

Compare the first  
three scenes of  
hamlet and twelfth  
night



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“ Hamlet” and “ Twelfth Night” are two Shakespeare plays of complete opposites. Due to one being written as a tragedy, and the other as a comedy, many comparisons can be drawn between the two plays, on themes and motifs that develop throughout the plays. One of the themes that is easily recognisable in the early stages of both plays, is that of deceit and disguise. In “ Hamlet”, we learn early on that Hamlet decides to act as a madman in order to try and weed out a confession from his uncle about the murder of his father.

Although he does not actually reveal to any other characters his plan until Act 1 Scene 5, when he tells Horatio that he plans to “ put an antic disposition on”, the audience can recognise very early that Hamlet is going to show some kind of deceptive characteristics in order to execute his plan. In “ Twelfth Night”, disguise is a key theme in order for the play to take shape. Within the first three scenes, we have several examples of characters deliberately deceiving others in order to achieve a selfish goal. An example of this is seen through Viola’s decision to disguise herself as a eunuch in order to find favour with the duke.

The decision by Shakespeare to now portray Viola as a man, creates confusion amongst the audience in terms of the love triangle between Viola/Cesario, Olivia and Orsino. This confusion is a key element of a Shakespeare comedy, and reflects the Dionysian interpretation of life. “ Hamlet” and “ Twelfth Night” are two Shakespeare plays of complete opposites. Due to one being written as a tragedy, and the other as a comedy, many comparisons can be drawn between the two plays, on themes and motifs that develop throughout the plays.

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