

The element of
disguise in as you like
it and much ado
about nothing



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The theme appearance versus reality or the image of disguise has been very apparent in some of Shakespeare's masterpieces. Shakespeare uses both the external or overt image of disguise and the element of deceptions and illusions. On his comedy play, *As You Like It*, clothing and manner of bearing that suggest pretense seems to be a favorite device of Shakespeare in order to fulfill the supposed fates of the characters. Clothing in the past became an important expression of pretense since it is a big part of self as it expresses social position.

The mode of dressing and what constitutes the physical appearance in general define character, reputation and sexuality. It is therefore not surprising that those characters in Shakespeare plays used physical appearances to disguise themselves effectively. In his play *Much Ado About Nothing* on the other hand is based upon deliberate deceptions by which the characters are fond of plotting in order to fulfill their illusions. The noble characters used deceptions to make people fall in love, to make someone realize their mistake and to help someone get what they want. But villains used deceptions for the purpose of revenge and to eventually make evil plots.

Apparently, the prevalence of deception in Shakespeare's plays illustrates the deceptive tendencies of human nature in which this element takes a variety of forms- the deception of their lovers, physical disguises and disguises through disingenuous dialogue. But nonetheless the element of disguise in these two plays is illustrated more in a positive light since at the end of every play, deception makes marriages and the realization of true love happens. The apparent and elaborate gender reversals in the play *As*
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You Like It illustrates the elements of disguise as an important tool for narrative development. The disguises of the main characters especially Rosalind are necessary for the realizations of the story's themes.

This Shakespearean comedy through the character of Rosalind contains scenes where a woman cross-dresses as a man to achieve a particular goal. The play compasses a complex plot of mistaken identities and deliberate cross dressing. In the play, clothing for Rosalind is an important factor to establish gender identity. The initial manifestation of disguise is when Rosalind assumes the dress of a young handsome man and when her best friend Celia dresses as a common shepherdess during their trip in the Forest of Ardenne for safety purposes. Unknowingly, this initial disguise of the two young women is a significant opportunity to take control of their own destiny and the others.

Rosalind's character basically dominates the play. She used her resourcefulness, her clever and independent mind during her trip to the Forest of Ardenne to creatively take control of her own destiny. She effectively used her disguise as Ganymede– a handsome young man– in order to win the love of her life Orlando, an unschooled yet noble young man. Orlando, though he extremely hates his older brother Oliver and wishes him harm for denying his right for proper education and training, he is a courageous picture of a hero in the play. However, Orlando relies on commonplace cliches in terms of love becoming overly emotional and unreasonably poetic, declaring that without Rosalind he would rather die, “ to have the touches dearest prize/ Heaven would that she these gifts should have/ And I to live and die her slave”. Orlando carved Rosalind's name on <https://assignbuster.com/the-element-of-disguise-in-as-you-like-it-and-much-ado-about-nothing/>

the trees, put and fastened love sonnets on it, and addressed to her with the traditional and poetic declaration of love.

Rosalind unconvinced into this kind of portrayal pitying Orlando for his unreasonable suffering for love due to his emotional love letters said; “haunts our forest and spoils our young trees with carving Rosalind upon their barks; and he hangs odes upon hawthorns, and elegies on brambles, all praising this same Rosalind. If I could find this lover, I would give him some good counsel that would soon cure him of his love” (Lamb 80). Apparently Orlando’s character conform to the conventions of literature and poetry on how to deal with love, holding the idea that love is a sickness that brings pain and suffering to the lover and the assumption that the male lover is automatically the slave or servant of his mistress. These concepts of courtly love tradition are the central ideas of earlier literature before Shakespeare’s time. In *As You like It* through the character of Rosalind Shakespeare portray this kind of conventions as something ridiculous, funny and unconvincing.

Disguise as Ganymede, Rosalind tutors Orlando on how to approach love as a force of happiness and fulfillment and not as a force of torment, teaches Silvius against obsessing himself to Phoebe who is only a human being and scolds Phoebe for her arrogance in playing the shepherd’s disdainful love object as if she is like an unreachable princess, which is a too common attitude to women in earlier times who assume like a precious maiden.

Rosalind, aware of Orlando’s comic and old fashioned views of love’s expression, gave herself over fully to the circumstance displaying her wits and intelligence where she disguise herself as a man. She goes into lovesick

Orlando and tutors him on how to intelligently approach extreme emotions
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created by love. Believing her to be a young man, Orlando confides Rosalind that his love and emotions is over-empowering him. Rosalind, as Ganymede, claims to be an expert in healing such emotions promises to cure Orlando's love sickness.

With boldness, imagination and disguise, Rosalind assumes herself as a young man for the majority of the comedy play in order to woo the man she loves and instruct him on how to be a more accomplished and effective lover. Apparently, Rosalind goes out to the conventions of the female behavior but which her character is illustrated through endless comic appeal as she dispenses herself with wits and cleverness. Meanwhile, when Orlando is about to visit Ganymede for his love lessons, he saw a man lying asleep on the ground and a large green snake had twisted itself around his neck. But seeing Orlando approach, the snake glides away among the green grass.

