

Compare the characters of hero and beatrice essay sample



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In what ways do their characters and behaviour reflect sixteenth century attitudes towards women and their role in society?

The two characters of Hero and Beatrice are in complete contrast. Both characters however represent stereotypes that men had of women in the sixteenth century. Hero is young, quiet and in every way the typical and greatly desired Elizabethan woman that men wanted for a wife. In contrast to this Beatrice could have been viewed by men as a shrew because she attempts to stand up for women's rights and rebels against the life style that women were expected to lead.

Shakespeare established the difference in Hero's and Beatrice's personalities and character in the first scene. Beatrice interrupts the conversation between her uncle and the messenger

Beatrice: I pray you, is Signior Mountanto returned from the war or no?

From this we see that Beatrice is impatient and has no time for formality. Beatrice's wit, recognised as intelligence in Elizabethan England, and a greatly admired quality in the sixteenth century, is quiet intimidating for the men. The messenger realises that her wit and strong personality is something he does not want to have to come up against therefore says

Messenger: I will hold friends with you lady

In this scene Beatrice is the centre of attention, while Hero patiently stands to one side, but isn't acknowledged. Hero's silence while the men speak, shows that her upbringing, and father's dominance over her has taught her to respect the men in her life. It could also be because her cousin Beatrice's

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strong personality has overshadowed Hero's. However Hero's personality is different when she is around women, she becomes more assertive and is stubborn

Hero: My cousin's a fool, and thou art another. I'll wear none but this

Hero also shows that she is intelligent because she and Margaret are teasing Beatrice and Hero makes a joke about Benedick.

Margaret: Get you some of this distilled Carduus Benedictus and lay it to your heart. It is the only thing for a qualm.

Hero: There thou prick'st her with a thistle

Hero's wit however is still none compared to Beatrice who has a way with words and is very good with puns and quick fire retaliations to Benedick.

The descriptions of the two characters from their suitors differ as well. When Claudio is speaking about Hero, he uses elaborate metaphors and speaks in blank verse

Claudio: You seemed to me as Dian in her orb

As chaste as in the bud ere it be blown

Here he is describing Hero as a rose that has not opened yet, and he also refers to the Goddess of virginity Diana. The unopened bud and reference to the goddess are significant because they are referring to her innocence and lack of sexual awareness. Claudio refers to Hero in blank verse because he is putting her on a pedestal. This is a common thing for men to do in

Elizabethan times because it is yet another stereotype that they had, a woman as a goddess. I think that Shakespeare uses this stereotype for Claudio and Hero because Claudio is thinking of Hero so highly that the audience will begin to expect a fall, because the higher you are the further and harder you fall. Not only does Claudio put her on a pedestal but he also gives the impression of Hero's youth.

Claudio: She is the sweetest young lady that even I looked on

In the speech he uses the words 'sweetest' and 'young' to show Hero's innocence, purity and youth. Claudio's address of Hero differs from Benedick's address of Beatrice because Benedick speaks in straight prose when he is talking about Beatrice.

Benedick: Were she not possessed with a fury, exceeds hero as much in beauty as the first of May doth the last of December

Here Benedick's saying that Beatrice is very attractive, and a lot better looking than Hero, but she has a strong personality that precedes her. We also know that she is attractive because the Prince Don Pedro tried to propose marriage to her.

Benedick: Here comes Beatrice. By this day she's a fair lady. I do spy some marks of love in he.

Again Benedick is saying how attractive Beatrice is. Benedick also uses the word 'Lady' which makes you think Beatrice is older than Hero because Hero was referred to as a 'young lady'.

The two couple courtships also show how because of their character difference, the two men approach their relationships differently.

Hero represents the model Elizabethan woman, because of this; the traditional method of courtship is employed. Don Pedro woo's Hero by proxy for Claudio, there is then the settlement of the dowry and a formal betrothal before the wedding. This courtship ritual was traditional among the aristocratic Elizabethan society.

When it comes to Beatrice and Benedick' who finally accept that they have feelings for each other after the princes has plotted to gat them together.

Benedick: They say the lady is fair- tis a truth...for I will be horribly in love with her

And

Beatrice: And, Benedick, love on, I will requite thee taming my wild heart to thy loving hand.

When they address each other for the first time after accepting their love. Benedick chows concern for Beatrice, this side of him she sees attracts her even more, during the love scene there are no flowery elaborate speeches, it all comes straight from the heart. Benedick and Beatrice's romance together is very fitting for their characters because they are both intelligent, which is what attracted them to each other, and there relationship will be on an equal level because of this. Hero's relationship however will be dominated and controlled by Claudio.

