

Through a close
examination of the
opening sequences
of "much ado about
nothing" ...

[Literature](#), [Play](#)



Through a Close Examination of the Opening Sequences of “Much Ado About Nothing” Essay Sample

Kenneth Branagh uses many film techniques to good effect in the opening sequences of the film “ Much Ado About Nothing”. He uses these techniques very effectively to introduce the themes, plots and characters of Shakespeare’s play, in an interesting way, which draws the viewer into the film.

The film opens with some white words on a black background. These words are from a song in the middle of the play, and Branagh has brought this forward to the beginning, as the song sums up the themes and plots of Shakespeare’s play. The lines: “ sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more, men were deceivers ever,” speak of love and deceit- women being deceived by men - and is a good summation of the play’s plot and themes. This is a somewhat bold move, as it contrasts greatly with the conventional openings of films - a colourful or atmospheric scene which draws the audience in. However” I think that the white words appearing on the black background captures the audience’s attention and the impact of the meaning of the song will be conveyed to the audience much more clearly, allowing the viewers to better understand the film.

The scene then opens on a sunny, grassy hill, with the camera focussing for a short time on a painter’s picture of perfect Italian countryside, the camera then slowly pans, showing an idealistic countryside, in which the play takes place - which again helps to introduce the story. The camera then pans slowly, and rests for a short, while on some happy picnickers, who are

laughing relaxed, which seems to indicate that this film is going to be happy, and a comedy. The camera, once again, starts to track and pans up to give us a view of Beatrice perched in a tree. This gives the viewers an opportunity to see that she is suntanned and sitting in a tree in a very unmaidenly manner. This first image of Beatrice may cause the audience to subconsciously think of her as a lively, forward and rather bold young lady, whose character is not like the usual rather reserved and demure temperament women were supposed to have in Shakespeare's time, I think Branagh has used all these things to good effect to introduce Beatrice's character.

There is a change in the music to a fast paced, rather sinister type of music that usually stirs up excitement and anticipation in people. These feelings are represented by the picnickers, as they hear, and then see a horse come thundering into view, only to have its rider leap melodramatically from its back and proclaim to the picnickers that he has an important message for Leonato. As Leonato reads the message there is some suspense as the music stops and people hold their breath to see what has happened in the battle. This suspense is quickly dissolved as Don Pedro's victory is announced to all, Branagh takes this opportunity to try and introduce the relationship of Claudio and Hero early on in the film as, when he mentions the honour that Claudio had gained, he stares at something off camera, and then the camera cuts to show Hero acting in a bashful manner, which implies that they have been courting for some time, or at least are attracted to each other. The banter between Beatrice and the messenger is also done well – the camera

cutting from the messenger to Beatrice as they make their remarks. Then when the approach of Don Pedro is proclaimed the scene shows the nobles flocking down a grassy hill, and the scene changes to show the approach of the victorious nobles.

Again, the music changes - to a grand "majestic theme" which is played, loudly by a full orchestra, Branagh has tried to have the approach of the victors have quite a big impact on their roles in the rest of the play. The advance of Don Pedro and his entourage is shown in slow motion accompanied with the majestic theme from the orchestra and as they gallop towards Leonato's residence the hooves of the horses fall in time to the music, this makes for a very impressive entrance which, I think stresses their importance in the play. This also gives Branagh the opportunity to show the riders separately though who they are is not made apparent by doing this.

As the riders approach the castle, Branagh has added a small section to the film showing the women and men getting ready with some harmless nudity and showing the women of the castle getting into a frenzy as they try to get ready, while the soldiers joke as they get ready to bathe. I think this was added to make for a smoother transition between the arrival of the soldiers and the meeting between Don Pedro and Leonato because, while it may have been acceptable in a play or theatre production to have a slightly abrupt change it may be considered out of place in a film. This small scene also helps make the film more interesting as well while emphasising the playful humour which is evident throughout much of the film and play.

After the soldiers have bathed and are ready Don Pedro Claudio and the other nobles march in time up to the castle once again to majestic music played by a full orchestra - brass instruments feature prominently in this making the music sound more majestic and more like a march. The camera sweeps from the top of the large villa. As it does so the excited inhabitants gather to watch the entrance of the Prince and nobles. This emphasises the point that Don Pedro is well loved, and that his visit is a cause for excitement for everybody. As the nobles march in, they take up a " V-formation" with Don Pedro at the head. It must be noted that the " villains" of the film are dressed in black uniform, while the others are dressed in blue. This subtle move to define the characters by Branagh is not very prominent" but it may register sub-consciously in the viewers' minds or later in the film.

The camera sweeps up to the door as it opens to reveal Don Pedro and the nobles in formation. They then march through into the courtyard while Leonato and his retinue, also in formation go to greet him from the other side of the courtyard. Looking at the courtyard in an aerial view we see them meet in the very middle of the courtyard the two formations mirroring each other. The music is now sweet, slow and mellow. Looking at the two formations we can see that Branagh has positioned the people who are involved with each other in the play opposite each other in these formations. Don Pedro faces Leonato, Hero faces Claudio and Borachio faces Margaret. This once again is a subtle move to introduce some of the characters, and may become clear when the camera cuts between characters. An instance of this is when the camera, showing Claudio then cuts to Hero, who looks down

demurely as if abashed. This is another way of suggesting the romance between them and another way of emphasising Hero's rather reserved character.

As the formations stop, there is a moment of stillness, while the music stops for a moment. The camera then cuts from Don Pedro to Leonato and they embrace, relieving the slight tension. After the introductions and the other conversations between Leonato and Don Pedro the camera then cuts from Beatrice to Benedick. They then proceed to banter, the camera cutting back and forth between them as they make their comments. Branagh has also involved the crowd around the Beatrice and Benedick in the repartee of wit, which may serve to accentuate the verbal wit and create a better atmosphere for the scene. Towards the end of this scene, Don John is noticed, staying sullenly out of the way in a corner of the courtyard. The change in mood of everyone in the room makes a markedly contrast in the atmosphere of the scene. The music changes to a minor key becoming soft as well. This sudden contrast from the jovial atmosphere to sombre silence implies to the audience that the character is a villain which is reaffirmed by his tense, stammering reply to Leonato's offer at hospitality. The scene then ends with Don Pedro and Leonato leaving the courtyard, behind the others, while Benedick and Claudio remain behind.

Overall, Branagh uses the many film techniques available to depict the scenes from *Much Ado About Nothing* in a way that will interest film viewers and will bring out many of Shakespeare's own ideas. He uses a script very close to the original play, and I think this brings out much of the

Shakespearean character of the film. In conclusion I must say that the opening scenes of the film do convey the humorous and light-hearted aspect of the play, and introducing the characters and their roles in the play, while also bringing forth the themes of love and the possibility of deceit.