When Orlando gets nearer though, he again saw a lioness crouching with her head on the ground waiting the sleeping man awake since it is said that lioness will not prey on a man sleeping or dead. Due to Orlando's gentle and noble nature, he wants to save the man from the danger even though he discovered that the man sleeping is his brother Oliver, who had so cruelly used and threatened his life. He attacked and killed the lioness thus preserved his brother's life. When Oliver awake and discovered that his brother just saved his life, he asked for forgiveness and reconciliation and Orlando on the other hand readily accepted it. Oliver told Ganymede and Aliena how Orlando selflessly saved his life. The genuine sorrow and repentance that Oliver expressed for his offenses made a lively impression on the kind heart of Aliena.

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Rosalind's disguises also created charades that affects the destiny's of other characters. A young shepherdess Phoebe hates the affections of Silvius, a young shepherd desperately in love. But Rosalind in Ganymede's disguise intervene in order to trick Phoebe into marrying the young Silvius. Phoebe falls hopelessly in love with Ganymede. Orlando on the other hand is tired in pretending that that a boy named Ganymede is his love Rosalind and so Rosalind, worried that she may lose Orlando, decided to end the charade.

Through Rosalind's pretense, various obstacles to marriage for several couples in the play (most especially that of Rosalind and Orlando itself) are easily overcome and a happy never ending love is very much possible. Looking at the deeper level, through Rosalind's pretense, she creatively expresses her recognition to life's difficulties but holds fast to optimistic attitude towards life that is playful, kind and wise. At the end it will be realized that Rosalind is the Christian heroine who successfully orchestrated four happy and delightful marriages. Much Ado About Nothing is also a romantic comedy by William Shakespeare that illustrates the elements of pretense and disguise in order to complete the main purpose of the narrative. The Play is set in Messina, Sicily that concerns about a pair of lovers named Hero and Claudio who are due to marry in a week. There are many examples of deliberate deceptions in the play since the plot is basically based upon this.

Deception in the play is used as a means to an end. The play's characters become caught up in the illusions that they help to create with one another temporarily. Most of the games and tricks played on people have the best intentions- to make people fall in love, to make someone realize their
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mistake and to help someone to get what they want. But not all however have good consequences. The initial trick in the play has been given lightheartedly by Shakespeare.

Claudio after seeing Hero, Leonato's daughter who happily welcomes them for passing by the city after a successful battle under Don Pedro, easily falls in love to the young woman. He soon announces his plans or intentions to court her. Despite Benedick's contradictions towards Claudio's plans in courting Hero since Benedick is a long time adversary of Leonato, it is unsuccessful in the face of Don Pedro's encouragement. During a masquerade ball, the men used the opportunity to disguise Don Pedro to woo Hero on Claudio's behalf. But Don John, Don Pedro's illegitimate brother and who often despises his brother's social authority, took the opportunity to get even on his brother by telling young Claudio that Don Pedro is actually wooing Hero for himself.

Apparently, Don John is using Claudio and Hero's love to get even on his brother Don Pedro by creating a dark scheme to ruin the happiness of the lovers. Meanwhile, Claudio becomes furious at Don Pedro after hearing the false testimonies of Don John. The misunderstanding is quickly resolved though and Claudio wins Hero's hand in marriage. Similarly Beatrice, Leonato's niece and Hero's cousin with a very sharp tongue, and Benedick, an aristocratic soldier under the fighting team of Don Pedro, are fooled into thinking that each loves the other. Don Pedro and his men harbor a plan to matchmake Beatrice and Benedick while waiting for the matrimonial ceremony of Claudio and Hero. Don Pedro is being encouraged to harbor such plans especially after hearing Benedict says that he will never get <https://assignbuster.com/the-element-of-disguise-in-as-you-like-it-and-much-ado-about-nothing/>

marry and after seeing that Beatrice and Benedick often resume to witty war of insults.

The people around wants to stop them arguing as they are clearly meant for each other. And so the deception begins. The men under Don Pedro's leadership proclaim Beatrice secret love and affection for Benedict knowing that the latter is eavesdropping on the conversation. A group of women led by Hero on the other hand do the same likewise to Beatrice.

Struck by the the fact that they are apparently thought to be too proud to love each other and not willing to bear the reputation of pride, Benedick and Beatrice express the love of the other (though they eventually love each other in the near future). Their tricks prove successful, and Beatrice and Benedick soon fall secretly in love with each other. Meanwhile, Don John who is apparently the villain of the play whose evil actions are motivated by his envy of his brother's higher social position and authority plots to ruin Claudio and Hero's wedding plans by casting a dark reputation upon Hero's character. In his plot he has his companion Borachio who should make love to Margaret, Hero's serving woman , at Hero's open window in the middle of the dark night.

