



THOUGHTS ON TWO PLAYS BY SHAKESPEARE

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William Shakespeare's two plays, *Hamlet* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, both express similar ideas, but the results are the exact opposite.

In *Hamlet*, we see deception, malice, intrigue and lies leads to death and great tragedy, while the same sort of things lead to marriage, happiness and comedy in *Much Ado About Nothing*.

The reason for this difference lies in the fact that both plays use these strategies in a completely opposite way. In *Hamlet*, deception, intrigue, malice and lies are used to further revenge; while in *Much Ado About Nothing* these same elements are used to ensnare lovers, and the entire façade is nothing more than a game.

Therefore, it is the result of these strategies that determine how each play will turn out, whether it will be a tragedy, or a comedy.

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, there is of course endless deception. Both Claudio and Don Pedro are deceived, and this leads to Hero's discredit, but this dishonor is overcome by the lie of her death.

And by way of this death, she is reborn, or resurrected into a state of redemption, where she becomes part of her lover, Claudio.

This intrigue is mirrored in a more comic way by Beatrice and Benedick, both of whom are fooled into thinking that the one loves the other, and because of this pretense they actually do fall in love. In both of these instances, we find that deception is merely a means to an end – to gain love and happiness.

However, it is important to realize that even in this comedy, there is good deception as well as bad. For instance, when Claudio declares his intention of wooing Hero, Don Pedro decides that he will help Claudio, and he woos Hero on behalf of Claudio.

This only leads to a mix-up of intentions, because Claudio (encouraged by Don John) now comes to believe that Don Pedro has betrayed him. Suddenly, the illusions have become reality, and reality has become an illusion, and the characters have a hard time keeping the two apart.

As well, during the ball, Beatrice and Benedick flirt with each other, while pretending they do not know who is behind the mask.

The deception becomes evil, or sinister, after Claudio rejects Hero, and her family announces that she is dead; this is done to punish Claudio.

Full of remorse, Claudio tries to make amends, and comes to Leonato in order to marry his niece, who is actually Hero. But suddenly, a group of masked people enter and force Claudio to marry while blindfolded. This points to the saying that love is blind.

But strangely, this method of marrying suggests that it is no longer a matter of love, but an attempt at redemption on behalf of Claudio, who says: "Which is the lady I must seize upon?"(V.iv.53).

Therefore, deception is an illusion that brings characters to the brink of disaster, to tragedy, but then veers away and returns to reconstruct reality back into what it was, and in this reality, the lovers find happiness and true love.

This allows for Claudio and Hero to be who they really – lovers. In fact, tragedy is avoided precisely because deception has not been allowed to play itself out entirely.

There comes a time for unmasking, when truth is revealed. And when truth is revealed it brings great happiness and joy, as Benedick says: "Come, come we are friends: let's have a dance ere we are married that we may lighten our own hearts..."(V.iv.120ff).

The mood is entirely different in Hamlet. Again we have deception and lies, but the outcome is tragedy and not happiness.

The reason for this lies in the fact that where in Much Ado About Nothing the attempt was to find a wife, in Hamlet the attempt is to get revenge.

In Hamlet too there is much masking, where people hide their true intents, chief among them being Hamlet himself, who hides his true feelings in order to spur himself into action.

In fact, the only truthful person in the entire play is Ophelia, who never swerves in her love for Hamlet; it is only he who thrusts her away. He does this in order to make sure that nothing will hinder him as he seeks his goal – revenge for his dead father.

In fact, he tells Ophelia: "You should not have believed me; for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish it: I loved you not"(III.i.119-120).

This revelation is also a lie that Hamlet tells in order to get rid of Ophelia. As in Much Ado About Nothing, deception does have its own results. In the comedy, there was a brief dark period, when Claudio feels remorse for causing the supposed death of Hero.

But in Hamlet, the death is very real – for it is Hamlet's deception (his rejection of Ophelia) that ultimately kills her. The truth is that he does love her, but he must hide his love from everybody, in order to carry out the revenge that his father's ghost has asked him to do.

Hamlet knows that he must deceive in order to get revenge. If he tells the truth, he will fail, because truth will force him to reveal what he wants to do.

This is why he assumes the role of the madman. But this madness is also a lie. It is important to note

that the only truthful person in the entire play, Ophelia, is the one who is driven mad because of lies and deception.

As the Prologue King states: "This world is not for aye, nor 'tis not strange that even our loves should with our fortunes change"(III.ii.210-211).

Therefore, Hamlet is deceiving not to win the heart of Ophelia; in fact he is not interested in love: "Love! His affections do not that way tend," observes Claudius (III.i.169).

Rather, he is deceiving in order to find the murderer of his father, and then give justice to the ghost of his dead father by executing the murderer.

Therefore, there is an entire detective story and a legal drama unfolding as well; and Hamlet must carry on both roles – the investigator and the avenger.

When he finally gets the chance to kill Claudius, he discovers that the force of revenge consumes not only the killer but also the avenger himself, and so when the play ends, the stage is literally littered with dead bodies: "Take up the bodies: such a sight as this becomes the field, but here shows much amiss," states Horatio at the end (V.ii.412ff).

Thus, both *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Hamlet* involve deception, lies and malice, and yet one play ends in love, happiness and marriage, while the other ends in death and bloodshed.

This is the result of the intended outcome of this deception. In the comedy, the outcome is to ensnare a lover; in the tragedy the outcome is to get revenge.

The photo shows, "Children acting the 'Play Scene' from Hamlet, Act II, scene ii," by Charles Hunt, painted in 1863.

