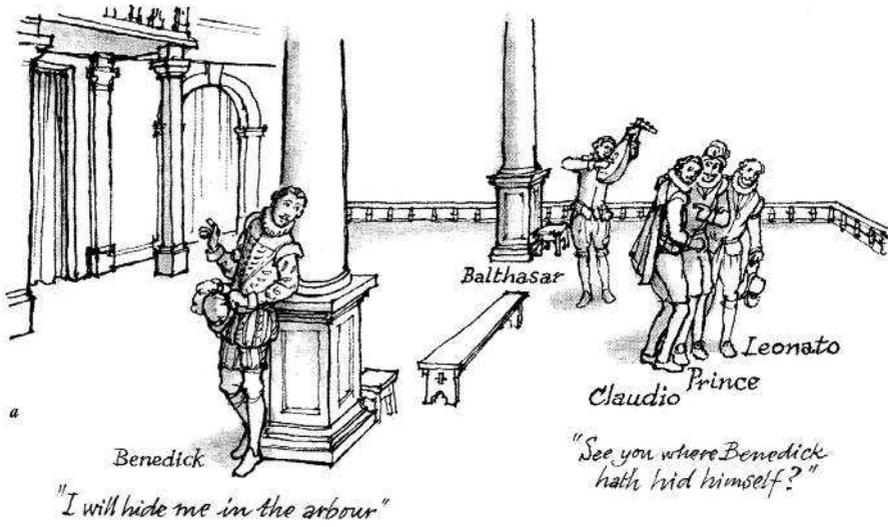
The 1600 quarto assures us that *Much Ado About Nothing* had 'been sundry times publicly acted', but the only performance in Shakespeare's lifetime for which we have documentary evidence took place three years before he died. In 1613 John Heminge received two payments on behalf of the company from Lord Treasurer Stanhope on warrants dated 20 May.³ These were for twenty plays that had been performed as part of the celebrations for the marriage of James I's daughter Elizabeth to Prince Frederick of Bohemia, the Elector Palatine. The first list contains fourteen plays and includes '*Much adoe abomte nothinge*'. The second list of six plays includes '*Benedicte and Betteris*', and, according to Halliwell-Phillips, Charles I inscribed these names against the title of *Much Ado* in his copy of the 1632

¹ T. W. Baldwin, *Shakespeare's 'Love's Labour's Won'*, 1957. However, R. F. Fleissner in '*Love's Labour's Won* and the occasion of *Much Ado*', *S. Sur.* 27 (1974), 105–10, has maintained the identification of *Much Ado* and *Love's Labour's Won*.

² Ridley offers a neat *reductio ad absurdum* by producing an 'early' version of Friar Francis's speech at 4.1.148 ff in rhyming couplets.

³ E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, 2 vols., 1930, II, 343.

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- 3 Alternative stagings for the arbour scene in Act 2, Scene 3, by C. Walter Hodges.
a 'Arbour' simulated simply by use of stage posts
b Arbour as a carried-on property