

Analyse the ways in which Shakespeare uses dramatic conventions in his plays essa...



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A dramatic convention is the specific actions or techniques the actor, writer or director has employed to create a desired dramatic effect/style. Dramatic conventions are significant in Shakespeare's plays as they created dramatic irony and they got the audience involved, making them feel like they were a part of the trick or lie. Dramatic conventions are still used today in TV soap operas such as Hollyoaks. In Hollyoaks eavesdropping is used. It has had a modern twist put on it, as it is put across through a visual aid, such as a mobile phone (reading of text messages).

Asides and soliloquies are still used too in the form of thought bubbles and voices in the characters' heads. Shakespeare used dramatic devices because there were so little stage directions in Shakespeare's time; mood, atmosphere and many of the characters' thoughts and actions are revealed through dialogue and dramatic devices. The main political beliefs at the time Shakespeare wrote these plays was Machiavellian Politics in which man will do anything to succeed and that anything can be bought.

Three of Shakespeare most famous play were: Nothing (Act 2 Scene 3, Act 3 Scene 1 and Act 3 Scene 3), Hamlet (Act 3 Scene 4) and Othello (Act 4 Scene 1). Much Ado About Nothing is a comedy and Hamlet and Othello are tragedies. Much Ado About Nothing was written in 1598/1599 this was known as Shakespeare's comedy period. This was Shakespeare's last comedy written in this period, before he went into the tragic period. Hamlet was written in 1601 this was known as the tragic period. Othello was written in 1602, it was also written in the tragic period.

The Globe Theatre on London's Bankside was the theatre where most of Shakespeare's plays were performed. The Globe Theatre was built in 1599. In Shakespeare's time many people attended the theatre to watch plays. It was about the only time the upper and lower classes came together in public. It was built in two stages; the stalls at the bottom, generally where the lower class sat and the higher tier where the higher class sat. It was free in the stalls but you had to stand, it got extremely crowded and was very unhygienic as people would do the toilet in a bucket being passed around.

In the higher tier where the upper class sat you had to pay to sit up there. There were toilets and more space though. Many poorer people would save up to sit up top, so that they would look richer. The Globe was actually quite reflective of the Machiavellian political climate of the Renaissance period as it was structured like the class system itself. It also follows the idea that anything can be bought. When plays were being performed, sometimes a joke was made insulting either the upper or lower class the opposite class would jeer and laugh. The Globe was a socially complying theatre.

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, eavesdropping is used all the time. In Act 2 Scene 3 eavesdropping is used to trick Benedick into loving Beatrice. The audience are almost involved in the trick themselves as they are listening in. This leads to the idea of eavesdropping within eavesdropping. The eavesdropping is used in a positive way in this scene as it is used to create love. This is deliberate eavesdropping as Leonato, Don Pedro and Claudio know that Benedick is listening. The stage directions used are the same as told in the script as in the film Benedick hides behind a bush.

After the eavesdropping Benedick changes the way he speaks from prose to blank verse because he is falling in love with Beatrice and so he wants to look smarter and appear well spoken, this links in with the idea of being someone you're not. Benedick has a two contrasting soliloquies in this scene, one at the start where he speaks about his dislike of Beatrice and also at the end of the scene when he speaks of how beautiful and intelligent she is. This is incredibly ironic as just before this he criticises Claudio for falling in love easily.

The trick works so effectively as Benedick and Beatrice already love each other, they just need to realise it. There is a lot of hunting imagery used throughout this scene as when Leonato, Don Pedro and Claudio are speaking and they know that Benedick is listening: " Bait the hook well, this fish will bite" this makes it so obvious to the audience that they are deceiving Benedick. The audience also know that the eavesdropping is obvious and that Benedick is so in love that he does not realise. The purpose of the eavesdropping in this scene is to create dramatic irony.

It creates it by getting Benedick to almost criticise himself: " I do much wonder, that one man seeing how much another man is a fool, when he dedicates his behaviour to love, will after he hath laughed at such shallow follies in others, become the argument of his own scorn, by falling in love: and such a man is Claudio. " This creates much humour as he does the exact thing he almost swears he will never do: " I will live a Bachelor. " In Act 3 Scene 1 eavesdropping is similarly used to trick Beatrice into loving Benedick. At this point in the play the trick has already been played on Benedick.

