

Twelfth night – would  
you agree with viola  
that the use of  
disguise and  
deception...

[Life](#), [Emotions](#)



Deception is a key theme within Shakespearean drama, whether it be tragedy, history or comedy. It is often the cause of a lot of turmoil, especially within Twelfth Night, as there are many romantic difficulties due to the art of disguise. However Shakespeare does not always use deception to cause romantic problems, he shows the act of deceit in many different lights, as is done in Hamlet, for example. Claudius lies to everyone about the murder of Hamlet's father and as a result is guilt ridden, saying " O heavy burthen", so it seems that Shakespeare often intends to portray deception as wicked, but does the audience agree with this concept?

For surely some good must come from the great extent of trickery. Twelfth Night is an ideal play to discuss this, as although the chicanery causes a lot of distress, this is evened out by the happy ending we would not receive when discussing a tragedy such as Hamlet. It seems this play is reasonably unbiased. When we first hear of Viola's disguise there is immediate foreshadowing as she says " what else may hap" (I, ii, 60), surely hinting that a lot shall occur due to the extent of her deception, and we have to wait just two scenes to hear of this.

We initially learn how Viola's disguise will cause grief as she tells us in an aside " myself would be his wife" (I, iiiii, 39-41), the audience immediately knows that this is an intricate dilemma, as not only is Orsino her employer, but he also believes her to be a man. This is surely wicked, as Viola's love cannot yet be returned, on the other hand if Viola had not disguised herself then she may not have met, and fell in love with, Orsino. The happy ending

does not occur until the end of the play, so there is a lot of hardship for Viola to endure before her wishes are eventually fulfilled.

In Act two Viola tries desperately to give Orsino an idea of her love for him, telling him that the person she loves is " of your complexion" (II, iiiii, 24), during this conversation Viola's dialogue is in blank verse, showing that she is unable to express her true love for him, this is another example of the cruelty of deception as it is extremely difficult for someone to conceal their love for someone who is constantly in their presence, the audience would relate to this as similar, less dramatic occurrences can often happen in real life.

In the final Act of the play Viola's disguise unravels, and to her ecstasy her femininity is received graciously. Orsino tells her " you shall from this time be your master's mistress", this is an extremely successful ending for Viola, so it seems her disguise (previously the bane of her life) has finally brought her good fortune. Therefore, in these circumstances, deception has been wicked, only to eventually be rather gratifying. Viola's love for Orsino is not the only problem emanated from her fai?? ade, as it also causes a woman to fall in love with her.

Olivia is immediately struck by Cesario's effeminate way of thinking and she says that Cesario " do give thee five-fold blazon". This is a dilemma as Cesario (being female) cannot return this love, and viola's realisation of this love causes her to acknowledge the sheer brutality of the effects of her pretence. She expresses her distress with a soliloquy, saying " she were

better love a dream". So Viola now believes deception to be a cruel thing, and at this point the audience would tend to agree.

We have not yet seen any happiness come from beguilement, so we result in agreeing with Viola, however melodramatic her opinion may be. As a result of all this Olivia is put through much heartbreak, and she acknowledges this saying "so I did abuse myself" (III, I, 95 - 107), she evidently knows that her love for Cesario is an enigma, although she does not yet know that she is being deceived. So even when characters are unaware that they are being fooled the effects of this trickery can still have treacherous outcomes.

Olivia is deceived further still when she, in thinking he is Cesario, marries Sebastian in haste, so that her "most jealous and too doubtful soul may live at peace". This may currently be seen by the audience as wicked, due to the fact that Olivia does not know the man she is marrying. However this accidental marriage turns out to be a happy one, as when Cesario is uncovered as Viola Olivia is grateful for the misunderstanding and, as far as we know, goes on to love her new husband Sebastian.

