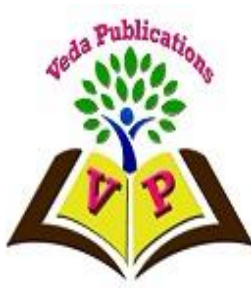




RESEARCH ARTICLE

**UP AND DOWN, UP AND DOWN: DUPING IN A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM**

Siddharth Shankar Upadhyay

*M.A. English, (NET Qualified), Jamia Millia Islamia*DOI: <http://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2022.9405>**ABSTRACT**

Elizabethan audience had a taste for wit and an interest in discovering the artistry behind the invention and the execution of the joke. Duping is a dramatic device which satisfied this relish for the display of wit in the Elizabethan comedies. This paper argues that Shakespeare uses duping as a narrative technique in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to give the play its dramatic, structural and thematic unity. The paper discusses how Shakespeare's comedies unlike traditional comedies of the time do not focus on the correction of human folly but rather offer a commentary on the human nature and turn toward the self. Shakespeare's humour is kind, and even when he uses a dupe storyline, he usually downplays the careless anger that he knows is at the root of the desire to mock. The dupe is not exploited like in other Elizabethan comedies. The dupe in Shakespeare offers a site for questioning and commenting on human behaviour. Shakespearean comedies become more than just crude mockery and laughter. They offer an insight about the human nature and help us come to terms with our own self.

Keywords: *Duping, Shakespeare, Elizabethan Comedy, Deception.*



INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare defied all conventions for comedies and wrote whatever suited his tastes and manner. He incorporated both joyous and sorrowful themes, as well as tragic and comedic components. This increased the credibility of his plays because no real existence is entirely humorous or sad but a combination of a variety of emotions. Shakespeare does not use comedy to provide a solution or a resolution to human folly. He rather exposes errors and indulgences, but humorously. Shakespearean comedies are brimming with inventiveness and ingenuity, and his only goal was to make his viewers chuckle and feel good. His main goal was to lighten the audience's spirit.

Traditional theory of comedy which lays emphasis on comedy's remissive view of human attributes and generates humor out of reformation of those attributes, cannot be applied to Shakespearean comedies. The traditional comic character has always been a butt of jokes and a scapegoat. Such character being mocked satisfies the need to put the society in order, a need which lies at the heart of all traditional comedies. Robert Torrance (1978) argues that the defiance of such characters in an unfavorable world shows their "heroic potential". He calls the comic character a hero whose role is "the emancipation of the uncomfortable self". (p.276) The defiance towards a status-quoist society, Torrance feels, should be celebrated as a victory rather than something to ridicule.

Shakespeare in his comedies gives us such characters. His comic characters have a potential to be comic heroes. Shakespearean characters have a potential to satisfy the need of Elizabethan Audiences for witty humour. The easiest way for

playwrights to incorporate wit in Elizabethan comedies was the use of a dupe-plot. According to Blake, "...the explicit standards in a dupe-plot are not moral but intellectual, and the audience is invited to consider the characters not in terms of good and bad, but in terms of clever and foolish" (p. 121). The attitude toward foolishness that distinguishes duping is fundamentally joyful; as a result, it is the opposite of that espoused by the satirical comedian, who attempts to expose folly before purging, curing, or destroying it. In expressly remedial satirical comedy, there is no space for duping. The disasters of fools provide the duper amusement and financial gain. It leads the audience to the fundamental question the idea of right and wrong because they side with the deceiver and not the deceived.

Like any other comic trick, duping is also a specific trick whose central goal is making fun of a victim chosen by the playwright for ridicule. The dupe-plot structure is not very different from that of other comic deceptions but the end goal varies significantly. It usually ends with a public ridicule of the dupe where the final realization of having been deceived usually happens. The dupers might choose to play their trick however they want to but they always succeed. In some cases, the victim is easily outsmarted. In the other cases, the tricksters take into consideration the duped character's flaws that they were aware of beforehand. The duper goes to great lengths to publicly humiliate the dupe but the Elizabethan audience does not side or sympathise with the dupe. They feel attracted to wit which they can only find in the duper not the outwitted dupe. Also, siding with the dupe makes them look foolish which they don't want. This generates laughter



because instead of feeling bad for the dupe they laughter at him with the duper.

