

Shakespeare's heroines essay



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Chin further states that they were not even permitted, by law, to perform on the public stage, and Stanley Wells, editor of 'New Penguin Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet' adds that "all women's roles were played by boys, there is no evidence that any female role was ever played by a male actor over the age of eighteen. Even though, Shakespeare tended to make male characters the main protagonists, he wrote quite powerful supporting roles for his female characters, for example the characters of Juliet in Romeo and Juliet and Beatrice from Much Ado about Nothing.

His 'women' generally controlled the actions of the play, thus secretly being the more authoritative figures in the plays. For instance it is Juliet who decides that she and Romeo should get married, and she goes as far as to 'stage' her own death to avoid marrying Paris. Even Beatrice, commanding Benedict to kill Claudio, after he is humiliated is an important part of the plot.

Benedict consents, because even though Claudio is his friend he will do anything to please Beatrice.

Linda Alicia also reveals that, the education of Elizabethan women "would have been purely of the domestic nature", to prepare them for their only available careers, as wives and mothers. "They were only expected to learn how to govern a household and become skilled in all housewifely duties. " Generally they were not educated beyond that, except those of the upper class, but most did not read or write and were not expected to. Yet, Shakespearean heroines are "well known for their intelligence, for their determination, and for their love - for their willingness to love despite fear

and suffering. These qualities have led some critics to consider Shakespeare a "master of womankind" and an innovator, because he avoided the stereotyped characterizations of women used by other playwrights.

Helen Zimmerman, in the introduction to the English translation of Louis Lessee's study 'The Women of Shakespeare', argued in 1895 that "of Shakespearean dramatist personae, his women are perhaps the most attractive, and also, in a sense, his most original creations, so different are they, as a whole, from Cumulative Word count-494

The ideals of the feminine type prevalent in the literature of his day." In Romeo and Juliet, Juliet the 'ultimate romantic heroine', was not just a fragile, pretty face, even though she was just fourteen years of age. In the beginning, Juliet is an innocent girl, having not yet experienced true love and by the end of the play can clearly see how much her love for Romeo has deepened in passion, and how vividly her character has developed. She is headstrong yet intelligent, and it is she who sets the boundaries in her relationship with Romeo.

Gullot's forgiveness of Romeo after he kills Tybalt signifies her authority in contrast to his impulsiveness. Stanley Wells, further states that "Shakespeare differentiates between the characters of Romeo and Juliet in the effects of their passions upon them. In spite of her self-abandonment to love, Juliet is strong and practical and becomes increasingly more so. This is displayed through Gullot's direct questions in contrast with Romeo's poetically phrased compliments." Juliet: "Art thou a Montague?" Romeo: "Neither, fair maid, if either thee dislike."

Beatrice, though sharp tongued and stubborn, in comparison to Juliet, abandons her pride and her scorn after she realizes that she is in love with Benedict. Shakespeare quickly establishes her in Act 1 scene I of the play as a woman against the social convention of women being meek, passive and modest. The "merry war" she wages with Benedict brings out her character to its best, but it is clear from the first scene of the play that Beatrice does not easily submit to the commands or beliefs of any man. Throughout the play, she is very clever with words, displaying her intelligence as well as a gift for humor.

As stated in William Richardson "on Shakespearean imitation of female characters" (1788), "her way with words is sharpened when the object of her humor is Benedict- She does not defend herself, or make her attacks with grave, argumentative, and persuasive elocution: but, endowed with the powers of wit, she employs them in raillery, banter, and repartee. These heroines distinctly stand out from the other female characters in their respective plays mainly because they rebel against the patriarchal society of that era.

For example Beatrice criticizes all masculine values and does not submit to the oppressive nature of the men in the play, especially Benedict. Mary berry and Michael clamp, editors of 'Cambridge school Shakespeare' 1993) claim that "she is a mature woman who rages against the masculine solidarity which can so easily destroy a woman's reputation." Juliet too rebels against the social norms of that time, by eloping with the man she loves and refusing to marry the one chosen for her by her father. Also in Gullet's case she further violates her family wishes by falling in love and marrying a Montague.

According to Chitchat Goop's article "Shakespearean heroines steal the limelight in all his plays", she is not the submissive girl of Shakespearean times. Shakespeare clearly cuts her out to be a female character that is different from the rest. That difference can be seen through her defiance, against her family, and against marrying someone she doesn't love, and most of all her loyalty towards Romeo. "Cumulative Word count- 1032 Hero on the other hand is completely different from both these heroines.

