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Comedy in five acts by William Shakespeare, performed in 1598-99 and printed in a quarto edition from the author's fair papers in 1600. The play takes an ancient theme--that of a woman falsely accused of unfaithfulness--to brilliant comedic heights. Claudio is deceived by his jealous cousin into believing that his lover, Hero, is unfaithful--a plot unveiled by the bumbling constables Dogberry and Verges. Meanwhile, Beatrice and Benedick have "a kind of merry war" between them, matching wits in clever repartee that anticipates other playfully teasing literary couples. Each is tricked into believing that the other is in love, which allows the true affection between them to grow. Both couples are united at the end, after Hero's simulated resurrection from the dead. In this play Shakespeare eschewed devices of obvious magic or disguise of sex, which he employed in other comedies; the wit and ambiguity of the dialogue and the exquisite pacing of the action sustain the play, which remains popular in repertory.