Shakespeare's humour is kind, and even when he uses a dupe storyline, he usually downplays the careless anger that he knows is at the root of the desire to mock. On the rare times that he does not, the dupers' ruthlessness and the humiliation of the fool stand out and disturb the comedy's tone. Shakespeare's comedic universe is too closely related to reality for it to be possible to include plots for mockery without horrible repercussions. Shakespearean comedies thus become very different from that of his contemporaries. According to Ann Blake,

“Shakespeare's comedies, which are controlled by young women who are much more than clever, are usually not so ingeniously plotted: his interest is not so much in deception as in self-deception. Where his plays move towards self-discovery, Jonson's move to the unmasking of imposters and the exposing of fools.”
(p.119)

This paper discusses what dramatic, structural and thematic function do the dupe-plots play in Shakespeare's on of the most magical and tragic comedies, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

DUPING IN A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

“Up and down, up and down
I will lead them up and down
I am feared in field and town
Goblin, lead them up and down”
(*A Midsummer Night's Dream* III ii.)

The audience of Elizabethan comedies loved practical jokes, laughing at deformed characters, tricks and deceptions but above all, they had a taste for wit and an interest in discovering the artistry behind the invention and the execution of the joke. Duping is a dramatic device which satisfied this relish for the display of wit in the Elizabethan comedies. Duping or deception as a technique performs structural, thematic and comic function in a comedy but every playwright has a unique sense of employing this device in his works. For playwrights like Jonson duping as a device is used for harsh contempt of folly. Shakespeare's use of duping is not that harsh.

Shakespeare's comedies are not very shrewdly plotted. His comedies, which are usually centered on young men and women falling in love, move more towards the self rather than a contemptuous ridicule of the other. Duping in Shakespearean comedies is a delight or a fun sport and does not leave the dupe wretched or in a state of dismissal. The function of duping in Shakespearean comedies is multifold. This can be studied by analyzing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which is one of Shakespeare's early mature comedies. In *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* (1974), Leo Salingar differentiates between accidental and manufactured deception. We can find both of these kinds in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Duping occurs at various levels in the play. Titania being duped into loving Bottom is contrived deception and the lovers' dupe-plot is accidental. There's another level of duping where Bottom's head becomes that of an ass as a result of Puck's mischief. Kaplan writes, “Shakespeare has at the same time given us an “objective correlative” for “that strange



union of the more-than-animal and merely-human which is a finding within man in general" (Farnham qtd. In Kaplan p.228) The most important and obvious function of these dupe plots is the comic function. The duping episodes in this play have both high comedy and low comedy. The mistaken identities and the mismatch of the lovers Hermia, Lysander, Helena and Demetrius is a source of high comedy and Titania falling in love with an ass is source for low comedy. The dupe plots here generate both intellectual and belly laughter.

This comic function is attained through the dramatic function of duping. The dupe plot provides the complete framework and apparatus of dramatic action by the production of dramatic values like irony, satire and dramatic conflict. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the duping incidents provide the play with its situational and dramatic irony. The situational irony comes into play when Puck confuses Lysander for Demetrius and the mismatch happens. The spectators of the play who are the witnesses to this situational irony give the play its element of dramatic irony because of this knowledge which the characters of the play don't have.

Most of the stuff of the story is made by the dupe plots. Duping plays a role in the movement of the play. It is through duping that this play gains pace. It is through duping that the dramatic conflicts arise both between the lovers and in the fairy world. It is through these complications that the play finally moves towards a resolution. Apart from giving the play a momentum, these duping episodes also give it its dream like quality that also justifies the title. Everything that happens as the result of this trickery is dreamy and airy. Everyone believes that they "have

but slumbered here, while these visions did appear."(V i) Robert W. Dent remarks,

...being good Elizabethans, we may well remember that not all dreams are the product of disordered, passion-stimulated, never-sleeping imagination. Some dreams are divine revelations of truth, however difficult to expound, and we have already seen plays of Shakespeare where dreams contained at least a prophetic, specific truth, if not a universal one. (1964, p.122)

The duping incidents in the play have an essential structural function to perform. The duping in the play acts as a connecting link between the three plots of the play. The plot involving the four lovers, the plot involving the play within the play of Mechanicals, and plot involving the fairies gets merged due to these duping episodes and the play comes together as a united whole.

