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EVALUATING *MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING* BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE AS A
GAME OF LIES AND DECEIT

Anwasha Ghosh,

Final year Bachelor of Arts (English)
Ramanarian Ruia College, Mumbai, India

Abstract:

Much Ado About Nothing by William Shakespeare is a romantic comedy thought to have written in 1598 and 1599. The play was included in the First Folio published in 1623. The play revolves around the formation of the love stories between two couples with one of them having a near-tragic end. Filled with deception, lies and love; Shakespeare has created numerous scenes where misunderstanding, lies and deceit help develop relationships as well as destroy it and the same applies to the characters as well. To lie is to simply the act of deliberately presenting something which is untrue and deceit is aimed at the concealment, misinterpretation or distortion of truth, it is consequences of lie with the specific intention of making someone believe a lie in order to misinterpret or hide the truth. There are plentiful of lies and deceit present and the tricks played on the characters, by the characters have both positive and negative impact. Deceit and lies though sound and seem to have a negative connotation; here it also shows to have positive motives behind the same. The present paper aims to explore how deceit

and lies affect the events and plot of the play and the development of characters involved within it, various parts of the play would be evaluated to put light on how Shakespeare has used deception and lies to move forward with his play and its plot.

Keywords: Evaluations, deceit, relationships, characters, play etc

Introduction:

Much Ado About Nothing is a romantic comedy, the play starts with Don Pedro, the prince of Aragon visiting Leonato, the Governor of Messina along with his followers Claudio and Benedick. Claudio falls in love with Leonato's daughter Hero and wants to marry her whereas Benedick and Beatrice, Leonato's niece, both of them are in a constant verbal war with insulting and taunting each other whenever possible. Don Pedro takes helps Claudio to propose to Hero as well as makes up a plan to get Beatrice and Benedick together along with others. On the other side Don John, Don Pedro's brother, the villain is making plans to spoil Claudio

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and Hero's wedding and is successful but is later caught giving a play a happy ending with both the couples coming together and having a happily ever after.

Throughout the play, Shakespeare does create scenes wherein misunderstandings, lies and deceit help develop and as well as destroy relationships and characters. The couples are influenced by others, through the usage of lies and deceit, to find love or to doubt their love. The characters are easily influenced by what they hear and see accompanied by the lies, and this also helps develop the plot and take further actions to take place in the play. Shakespeare has used the theme of lies and deceit intricately throughout the play to help the construction of events and characters as well. The paper further goes on to explore how the theme has put into action the events surrounding the characters and the characters themselves as well.

Lies and Deceit in the Play: Evaluation

Deceit and lies play a huge part in the play and is also a key theme in the play as it helps the plot to move forward. Lies and deception are used in the love stories of Claudio and Hero as well as Benedick and Beatrice. The play portrays in it both positive and negative kind of lies and deceit. Claudio and Hero's instances of deceptions brought a near end to their love story whereas in Beatrice and Benedick's case deceit helped them come closer and

fall in love with each other, contradictory to the earlier scenario of both constantly being at each other's neck.

Lies and deceit is present throughout the play, one can find instances of it from the very beginning of the play itself. We are introduced to the plan which Don Pedro makes in Act I, Scene I, that is to disguise as Claudio in the masquerade and ask Hero for marriage and here starts the development of the stages of lies and deceit.

*"I know we shall
have reveling tonight
I will assume
thy part in some disguise,
And tell fair
Hero I am Claudio.
And in her
bosom i will unclasp my heart
And take her
hearing prisoner with the force
And strong
encounter of my amorous tale."*

Don Pedro's plan seems to be a positive deception to sail Hero and Claudio's love story, but it also serves as fodder to the Villain Don John to create further problems. Don John's lies and deceit does bring in some major changes in the plot and events in the future of the play.