In order for the plot to be effective, Don John leads Don Pedro and Claudio to spy below. Borachio who is part of Don John's evil plots calls Margaret " Hero". The two men, Claudio and Don Pedro, are convinced of Hero's infidelity believing that the woman making love is indeed Hero . As a result, Hero angrily refuses to marry Hero at the day of the wedding ceremony itself. Claudio and Don Pedro humiliate Hero publicly before a stunned

congregation. Hero's family members decide to pretend that Hero died suddenly of shock and grief and to hide her away while they wait for the truth about her innocence to come to light.

Fortunately, the night's watchman overhear Borachio and his other men bragging about their crime. The police as a response ultimately arrest the villains. Everyone eventually learns that Hero is really innocent, and Claudio, who believes she is dead, extremely grieves for her. Leonato, Hero's father, tells Claudio to tell everybody in the city that Hero is really innocent.

And as a additional punishment, Leonato wants Claudio to marry Leonato's niece- a young lady who they say looks like the dead Hero. Claudio goes to church with the other men, preparing to marry the mysterious, masked woman he thinks is Hero's cousin. When Hero reveals herself as the masked woman, Claudio is overwhelmed with joy. Benedick on the other hand got the courage to propose to Beatrice and the latter willingly accepts it. The play ends with a merry dance with joyful lovers as they are about to celebrate their double wedding.

The masking of Hero reveals that the social institution of marriage has to do with love. Claudio immediately accepted Leonato's offer to marry a woman totally unknown to him, " For this I owe you: here comes other reckonings. Which is the lady I must seize upon? ". Apparently, Claudio is ready and willing to commit his whole life to a stranger event though he did not even see her face. His willingness is to both appease his conscience for slandering an innocent woman publicly and perhaps to renew his name before Leonato

who gave him a great deal of favors in the past. Each of the main characters in the play are victims of deception.

Likewise nearly every character in the play at some point plays a part of consciously pretending to be what they are not- Don Pedro acts for Claudio's behalf in wooing Hero, Don John acts the part of a sincere friend, concerned for his brother's and Claudio's honor, Leonato together with the family act as if Hero were dead and all the main characters in the plot pretend for Benedick and Beatrice sake in order for them to reconcile and eventually fall in love. But not all consequences of deceit are essentially evil. In fact in the play, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between what is a good and what is a bad deception. Even though Don John succeeds in fooling Claudio and Don Pedro into thinking that Hero has been sleeping with another man before the matrimony, at the end Claudio and Hero are reunited and even more in love after Claudio asks for a sincere apology. At first their love is founded by each other's appearance but the tragedy deepens their feelings.

Likewise Beatrice and Benedict are fooled into thinking that they love each other but actually does fall in love as a result. Their love has been nurtured immediately into the point of marriage and commitment. Meanwhile, the title Much Ado About Nothing seems that it has no relevance to the play's plot. The strong themes and ideas seems to oppose the title since the characters truly exerted efforts to fulfill their own purposes. The games and tricks are created by the characters itself and not the fate.

This shows that the title and the plot are not always in complement. Perhaps Shakespeare could have intended this to fool the readers while lacing the

play with themes of deceptions and love. In this play, Shakespeare presents the viewers about the realms of truths and illusions. Since the play is full of characters plotting and deceiving, it illustrates that deception is truly ingrained in human's social behaviors. The characters used deception to create various illusions to reveal and conceal something.

The love stories of Claudio and Hero and Benedick and Beatrice have a glimpse of illusions. Their intentions and emotions for each other are truly transparent but they can not immediately and directly reveal their true feelings. Both fall in love upon sight and appearance. The notion of physical attraction to the opposite clearly demonstrates the concept of sexuality as the characters have not even spent enough time with each other to dismiss their feelings to be of love already.

But Claudio can not create an illusion as simple as the portrayal of himself as a suitor. The characters of Claudio and Hero are Shakespeare's social illusion of true love- a love that is not straightforward which demonstrates that honesty in terms of love do not go hand in hand. Benedick and Beatrice however are unconsciously well versed in the intricacies of illusions. They disguise their affection with verbal sparring and insults creating a facade of hostility. They are successful only at fooling themselves but not the people around them.

The elements of deception is used by Shakespeare to make his narrative more effective, creative and amusing or more comedic in its own ways. In this way, Shakespeare reveals his creative talents in plotting and using language for specific purposes. The element of deception is also used by him

for the purpose of narrative that reveals something about human nature specifically man's ability to plot specific kind of deception for personal purposes. The case of mistaken identity and deception creates various illusions that is particularly useful for character development.

The theme of deception is apparently used in all sorts of comedies to cause confusion and misunderstanding. Disguise causes confusion and confusion leads to comedy. Disguises and deceptions is used to bring about humorous situations and to help the characters achieve their goals.