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This scene is a mirror scene to the previous. It follows the same type of plot. The title of this scene is “ The Orchard” there is imagery to the story of the Garden of Eden, where deception is also a main theme as well . When the audience see the start of the scene they can guess what is going to happen this is known as foreshadowing. This is also deliberate eavesdropping as Ursula, Hero and Margaret know that Beatrice is listening, this adds to the comedy. When Hero speaks at the start of the scene there is alliteration of “ c”. This implies sly, sneaky and crafty.

The alliteration of “ c” also links back to the snake in The Garden of Eden. There is further reference to Machiavellian politics: “ Cupid’s crafty arrow” this goes back to arranged marriage which was very Machiavellian. Ursula then also uses a lot of hunting imagery “ Angling” and “ Angle” this gives the effect that they have Beatrice biting and they just need to bring her in. There is a reference to Machiavellian politics and how in this capitalist society everything can be bought; when words of precious materials are spoken, “ Golden” and “ Silver”. This again shows that everything has its price.

They speak a bit more and Beatrice hidden in a bush cannot believe what she is hearing. In the BBC Shakespeare remake of this play when Beatrice is eavesdropping she is in a toilet cubicle, the effect of this is to show to the audience that Beatrice is so in love with Benedick, she has not noticed that they are deliberately making sure she hears. To maximise the effect of the eavesdropping Hero then says she is going to tell Benedick he must try to hide his passion as Beatrice does not love him back and is over dramatic: “ No rather I will go to Benedick, and counsel him to fight his passion. This will make Beatrice feel guilty.

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This trick works so easily because Beatrice already loves Benedick, she is too proud to realise. To emphasise the fact how much Beatrice have been tricked Hero uses rhyming couplets: “ Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps”. This makes it so obvious to the audience that Beatrice has been tricked. After Beatrice hears Hero and Ursula she also speaks in a soliloquy. The soliloquy is almost a sonnet. It is spoken in iambic pentameter; this means that words go together in pairs like Beatrice and Benedick should go together.

In this scene the eavesdropping creates a lot of dramatic irony because Hero is tricking Beatrice; Hero thinks that it is so foolish for Beatrice to fall for the trick. However the last two scenes have showed the positive qualities of eavesdropping, yet you feel it is like the cloud before the storm. In Act 3 Scene 3 eavesdropping is not used in a deliberate way. It is accidental eavesdropping. It suggests how the Machiavellian class system has the potential to create tragedy. As Machiavellian encourages spying, eavesdropping and trickery, this helps them to climb the social ladder whatever the cost.

As Dogberry and Verges overhear Borachio and Conrade plan to break up Claudio and Hero. Dogberry and Verges use malapropisms, this adds humour to the scene. They do this because it makes them look higher class. However, when the watchmen go to tell Leonato of Don John’s cynical plans, he simply brushes them off; this shows the ignorance of the higher class to the lower class. As the watchmen are trying to act clever they use oxymorons but not deliberately “ Senseless and fit. ” This shows the

audience that they are lower class. When Dogberry is explaining what Seacoal must do in his new job of watchman.

He shows the audience that he has no authority, as he tells him to let anyone pass through the gates. Dogberry basically says that it does not matter if they are good or bad workers, as they will get their money at the end of the day. This links back to the Machiavellian way of politics. Dogberry then makes a comical mistake when he makes a child's error: "Vigilant calf when he bleats" calves do not bleat this adds much comedy and shows up his lack of knowledge to the audience. This creates so much dramatic irony as Dogberry and Verges have uncovered them, but they are lower class.

The audience in Shakespearian time would be surprised as the lower have beat the lower class, in the Globe the lower class would cheer up to the higher class. They accidentally uncovered the truth through eavesdropping. This shows the bad side of eavesdropping as it is being used to break up Claudio and Benedick. Don John's slyness is shown through the alliteration of "s". This links back to The Garden of Eden with the snake. Throughout Much Ado about Nothing there is themes of deception, comedy and the play on of the word noting. As in Shakespearian times the word nothing was pronounced noting.