Hero's character reflects sixteenth century attitudes because before she is wooed by Don Pedro for Claudio her father tells her

Leonato: Daughter remember what I told you. If the Prince does solicit you in that kind you know your answer

Hero of course knows her answer because the settlement of the dowry and marrying into respectable families was more important than her feelings. As the daughter or wives belonged to their father or husband, Hero knows that she has to obey him. We see Beatrice's feelings about this when Antonio addresses Hero

Antonio: Well niece I trust you will be ruled by you father

Beatrice's immediate reaction to this is to speak, so she does, even though Hero was being spoken to. This again shows the dominance of Beatrice's Character over Hero's submissive one.

Beatrice: Yes Faith, it is my cousins duty to make curtesy and say, father as you please.

Even though Beatrice is mocking the position that Hero is in, the word ' curtesy' is very important for a curtesy was a sign of respect and it shows Hero has the greatest respect for the father, and believed that his decisions are correct because he know what is best, not only because of he age but also because he is male. I think Hero's submission to do as her father says is not only because of her desire and ' duty' to marry but it is also out of love for the father and his social standing. The two words ' ruled' and ' curtesy'

gives us insight into the male status in the Elizabethan time, because the <https://assignbuster.com/compare-the-characters-of-hero-and-beatrice-essay-sample/>

two words hold close associations with royalty as though the men think of themselves as much more superior to women.

Beatrice is an orphan so she has no father to rule her and show her guidance or to love, this would be very lonely for Beatrice not growing up with any close family around her. She may have had to integrate into her uncle's family, of which she is an outsider to their ways of living. I think this is where her strong personality came from, because of the hardships she had to endure and from the position she was within Leonato's family, which allows her freedom of mind. Leonato her uncle, allows her this freedom because he knows that it is not his parenting that is at fault, and because Beatrice's wit amuses him. You might say that Beatrice's wit was one way of getting attention within her family, as she was originally the outsider. However he is still concerned for her well being and chances of getting a husband because of her intimidation outgoing character. For in the sixteenth century a woman's sole existence was to get married and to have children, if a woman did not do this then she was seen as a failure in society

Leonato: Thou wilt never get thee a husband, if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue

Before Hero is formally handed over, Claudio is led to believe that Don Pedro is wooing Hero for himself and not for Claudio. Claudio's jealousy seems extreme and he quickly accepts Don Pedro's betrayal, this event is a foreshadowing of the future, however he immediately reverts back to putting Hero on a pedestal, showing how fickle he is.

When the betrothal comes Leonato is handing Hero to Claudio he says
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Leonato: Count take me my daughter, and with her my fortunes.

This shows that Leonato's daughter and fortunes go hand in hand because Hero's inheritance becomes the property of the man she marries. It is a very formal speech as though he was making a business proposition rather than giving his daughter to be married. Because Beatrice has no father, she is able to also have freedom of choosing her partner and within the actual relationship with Benedick, this is to her advantage because, I think it shows that Benedick loves Beatrice for who she is not the money. And she has no time for formality, which is why she interrupts conversations despite what she is expected to be like.

At the wedding ceremony we again see the attitude men have towards women, and how the men's honour is more important to them than their female family members. Claudio's shaming of Hero, was foreshadowed earlier when his jealousy was shown and by his placing Hero on a pedestal. Claudio calls off the wedding because he thinks that Hero has sinned and has slept with another man. This is dramatic irony because the audience knows that it was a plot by Don Jon and that Hero is innocent. Hero's actions hurt Claudio's pride because he does not want to be associated with a whore. This all comes down to the importance of property because no man wants an illegitimate child inheriting all their property and money because that child was born first, this is why it is so important for women to be virgins when they marry.

Claudio. This rotten orange...She's but the sign and semblance of her honor

In Claudio's speech he is denouncing Hero, Shakespeare uses the image of an orange, how on the outside it looks ripe and tasty but on the inside it is rotten and sour. He is also saying that appearance and reality are different. By the orange he means Hero, he is saying that her looks of purity and sweetness are nothing just a front for what she really is, is the opposite.

The 'honor' that Claudio talks about in his speech, was spelt differently in the sixteenth century, it also has a slightly different meaning. The meanings of the words in the sixteenth century are different for men and women. When talking about a woman's 'honor' they mean her virginity. The men's meaning of 'honor' is bravery and social standing.

