

A conventional  
heroine (hero) and an  
unconventional  
heroine (beatrice)  
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**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In Elizabethan times, when William Shakespeare wrote the play, the conventional heroine would have been Hero. This is due to the fact that in the 1600's women were expected to be co-operative, modest, virginal and placid. Beatrice on the other hand is a heroine, but an unconventional one at that; she may have been seen as disobedient, cheeky and rebellious during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

Nowadays however due to the change in women's rights at the turn of the 20th Century, we see Beatrice as a more conventional heroine. We see her good points as a heroine shining through in examples such as her crusading on her cousin's behalf and other matters, which I will discuss throughout this essay. In today's modern times we see Hero as a timid woman, who could not be a heroine. I feel we see no heroic from a modern point of view.

One might prefer Beatrice's character for many reasons, one being that she is bold and set in her ways. We can see this through her stubborn views on marriage and love. During the first two acts of the play, Beatrice '... would rather hear her dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves her.' (Act I: Scene I) Beatrice swears in the Act 2 that she will also never marry: '...Not till God make men of some other metal than earth.' Nowadays modern people may prefer that view, as it shows an independent woman, still content without men. However, in Elizabethan times, girls aims were to be married at a young age, so an audience in those days may have been surprised by Beatrice's rebellious nature.

Hero on the other hand would have been an agreeable character who obeys her father's will and is always helpful. We see this throughout the play, such

as when Antonio and Hero's father (Leonato) warn her that Prince Don Pedro may ask her to marry him on the night of the ball. Hero says's nothing, however we see her co-operation through Beatrice's remark: '...is it my cousin's duty to make curtsy and say, " Father, as it please you"...' She is helpful in the plot to bring Beatrice and Benedick together as we see by her statement: ' I will do any modest office, my lord, to help my cousin to a good husband.' In modern times, we see Hero's character as sweet and innocent, but not, however, a conventional heroine.

A conventional heroine nowadays would have a witty and cheeky disposition and think for herself. We see Beatrice as very mischievous throughout the whole play, especially in her conversations with and about Benedick in which she uncontrollably mocks him. We can see this in one of her opening lines of the play; in Act I Scene I she sarcastically queries: '...How many hath Signor Benedick killed? For indeed, I promised to eat all of his killings.' When Benedick arrives we see their first meeting of the play, complete with taunting language.

BEATRICE: ' A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours.'

BENEDICK: ' I would my horse had the speed of your tongue...'

This teasing, taunting behaviour illustrates that Beatrice is a very headstrong woman with a cheeky disposition. Modern audiences would enjoy Beatrice's character and see it as flirting. They would enjoy watching this flirtatious behaviour as it portrays Beatrice as a bold woman, therefore an excellent heroine.

However, Beatrice's war of words with Benedick can be seen as favourable or disagreeable in many ways. It may be seen as flirtatious, which modern audiences and the element of rowdy, common, Elizabethan audiences would admire. It may also be seen as rude, which 21st century audiences would see as courageous however Elizabethan's would see this as disrespectful.

Some people, on the other hand, may prefer Hero as a more conventional heroine. When Don John's plot comes into action, we see Hero disgraced for allegedly being unfaithful to Claudio. Claudio is asked whether he '...comes hither to marry this lady?' in Act 4 Scene 1. He replies in the negative and reveals that he 'saw' Hero receiving a male visitor the previous night. He throws Hero back to Leonato shouting: '...Give not this rotten orange to your friend...' Hero, as we know, does not comprehend and is ashamed and disgraced. Hero endures much suffering throughout the play, which in turn increases our respect for her and influences us to admire her and name her as the conventional heroine.

Beatrice's vigorous character can be seen as proud. She may not be courageous or bold, but proud and arrogant. As her cousin suggests, her pride makes her appear hard. Hero says: '...Nature never fram'd a woman's heart

Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice...' (Act 3: Scene I)

This statement is true of Beatrice for, even when Beatrice and Benedick have confessed their love for each other, when revealing these emotions to the public in the final Scene of the play, she denies all feelings.

BENEDICK: ' Do you not love me?'

BEATRICE: ' Why no, more than reason.'

BENEDICK: ' Why, then your uncle and the Prince and Claudio have been deceived; they swore you did.'

Pride is indeed not a quality held by a conventional heroine. However, a caring disposition is something needed by a heroine, conventional or not. Beatrice is caring, emotional and very loyal. We see this through her reactions towards Hero's wronging by Claudio. She requests Benedick to '.... kill Claudio.' (Act 4: Scene1 line 285) her aggression towards Claudio and her care for her cousin can be seen when she states '...O God, that I were a man! I would eat his [Claudio's] heart in the market-place.'

Hero and Beatrice share this nature and this is portrayed when Hero cares for her cousin's happiness and persists to bring Benedick and Beatrice together. This occurs in the final scene of the play, Beatrice and Benedick deny all love for one another and Hero ' heroically' pulls a letter from her cousin's pocket. This letter contains evidence of Beatrice's affection towards Benedick. These acts of care and love towards her cousin results in her marriage.

However we may choose to perceive Hero's behaviour as extremely two-dimensional. We may choose to see her actions negatively in that she does not have the individual thoughts of her cousin and just does what she is told. On the other hand, Elizabethan's would see this as good, and the fact that she is not as fickle as Beatrice is an excellent quality. Throughout the play,

and throughout all the plots that Hero is involved in, she maintains a cheerful and optimistic outlook. This completely contrasts with Beatrice, for she is apparently against marriage and love, yet when she discovers Benedick loves her, she then decides she does like him.

This can be interpreted in many ways, each would alter our views on Beatrice, as a conventional heroine. One way, is that she always did love Benedick but has chosen to stay away from love since she was (as she implies):

‘... lent it [the heart of Signor Benedick] awhile, and I gave him use for it, a double heart for his single one, Marry, once before he won it of me with false dice, therefore your grace may well say I have lost it.’ (Act 2: Scene 1)

So in this way, she is not fickle, however, just revealing her feelings that have been concealed up to the point when she knows Benedick returns her love.

Nevertheless we may choose to see this in such a way that she changes she may change her emotions because she finally has someone who returns her love. This is an open-ended argument as she did have an option to love the Prince, when he asked her ‘...if she would have him?’

In conclusion, both are heroines. Hero is extremely different to Beatrice. She is quiet, calm, pretty and agreeable. She may have been the preference in Elizabethan times due to the situation of England and it’s views on how women should act; however I do not prefer her. She is placid and naïve. She is heroic in that she forgives Claudio after he disgraces her, however it

may also just show passive behaviour, prompted by her duty as a daughter towards her father. I cannot relate to Hero at all and only see her as a necessary character within the play. Beatrice, on the other hand, is one of the most interesting women in all Shakespeare's plays. She is more related to women of modern times in her realistic, independent views. She refuses to be dominated by a man and in the end hold her own, but also falls in love. She is indeed, very proud however she is capable of compassion. Over all, Beatrice display's the character of a conventional heroine and would influence one to prefer her because of her extraordinary verbal facility; her witty remarks and bold character all cause me to prefer her. She is fantastically animated and Shakespeare has -in my views- created the most fascinating woman in all of literature.