This is a clear example of when deception is quite the opposite of wicked, as Olivia originally fell in love with Viola, who Sebastian (being her twin) is supposedly the male version of, and as Olivia does not think of herself as gay, this unlikely coincidence - brought upon by deception - is an extremely successful one. Maria instigates the manipulation of Malvolio through means of deception, and the consequences of this prove very wicked on his behalf. First, he humiliates himself in front of his colleagues. They watch on, making

comments such as " fie on him, jezebel! while he fantasises, with no clue that they are watching. This is surely wicked as Malvolio works himself into an emotional frenzy, causing himself to believe that he loves Olivia, and worst of all that she returns this love. The foolery doesn't stop here, as they take the chicanery as far as they possibly can before they are eventually caught out. Feste even chooses to ridicule Malvolio while he is imprisoned; deceiving him further still he says he is Sir Topaz. He attempts to convince Malvolio he is insane, saying " thou art more puzzled than the Egyptians in their fog".

This is severely malicious and causes Malvolio much distress. He acknowledges this, saying " there was never a man so notoriously abused", this clearly shows how deception is a hurtful, ruthless thing, especially when used upon cruel intentions. Incidentally, Malvolio is the only character who does not receive a happy ending. He leaves with a passionate line, saying " I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you! ", yet to our knowledge his vengeance is not resolved, as this is the last we see of him throughout the rest of the play.

Viola's disguise even causes herself to be deceived, as there is much confusion concerning herself and Sebastian. This almost causes Viola to be forced into duelling with a man, a fight she would surely lose. Viola knows this and says " pray God defend me! ", it is surely wicked that her disguise may cause such an unfair fight. On the other hand, it is her disguise which also causes her to be saved from the battle ever occurring. As Antonio thinks

she is Sebastian and consequently attempts to fight for her, saying " I take the fault on me".

So yet again deception is the cause, yet also the remedy for a problem, therefore making it difficult to form an opinion on whether or not deception is wicked. More trouble is to come however, as the confusion between Viola and Sebastian continues to cause difficulties. There is a slight quarrel between Antonio and Viola as he thinks she has his money, he says " do not tempt my misery". We are lead to think more arguments will occur due to disguise, but the problem is quickly solved as Antonio calls Viola Sebastian, and the confusion begins to unravel.

This is another example of how deception can be the problem which, when resolved, ends up causing a lot of good. It is much like a white lie - sometimes wickedness must be performed in order to do good overall. The whole plot of Twelfth Night depends on the continuous theme of disguise and deception, without it the play would have no foundations on which to grow. How is it that such a crucial factor of the play can be seen as wicked? It is only in Act Two that Viola comments on this, saying " disguise, I see thou art a wickedness", therefore surely her opinions may alter since then.

At the end of the play she does not seem to have such a bitter perspective on the subject, as it turns out that everything has worked to her advantage. Surely, to decide on whether or not something is wicked, you must decipher the outcomes of it, and whether or not it has been beneficial to the people involved. At the end of the play everyone (except for Malvolio) is happy,

Viola and Orsino are in love, as are Olivia and Sebastian. These are the main characters within the play, so these are the ones we should be concentrating on, and the excessive use of deception has obviously worked to their advantage.

Admitted, disguise and deception cause a lot of trouble throughout the play, and at times can be seen as very wicked. But the overall effects of this are not wicked, in fact they are quite the opposite! If Shakespeare intended for deception to be seen as a cruel thing, then it is doubtful that he would have made this a romantic comedy. For if he aimed for the audience to have such a pessimistic view on the play, he surely would have made it a tragedy, therefore making the effects of deception obviously bad.

I do not think that Shakespeare intends for his audience to see deception as a wicked thing, therefore I do not think they do. Overall I would tend to agree with Viola that disguise is a wickedness, however I believe that Twelfth Night is an exception to this opinion, as although it did cause the characters a lot of grief, this concluded to be a very happy ending, typical of the plays genre. Also I can pick fault with Viola's opinion as she says that the disguise itself is a wickedness.

I believe that it is not the disguise that is wicked but of course the nature in which it is used, in the circumstances of this play disguise is used to protect Viola and it is not intended to cause any harm. In my opinion this means that it is not wicked, however had she used deception with cruel intentions - much like Maria - then I would have to agree that it would be a wickedness.

Some wickedness may have occurred due to beguilement, but I think the audience would agree that overall, when referring to Twelfth Night, the act of disguise is not wicked.