Other than this, duping episodes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* raise some important thematic concerns in the play. The theme of love gets a new dimension through the duping. The idea of love for physical beauty established in the beginning of the play is reinforced here through the love potion applied to eyes which leads to mismatch. This critiques love as being just physical attraction that makes the lovers oblivious to reason. To the contrary, through Bottom and Titania, it is established that love transcends all boundaries of beauty and class. Bottom, after getting duped, becomes a living metaphor. According to Ronald F. Miller, "Bottom.....does not represent a position so much as a problem, in particular the characteristic problem



of men-all men-immersed in an ambivalent reality.” (p. 260) He visually embodies the idea of the mortals being fools which Puck puts forward. Titania and Bottom’s episode also satirizes the idea of apotheosizing asininity which is a representation of man’s mindless folly.

Issues of class and gender are also put forward through duping where Puck and Bottom belong to a lower class and are generally at the receiving end of things. The gender issues are enforced through Titania whose subservience to Oberon restores the natural order of seasons. Apart from this, the dupe plots construct the three worlds of appearance, reality and imagination within the play. The reality is what the duped think is a dream and the Royals think is an imagination of those who are duped. Important issues concerning drama and imagination also stem from the dupe plots of the play. The thematic concerns raised here also establish the didactic importance of duping as a technique.

The audience watching *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* might also have felt duped as the play does not offer a clarity about what it is, if all of it was a dream, an imagination or a reality that only the spectators know and the characters in the play do not. Some critics believe that the audience is duped into believing that it is a comedy, but in the hindsight it feels more like a tragedy. Right from Hippolyta marrying someone who vanquished her, to Helena’s pitiable state and only getting love through enchantment, to Lysander’s leaving Hermia and Titania being won over by Oberon, this appears like the “most lamentable comedy” and “very tragical mirth”(V i). But nonetheless, dupe plots intrigued the

Elizabethan audience, something which was much desired. For them it was like an exercise of intellect and wit. Duping works like a revitalizer for comic and ironic nature of the play.

CONCLUSION

Even when writing a comedy, Shakespeare keeps it close to reality. He satisfies the need for wit but at the same time does not make it totally about crude mockery and correcting human folly. He rather raises some important questions about the self and the society in his comedies. Audience laughing at the dupes and with the duper subverts the paradigm and makes us question the ideas of right and wrong. But the dupe is not exploited like in other Elizabethan comedies. The dupe in Shakespeare offers a site for questioning and commenting on human behaviour. Thus, Shakespearean comedies become more than just crude mockery and laughter. They offer an insight about the human nature and help us come to terms with our own self. Shakespearean comedies make Shakespeare’s uneasiness with traditional styles of generating humour apparent. Even with his dupe-plots, he moves over the cruel aspects of the device. His dupe-plots thus not only give the play its structural, thematic and dramatic unity but also give its audience food for thought and an insight into human nature.

REFERENCES

Primary Source

Shakespeare, William. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. University Press, 1936.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Blake, Ann. “Sportful Malice’: Duping in the Comedies of Jonson and Shakespeare.” *Jonson and Shakespeare*, by Ian Donaldson, Humanities Press, 1983, pp. 119–134.



Dent, R. W. "Imagination in A Midsummer Night's Dream."
Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 15, no. 2, 1964, pp. 115–29.
JSTOR,

<https://doi.org/10.2307/2867882>. Accessed 16 Dec. 2022.

Kaplan, Joel H. "The Medieval Origins of Elizabethan Comedy."
Renaissance Drama, vol. 5, 1972, pp. 225–36. *JSTOR*,
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41917099>. Accessed 16
Dec. 2022.

Miller, Ronald F. "A Midsummer Night's Dream: The Fairies,
Bottom, and the Mystery of Things." *Shakespeare
Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1975, pp. 254–68. *JSTOR*,
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2869606>. Accessed 16 Dec.
2022.

Salingar, Leo. *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy*. 1974.

Torrance, Robert M. *The Comic Hero*. S.n., 1978.