When Leonato realises Hero's activities he is very shocked.

Leonato. Death is the fairest cover for her shame

Here he would rather his daughter died so she wouldn't have to live with her shame and she wouldn't have to live with her as a constant reminder to the shame he has put her through. In Leonato's speech he is talking as though Hero was a commodity, he refers to her as 'mine' because the daughters belonged to their fathers.

Leonato. But mine, and mine I loved, and mine I praised

Here he is referring to Hero in the past tense, I think this is because he feels that he does not know her any more and he is in the process of disowning her from his family and life because his honour has been ruined. The

audience understands Leonato's reaction and are able to sympathise with

the situation of Hero's supposed sexual activities because they know the
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importance of honour and the women's purity. However Leonato does not even refer to Hero's feelings, because his honour is more important to him than his daughter. Hero however eventually speaks up for herself; this is after she has fainted from the shock of Claudio's accusations. Hero's fainting shows that she is vulnerable to the way men treated her, in contrast to this Beatrice properly would have made her defence very clear by now. Her silence before this shows that she truly is suppressed by the dominance of male characters, or it could show that she did not want to alienate herself anymore by speaking out of turn. Hero's speech is in the form of an oath. This is important at the time because she is protesting her innocence in the strongest way possible, she is protesting her innocence before God, as religion was very important to the Elizabethan people.

Hero. Let all my sins lack mercy! O my father.

Prove you that any man with me conversed

At hours unmet, or that I yester night

Maintained the change of words with any creature

Refuse me, hate me, torture me to death

As the Elizabethans believed so strongly in heaven and hell, this speech is very important because she is saying she will give up her place in heaven if she is lying about this. I think that because Hero defends herself in the form of an oath, that she is very religious, which no doubt was an influence of her father, and she believes strongly in good and bad, that she truly does uphold the standards that were expected of all Elizabethan women, she is honest,
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undoubtedly a maid as the audience know, and she is devoted to all the men in her life. The denouncing of Hero shows how vulnerable she is. Hero's pain from this also affects Beatrice, because no doubt Hero would be like a little sister to Beatrice, and the two characters are very close as they are ' bed fellows' as well as cousins.

Beatrice: I have twelvemonth been her bed fellow

It is also in Beatrice's character to believe in her cousin innocence, and her defence for her is immediate.

Beatrice: O, on my soul, my cousin is belined.

Beatrice is so convinced that hero is wrongly accused of her crime that she also convinces Benedick of it as well.

Benedick: Think you in your soul the Count Claudio hath wronged Hero?

Beatrice: Yea, as sure as I have a thought or a soul

Benedick: Enough I am engaged...

Benedick believes Beatrice about Hero because of his love for her and I think it's also because he also believes that it is not in Hero's character to do it either.

Beatrice is clearly frustrated by the double standards of men and the way they treat women and the restraints there governing has on her. This is shown by Beatrice's loyalty to Hero, she wishes that she could eat Claudio's heart in a public place for the grief that he has caused Hero.

Beatrice: O that I were a man! What, bear her in hand until they come to take hands; and then, with public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancour- O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the market place.

In this speech she wishes she were a man, this shows that her character rages against the masculine solidarity, which destroys and hurts the reputation of women. She wishes she were a man so she can harm Claudio like her has harmed her cousin, this is because she knows that as a woman she would come under scrutiny for doing this, which again frustrated her because women can not stand up for themselves. She then realises that she can still get her revenge so she asks Benedick to ' Kill Claudio'. This loyalty that Beatrice shows for Hero shows that family values are important to Beatrice, because she knows what it is like to be lonely and is protecting trying to protect her cousin from this.

Overall the language and action through the play, Shakespeare has displayed two different Elizabethan women, and their very different characters.

Hero is a young girl who submits to the men in her life and is silent and dutiful around them. This is because of her desire to marry and to do duty to her father by being the typical and desired Elizabethan women. In contrast to this Beatrice who, despite expectations of women in the sixteenth century and will to overcome the stereotype shows independence and defiance to the woman's place in society.

The effects that the characters had on the audience and their response to them are very different. For Hero they would have great sympathy, for what she was put through and the way she was treated. For Beatrice however they would have great admiration for her, because of her ability to play with words, her wit and strong personality. However the Elizabethan audience would rather Hero be a role model to women because she was the desired Elizabethan lady. However the contrasting characters both got their perfect man despite expectations, so as in all of Shakespeare's comedies there is a happy ending.