It also links into the love notes that Benedick and Beatrice wrote about each other. The word "Noting" is mentioned a lot throughout the play. It is like an unlucky charm that keeps propping up. Another of the main themes of the play is class. As when the lower class watchmen hear of Don John's plans, they go straight to Leonato to tell him of the news. He brushes them off

because he believes they are too stupid to be correct, this is a dire mistake. The final theme of the play is superficial love. This theme is shown very well in the BBC adaptation of *Much Ado About Nothing*.

When Don John pretends to Claudio that Hero loves him. This is done by Borachio having sex with Margret out of the window for Claudio to see. This is set up eavesdropping by Don John in a visual way. This works well as Margret looks like Hero. The director has done this well through text messages, photographs and visual as well. In Act 3 scene 4 in *Hamlet* eavesdropping is used to create tragedy. I think that Shakespeare does this because all the previous scenes have shown the positive effects of eavesdropping and that was like the clouds, before the storm.

This happens when Hamlet attacks Gertrude so violently that she cries out for help. Polonius responds from his hiding place and Hamlet who thinks he is Claudius, stabs through the wall hanging and killing him. He then continues his furious indictment of Gertrude, until the ghost enters, reminding him of his mission. Having implored his mother to repent, he drags away Polonius's body. This shows us the bad side of eavesdropping as in *Much Ado about Nothing* the eavesdropping is used to create love and comedy. In this scene Polonius is hiding and eavesdropping on Hamlet.

When Hamlet attacks Gertrude he attempts to help her. Hamlet cannot see who it is and thinks it is Claudius, he then stabs and kills him. This goes back to the idea of masks in *Much Ado about Nothing*, as Hamlet does not know who it is. Hamlet is so caught up in his own plans that he is willing to do whatever he wants to get his own way. This is very Machiavellian, as it

continues the idea of gathering information through spying. The audience are very involved in this scene because they have seen the murder of Claudius and the other characters have not, this makes the audience feel like they are in on the murder.

In Act 3 scene 3 in Othello eavesdropping is used to create tragedy as well. Iago is very much sowing the seeds of doubt in the characters heads in this scene. He is very like Don John in Much Ado about nothing. Desdemona urges Othello to forgive Cassio. Once she has gone, Iago starts to sow seeds in Othello's head: he states repeatedly that Cassio is an honest man, whilst making it seem quite the opposite. He warns the ever unsure Othello: "O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!" Othello is definite that he would never be suspicious without concrete evidence.

Iago advises him to watch Desdemona with Cassio, adding: "She did deceive her father, marrying you." This scene is very like the scene in Much Ado about nothing when Don John tells Claudio to watch him as he goes to Hero's room. Othello is very badly disturbed as he is now unsure of Desdemona's trust. This has all been done by Iago when he puts ideas in Othello's head. When Desdemona drops her handkerchief, Emilia gives it to Iago. He plans to plant it in Cassio's lodgings: "Trifles light as air/Are to the jealous confirmations strong/As proofs of holy writ. Othello returns, accusing Iago of torturing him and demanding proof of Desdemona's infidelity.

Iago claims to have heard Cassio talking of her in his sleep and to have seen him use her handkerchief. A director could modernise the play in film by replacing the handkerchief with another item of clothing. The director

achieves this well in the film “O”. They replace the handkerchief with a scarf. The audience in this scene will have noticed that Iago is trying to put ideas into Othello’s head. They will feel almost guilty as well because they feel like they want to shout out to Othello that Iago is trying to trick him.

They will also feel powerless, as they cannot help Othello but must watch the story unfold right in front of their eyes. This gives more power to Iago. This is how Shakespeare used eavesdropping in three different plays, to create very different effects. It shows us how it can have positive and negative effects. Eavesdropping is probably the main dramatic device that has been carried through the years into modern television and film. This shows just how a successful playwright William Shakespeare was. To have plays that have gone through 400 years and are still very successful, is a great achievement.