She clearly submits to will her father, the prince and then Claudio.

Leona controls not merely Hero's actions, but her words as well. Hero is, as stated by Richard Laws (2011) "thoroughly repressed by the male-dominated society in which she lives that she submits not only to her father's will, but to that of early every other man in the play." She is easily wooed and won by Don Pedro posing as Claudio, then given over to Claudio himself. Even though at the end of the play, she seems less naive about men, even speaking up for herself to Claudio after her unveiling, she still willingly marries the man who so cruelly humiliated and rejected her previously.

Hero represents the feminine values accepted during the Elizabethan age, gentleness, loyalty and submissiveness. Beatrice in contrast, is independent, witty and fiery. As said by critics, Hero is more or less a 'foil' for Beatrice, a character whose presence reverse to enhance the qualities of another character. All female characters in *Much to do About Nothing*", and "Romeo and Juliet", have varied personalities and attitudes. Minor female characters in both plays include the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* and Margaret in *Much Ado about Nothing*.

Prose and 'sexual innuendoes' used in dialogue signify that both these characters are from a low social status.

For example in Act 1 scenes of Romeo and Juliet the nurse says: 'No less, nay bigger; women grow by men.' And in much ado about nothing Margaret says "give us the swords; we have bucklers of our own. Margaret and Ursula both contribute to the overall impression of female wit and intelligence in the play. However while Margarita's affair with Broacher unwittingly results in hero's disgrace, as stated by Ross Stuart in "York notes, Much ado about Nothing", Ursula helps hero to trick Beatrice into falling in love with Benedict.

Yet from all three of these characters the Nurse plays the strongest supporting role. She's an important figure in the play, since without her the relationship between Romeo and Juliet couldn't have developed so easily, and she is a motherly figure to Juliet. Yet as Michael Vagabond states in his book "Shakespeare the director's cut" (2003), the nurse encourages Juliet to elope with Romeo because she wants to "relive the pleasures of her youth through fourteen year old Juliet. " Her desire to extract vicarious pleasure from the thought of Juliet losing her virginity, leads her to abandon all sense of responsibility.

" This is evident through her fantasies of Juliet lying on her back.

Furthermore, a change in attitude is revealed, when Juliet turns to her for help when she is being forced to marry Paris and the nurse states that she should go through with the marriage. Lady Caplet on the other hand, sees love and marriage in an attitude different from the Juliet and the nurse. Her own arranged marriage plays a role in her materialistic attitude.

Being from the upper class, Lady Caplet married young therefore she eagerly awaits Gullet's marriage to Paris, thus making her seem cold and distant and resulting in her abandonment of Juliet. She is an ineffectual mother, perhaps because of her young age, relying on the Nurse for moral and emotional support.

This is Cumulative Word count- 1590 Displayed when Lady Caplet first introduces the idea of marrying Paris, she Anton talk to Juliet by herself. Lady Montague, Romeos mother is another character from one of the high class families in Verona.

In Act 1 Scene 1, she seems to mock her husband when he wants to go out into the battle, " Thou shall not stir one foot to seek a foe. " By saying this she seems to be a character that is in control of Montague as she is able to say things like that to him in private. But she never seems to speak in public, and has the least amount of lines in both the original text and the films, which shows her to be a quiet character that is being kept under control by Montague.

Both Lady Caplet and Lady Montague have no say in any conversation or fight but they are bound to support their husbands.

They are expected to be obedient followers of the men in their families. For example, Lady Caplet and Lady Montague can do nothing to stop their husbands' anger against their rivals. Both these women present the suppression of females in a male dominated chauvinistic world, and contrast heavily with Beatrice and Juliet, who were not afraid to take matters concerning their loved ones, into their own hands and fight against the male

dominated society. Michael Vagabond claims that Juliet trusts her instincts, breaking the male law of non-choice.

Brave, outspoken, practical, vulnerable, a female beacon of civil liberty in a dark, chauvinist world. " Even hero, passive and meek as she is, displays loyalty through her acceptance of Claudio as her husband. Even though she is not as rebellious and bold as the other two heroines, she like Juliet and Beatrice, is honest and true in her love for Claudio. She is not concerned with the physical side of love or gaining status or wealth through marriage.

She faces all odds, and even forgives Claudio for disgracing her, displaying emotional maturity, quite eke Juliet.