

How does
shakespeare use
deception to structure
the plot in 'much ado
about nothi...



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Pretty much all of the key events or turning points in Much Ado about Nothing happen because characters deceive each other. Shakespeare uses deception as a way of structuring the plot because it often results in comedic situations and, after all, Much Ado about Nothing is a comedy.

From the very beginning Shakespeare introduces the idea of using deception as a way of getting what you want. Don Pedro's plan of wooing Hero for Claudio is the first act of deception the audience sees but, unlike Don John's plan, it is for a good cause and leads to the engagement of Hero and Claudio. We know of Don Pedro's good intentions due to him saying "and the conclusion is, she shall be thine" [Act1 scene1 line316]. Don John's stratagem is a malicious plot to ruin Hero's reputation and stop her marrying Claudio; "if i can cross him any way, i bless myself every way" [Act1 scene3 line64].

The audience then know that these plans will be put into action at some point in the play. Deception in the form of delusion, or the characters deceiving themselves, is also utilised in Act 1. It's the first time we meet Benedick and Beatrice who both deceive themselves into thinking they never want to marry because of a fear of getting hurt, ultimately believing they are something that they are not; both of them talk of being "bachelors". This is particularly important as it shapes the characters' personalities which helps to construct rest of the plot and is the exposition of the play. For many of Shakespeare's male protagonists, the fear of deception by their lovers consumes them, often to an irrational degree but here we see a female protagonist with the same fear which would have been strange to a

Shakespearian audience given the social conventions of women doting on men.

The plans are quickly implemented in Act 2 scene 1 during the masked ball. This scene is full of deception and delusion which manifests itself through physical disguise using costume. Don Pedro sets to work wooing Hero for Claudio who is then subsequently tricked by Don John into thinking Don Pedro is “enamoured on Hero” [line165]. Many of Shakespeare’s characters strive to deceive each other through disingenuous dialogue of which this is of prime example. Beatrice is misled by Benedick who convinces her he is not Signor Benedick (“not I, believe me” [line134]) which leads to Beatrice unknowingly telling him he is a “prince’s jester” and a “dull fool”.

Shakespeare attempts to deceive his audience and readers through the language and structure of his plays and this scene does just that as we think that perhaps the two won’t get married after all because Beatrice has gone too far and wounded Benedick too much. The following scene where Benedick expresses his anger at Beatrice is quite comical because he is reacting so violently to a minor wrongdoing; “well, I’ll be revenged as I may” [Act2 scene1 line120]. Not only is it funny because it’s his fault that he heard things he didn’t want to hear due to his pretending to be someone else but the audience know he is deceiving himself in thinking he hates Beatrice creating dramatic irony. This scene shows how the interplay of deception and self-deception generates comedy. All of these events are part of the development of the play.

The next few major events to structure the complications of the play are the gulling of Benedick and Beatrice. Don Pedro, Leonato, Claudio, and Balthasar benignly dupe Benedick into thinking Beatrice is madly in love with him thus bringing about Benedick's realisation of the love he has for Beatrice which he expresses by saying " I will be horribly in love with her" [Act2 scene3 line232]. This love blinds him, making him change nearly every aspect of his previously portrayed personality consequently causing a plot twist that only the characters didn't expect; Benedick is to marry Beatrice. Beatrice is then tricked in much the same way by Ursula and Hero and, having the same reaction as Benedick, she declares she " will requite thee [Benedick]" [Act3 scene1 line111] which has much the same effect on the plot as Benedick's confession. The use of deception to manipulate these characters is necessary because it is the only way they could be convinced to allow love into their lives.

Another complication is the unfurling of Don John's second treacherous plan of telling Claudio that Hero is worse than disloyal and that " the word [disloyal] is too good to paint out her wickedness" [Act3 scene2 line103]. This pernicious trick provokes Claudio into wanting to " shame" and " disgrace" Hero on their wedding day. This chain of events, brought about by the deception of one character to another, lead to the fabricating of Hero's death which, in turn, allows Hero to trick Claudio into marrying her. Don John's deceiving Claudio sets up these next two key scenes.

Both of the marriages, the key feature that separates a comedy from a tragedy, are caused by characters lying to, cheating and deceiving each other. The audience finds this funny because all of Much Ado's characters

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are so willing to be deceived – Claudio doesn't stop to suspect Don John's actions, both Benedick and Beatrice are willing to completely change their world view after the gulling scenes, and Claudio is willing to marry a complete stranger to appease Leonato. A lot of fuss is caused about very little just as the title of the play suggests and the whole play is faintly ridiculous which is comedic in itself.