

What impressions
would an audience
have of the principal
characters' attitudes
to...

[Family](#), [Marriage](#)



Impressions are the 'marked images and effects made on the mind and senses'.

A villain would never say 'I am evil' or 'I am a villain' during a performance, but from his words and actions, the audience would easily be able to reach that conclusion.

It can be said that impressions are the shadows inspired by what is said and done, causing a reflection of a character's true personality.

Such is the case in Shakespeare's 'Much Ado About Nothing'. That mentioned play is successful when acted out, partly due to its persuasive text and the subtle words that speak for each character's beliefs.

In 'Much Ado About Nothing', each of the principal characters have different attitudes and principals regarding marriage. However, before we individually explore each character's views, let's explore the general Elizabethan theory about marriage, accepted by English (and Messinian) society at the time

Marriage, to them, was a sacred union to be entered only with the utmost care, preferably with the parent's blessing. The ideal wife would be virtuous, modest and obedient while the ideal husband would be older, 'wiser' and able to control his wife and her views. Hero, a principal character in the play, qualified for the candidacy of an Elizabethan housewife, unlike Beatrice, who in the eyes of her society, would be branded as 'an untamed little hussy'.

Shakespeare frequently included such female characters in his plays.

Katherine, for example from 'The Taming of the Shrew' was such similar to

Beatrice while her younger sister Bianca would be Hero's counterpart.

Meanwhile, let us examine all the characters' attitudes towards marriage. A comparison will take place later.

Benedick

Benedick is regarded as the principal male characters. He is well-known throughout the play for his negative attitudes towards marriage, simply because it involves women, preferring the easygoing companionship of his comrades

' Do you question me as an honest man should do, for my simple true judgment? Or would you have me speak after my custom, as being a professed tyrant to their sex?' (Act I, Scene I, Lines 148-151).

Here we can say that Benedick is against the general concept of marriage. This was his reply to Claudio's question as to whether he liked Hero. Benedick, not knowing Hero, wouldn't have anything against her. It is the idea of her that Benedick resents.

' That a woman conceived me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her the most humble thanks But that I will have a recheat winded in my forehead, or hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick, all women shall pardon me. Because I will not do myself the right to trust none. And the fine is, for which I may go the finer, I will live a bachelor'. (Act I, Scene I, 212-219).

Here we see Benedick acknowledge and the important role they play in rearing & bearing children. But, Benedick does not acknowledge women

further than this point on. In his society's eyes, a woman did not share in the pleasures of life, only in its responsibilities. It is evident here how Elizabethans, in accordance with their traditional values, regarded their women, despite being ruled by one. To them, a woman was only there to have and raise children.

Another important impression is when Benedick claims that he will never be deceived by love. Here is the passage:

' I will not be sworn but love may transform me to an oyster; but I'll take my oath on it, till he have made an oyster of me, he shall never make me such a fool. One woman is fair, yet I am well, another is wise yet I am well. But till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace. Rich she shall be, that's certain, or I'll never look on her; mild, or come not near me; noble or not I for an angel; of good discourse; an excellent musician; and her hair shall be of what colour it please God' (Act II, Scene III, 21-31).

This quote practically sums up Benedick's and Elizabethan men's attitudes towards marriage in general.

Another interesting extract is Benedick's explanation as to why he cannot stand Beatrice:

' She speaks poniards and every word stabs. If her breath were as terrible as her terminations, there would be no living near her; she would infect to the north star'. (Act I, Scene II, 220-223)

Benedick claims that a woman is always incomplete, and therefore inferior, because she shall never have all the desirable traits that he has (wisdom, beauty, and grace). He then goes on to claim that if a woman would have all these traits, he'd marry her, but since (to him at least) all women do not have all these qualities; such a union can never take place. Benedick then proceeds to say a few more desirable qualities; virtuous or he won't cheapen her (sleep with her, and therefore not remain his wife), mild (even-tempered) or he'll avoid her, and that also her hair be of what colour it pleases God, meaning that his wife would retain her original hair colour, as in those times a woman who dyed her hair tended to do so out of vanity, which is NOT a desirable quality.

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Here, Benedick complains of Beatrice's witty banter, comparing her words as daggers stabbing him

Therefore, we can say that Benedick is against marriage and women as a whole, even though he has nothing against them individually. This may be because he is not open to his true feelings, and resents the possibility that he may be outwitted-and rejected.

Claudio

Claudio's attitude towards marriage is probably a very simple one to explain, evident throughout numerous texts.

At first, Claudio is the ideal young man: honest, young, polite, clever and with a broad prosperous horizon in front of him. Like most young men, he is greatly influenced by beauty, evident when he shamelessly pouts '... and trust no agent, for beauty is a witch...' (Act II, Scene I, 61). This then brings us to the weakest, and most disastrous weakness in his character; Claudio is all too willing to rely on what he sees, not thinking that things are not always what they seem. He sees Don Pedro with Hero at the masque, and believes that the former is wooing Hero for himself. More importantly, he sees a woman resembling his bride-to-be from the back, and immediately assumes that Hero is a 'rotten orange', having had previous relationships with men on her the eve of her wedding.

We can assume from this reaction that Claudio did not really get to know his fiancée during the courtship at all, if there was a courtship even, for he did not even know the outline of Hero's character. From a viewer's point of view, Hero, modest, obeying, virtuous, would be the last person in the world to commit such an act. The blame here falls entirely on Claudio, for acting too rashly, and not judging without reason. Like the trick that was played on him by Don John, Claudio to us is also two-dimensional, with nothing more concealed behind the exterior.

At the wedding, Claudio then proceeds to say:

‘ Give not this rotten orange to your friend... she’s but the sign and semblance of honour... comes not that blood as modest evidence... to witness simple virtue... her blush is guiltiness, not modesty!’ (Act IV, Scene I, 29-40)

Here, we can conclude Claudio’s attitudes towards marriage, notably towards his ideal bride. From this extract, we can tell that all Claudio wants in a bride is her virginity, for this represents her honour, her virtuosity and her modesty, all the good qualities that an Elizabethan husband would seek.

Beatrice

Beatrice’s attitude towards marriage is the most pronounced, and obvious one. She is a contradiction of the image of the ideal Elizabethan woman, although this is resolved at the end, reinforcing the idea that society’s traditional values always win out.

When her uncle tells her he hopes to see her married, she saucily replies:

‘ Not till God make men out of some other metal then earth. Would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a piece of valiant dust? To make an account of her life to some clod of wayward marl? No uncle, I’ll none. Adam’s sons are my brethren, and truly I hold it a sin to match in my kindred’. (Act II, Scene I, 51-56)

Here, Beatrice tries to convince her uncle that she won’t marry ever, and does so unsuccessfully at that, as there are some deliberate contradictions here. If she is Adam’s brother, than doesn’t that imply that she also was

created from the same substance, mere dust? The use of valiant here highlights Beatrice's witty sense of humour; how can men, created from dust, be brave and courageous?

'I would rather hear a dog bark than a man swear he loves me' (Act II, Scene I, 53).

Here, we hear Beatrice claim that a man's profession of his ardor towards her is no better than hearing a dog bark, indeed, the latter is more enjoyable to her. Again, this highlights Beatrice's resentment towards marriage. It seems that she and Benedick are oddly paired; their only common factor is their loathing of marriage.

We can safely conclude that in *Much Ado About Nothing*, each of the major characters have different views and opinions, although all can lead back to the traditional Elizabethan theory. So, as a result, the audience would be able to distinguish each of the characters through their attitudes, creating a certain and unique impression for all.