In Act II, Scene I, at the masquerade everyone is lying and deceiving others, the

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instances though trivial, do not really bring in major changes in the play, but the theme is evidently introduced and made glaringly visible. To start with, Don Pedro disguised as Claudio deceiving Hero and proposing to her, followed by Antonio trying to hide his real identity from Ursula by saying he is counterfeiting his actions but is not him. Beatrice and Benedick both are lying and deceiving the other by being someone else and ill mouthing and insulting the other indirectly which adds on a comic element in the play. In the earlier scenes, one sees Beatrice and Benedick use sarcasm and insult for each other but with the turn of events ignited by deceit and lies, they fall for each other. The spark of love, lit by the other characters, by making each believe that the other loved them leads to a whole sequence of lies being fed into the ears of their target. Though it seems a bit unreal as if one really holds negative hateful feelings towards the other, it's usually difficult to make a sudden shift to positive ones, especially love, and in this case it was smooth as butter for both Beatrice and Benedick to be fooled, this could be interpreted as both Benedick and Beatrice make use of sarcasm to conceal their true feelings for each other, which also serves to be an example of deceit in their relationship as well as themselves. It could be said that they were deceiving their own selves under the veil of being disdainful towards the other.

In Act 2, scene 1, Don John comes up with a minor plot of deception and lie to create problems, by lying to Claudio that Don Pedro has asked Hero for himself and then tries to convince him by swearing to have seen him proposing to Hero. Claudio believes him and is heartbroken and starts doubting his friendship with Don Pedro. Here, it is also interesting to note how deception gives out details about the characters as well, Claudio who was introduced as the bravest warrior in the introductory scene might be brave at the battlefield but is extremely gullible and hence it was easy for Don John to fill in a little amount of poison that made him distrust his dearest friend Don Pedro. He passively accepted what Don John said, considering it the truth and goes on to brood and regret about losing his love. This gullibility of Claudio further leads to the larger doom of Hero being insulted and wrong on the wedding day.

However, in the play, one can see a clear distinction between the types of deception used and the same has been distinctly portrayed. Benign deception is used to enrich the lives of others whereas malicious deception is used to shatter other's lives. Don Pedro and Don John both the brothers are as manipulative as each other but the intent with which both lie and use deceit is completely opposite, one intends good while the other evil. Gulling scenes which take place in Act II, Scene III,

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where Claudio, Don Pedro and Leonato deceive Benedick and in Act III, Scene I wherein Beatrice is deceived by Hero and Ursula to make them fall in love is deceit and lies motivated by positive intent. Beatrice and Benedick both think they are eavesdropping on a confidential conversation of the characters, but the others are aware of their presence, the conversation was meant for them to listen, if directly addressed to them it would have not yielded the results as expected. Beatrice and Benedick thinking the other characters are unaware of their presence make it more believable for them to accept its the “truth” and here’s how deceit comes into play and eventually makes them give a thought on to trying to love the other and accept the other’s feelings without being disdainful and mean.

Benedick’s gulling scene is also more of a comic scene rather than a serious one like the deception of Beatrice, Benedick’s friends make fun of him and think he was going to be a bachelor for the rest of his life and Benedick cannot believe his friends think of him. The deception scene of Beatrice also serves her to self-reflect into her attitude and behaviour and her trying to change herself to be better and try loving Benedick. Don Pedro suggested a coordinated deception of his friends but in this case, the deception was directed to make their friends’ lives better, Beatrice and Benedick are truly happy when they

admit their love for one another and would have probably never done so without the interference of Don Pedro’s plan of lies and deception.

On the surface things might look smooth and happy with the lies and deception serving a good and noble purpose, but, on the other side Don John and his sidekick Borachio plan to ruin Claudio and Hero’s marriage. Don John forms the flip side of Don Pedro’s coin and has the opposite intentions for their lies, while Don Pedro introduces the positive results of lies and deception, with Don John we are acquainted with the negative intentions and the severe outcomes of those lies and deception.

