

Gender issues: macbeth muchado

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Gender issues are prevalent in Shakespeare's plays *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Macbeth*. Some of the key characteristics relevant to gender issues are masculinity, feminism, honor, bravery, and ambition. These issues will be examined through the dynamics of three couples, Hero and Claudio, Beatrice and Benedict, and Lady Macbeth and Macbeth. It is important to remember that these are two different genres of plays. *Much Ado About Nothing* is a comedy that satirically focuses on male-female relations. While *Macbeth* is a tragedy, which takes a serious tone where gender issues are subtly woven into the plot.

The first couple, Hero and Claudio, represent the 16th and 17th century Elizabethan norm in marriage. Claudio is the model of masculinity and a gullible romantic. Hero is the modest docile young woman. They seem to have the picture perfect expectations of marriage. This optimism combined with the cuckold fear of the times allows Claudio to be easily deceived into believing the fabricated story of Hero's infidelity. Such an action is the ultimate betrayal to Claudio's honor. Similarly, the public accusation made by Claudio is a black eye to the honor of Hero's family.

But in the end, Hero was the virtuous lady everyone wanted her to be. Hero and Claudio play the foil to the pessimistic couple, Beatrice and Benedict. Beatrice and Benedict are the cynics of love and romance. Their attitudes and relationship often breaks from the gender norms. In the beginning of the play both preached that marriage is an institution not meant for either. Beatrice is a free and uninhibited strong female. She eventually consents to marriage after she expresses her objections to the traditional voiceless role of the woman in a relationship.

Her constant verbal sparring with Benedict shows she will not be the typical apathetic female in the marriage. Benedict is a fanaticizer who becomes smitten with the idea of Beatrice being in love with him. Benedict also exhibits honor, bravery, and loyalty by challenging his friend Claudio to a duel after he was asked to do so by Beatrice. The courtship of Beatrice and Benedict sharply contrasts that of Hero and Claudio. Hero submitted to marriage and accepted her docile role while Beatrice chose marriage after showing her disapproval to the gender structure of marriage.

The gender issues in Macbeth are often skewed. Sometimes a character will fall into the proper gender identity, but often it appears that roles are reversed between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. In the beginning Macbeth is a brave man of honor. He was loyal and defended his king's honor as well as his own when he attacked the castle of the traitor, Macdonwald. Macbeth shows the masculinity of men as well as women. In Lady Macbeth it can be seen that some women are just like men in their quest for power and success.

It is to the point where it seems Lady Macbeth is a man trapped in a woman's body. She is filled with greed and envy and will use any person or thing to get what she wants. When learning of the witches' prophecy she feared that Macbeth was not ruthless enough to ensure the attainment of his ambitions, to full of the milk of human kindness to murder Duncan. So she took it upon herself to make things happen. She calls upon heavenly powers to unsex me here and fill her with cruelty, taking from her all natural womanly compassion.

Later she reinforces this rejection of her femininity by saying she would go so far as to cast off all motherly sentiments that go with it by bashing the brains out of her own baby to attain her goals. Lady Macbeth taunts Macbeth for his fears and ambivalence, saying he will only be a man when he commits the murder of Duncan. She sees feminine virtues as being remorseful, peaceful, kind and soft and calls Macbeth womanish. Macbeth is indecisive, he knows right and wrong, but sees his biggest flaw is not a lack of moral values but a lack of motivation and gumption.

On the other hand Lady Macbeth has such a vision and drive for advancement that she makes the murder happen and pushes Macbeth into doing it by pouring spirits in [Macbeth's] ear. If comparisons are made between the couples in both plays it can be seen that in public Lady Macbeth and Macbeth appear to be as Hero and Claudio, but behind closed doors there is a strong-minded woman swaying her influence similar to the relationship between Beatrice and Benedict. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth want to appear to be like Hero and Claudio, the flawless norm in marriage, so that they don't bring suspicion upon themselves for the murders they have committed.

Like Claudio, Macbeth needs to project an image of bravery and honor if he is to be respected as a king. Although they are fundamentally different in their heart, Beatrice and Lady Macbeth are similar in that they are both strong-minded opinionated women who have certain expectations of their man. In Conclusion, Much Ado About Nothing shows two extremes of a couple, the cookie-cutter orthodox couple and the bantering couple of

individuality. The couple in Macbeth has a strange and unnatural dynamic that often sways from the gender norms.