Don John’s plan brings in a major twist in the play that brings along a near tragedy. Don John pretends to be the caring brother and shows concern towards Claudio by apparently trying to save Don Pedro and Claudio’s reputation and honour by making them aware of Hero being an immoral and disloyal girl, which was a lie set up by Don John to bring in trouble in the marriage. In Act III, Scene II, he enters the scene having a morose and worried expression and starts the conversation with “My lord, and brother, God save you.” which makes them think of a very serious situation and some doom to be befalling on them. Don John, to make his lies the truth and to make them believe him also brings up a hint on his past wrongdoings, he says:

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“I know we shall have reveling tonight
I will assume thy part in some
disguise,
And tell fair Hero I am Claudio.
And in her bosom i will unclasp my
heart
And take her hearing prisoner with
the force
And strong encounter of my
amorous tale.”

Don John says you may think I do not care for you but I will show you how much I do and care for what I will say and I will prove that I care. Here, he is trying to get sympathy by showing them he knows they think bad of him but he loves them, and through this, he is trying to trick and deceive both Don Pedro and Claudio into believing him or at least to give him a chance to trust him which results in sowing seeds of doubt against Hero in the mind of Don Pedro and Claudio which makes Don John’s plan a success.

Don John’s plan malicious plan aimed to ruin Hero’s reputation is revealed to the audience through a drunken conversation between Conrad and Borachio. Borachio tells about how he was romancing Margaret, Hero’s attendant, dressed as Hero when Don John had got Don Pedro and Claudio to prove his point. Don John had successfully deceived Claudio and Don Pedro and the result was seen in Act IV, Scene I, where Claudio insulted Hero on her wedding altar by

accusing her of being immoral and disloyal, thus leaving her. A tragedy for Hero, as the society during those days would blame Hero in spite of her claiming to be innocent and loyal. Don John’s plot brings in a negative impact on Hero’s life and one could hold Claudio responsible enough as well because his gullibility takes on to him believing whatever people feed him. Claudio doesn’t use his rationality, as in spite of knowing how Don John is he decides to trust him rather than Hero whom he claims to love.

Don John first lied about Hero being disloyal and then his plot of making Borachio and Maragaret stand near Hero’s window served as a deception to Don Pedro and Claudio and made them accept the falsity as the reality. Here, Shakespeare has shown the negative effect of deception and how it managed to turn everything upside down for the couple and also displays the power malice acquires when it appears to be respectable. Margaret was also under deception as she might have thought to have a good time with her lover but was unaware of the consequences and the doom it would bring upon her lady, but yet the question of what was she doing in Hero’s attire and why didn’t she speak up when Claudio was accusing and insulting Hero stays unresolved.

Next instance of positive deception is the Friar and his plan; he was the only

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one to trust Hero when her father left her side. He devised the plot to release the news of Hero being dead until her innocence was proved and was seemed necessary keeping in mind the social circumstances during those days and the position of women.

It is also interesting to note that the play's title also has significance, in Elizabethan times the word 'nothing' was pronounced as 'noting' which was slang for eavesdropping and deception. The title gives out a lot about the events taking place in the play and holds up its relevance as there are multiple incidents of mistaken identity as the characters incorrectly perceive their surroundings, while in some cases they are purposely arranging situations to create misunderstandings. Lies and deceit are a pivotal part of the play which keeps the plot to move forward and the audience hooked as well.

Conclusion:

Much Ado About Nothing is about right deception which leads to marriage as well as deceit which is wrong at intent that breeds conflicts and distrust. Proper use of lies and deceit led to the marriage of Beatrice and Benedick as well as Hero and Claudio while on the other hand use of deceit by Don John with the wrong intent also led to bringing in a near tragedy to Hero and Claudio's life. The play uses deliberate deceptions and schemes that are used to manipulate the thoughts of every character and even the characters deceive

themselves by putting on a public facade instead of showing their true feelings and personality. The play involves an elaborate arrangement of deceit and lies to achieve the prerequisites to move the plot forward steadily.

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