

A contemporary view of benedick and beatrice



William Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*, brimming with metaphors and figurative clowning walks the line of comedy and tragedy. As Shakespeare flexes his exemplary wit which brands his work as so signature and formulaic; he brings probably the most memorable characters in the play; Beatrice and Benedick as well as their own volatile and flippant relationship to life. A modern audience find their relationship partially satisfactory. Shakespeare's use of structural and linguistic devices enables the audience to believe in the relationship between Benedick and Beatrice. These features, taken in the context created by Shakespeare, further establish their credibility, especially when taken in relation to Claudio and Hero.

A Shakespearean audience would have viewed Beatrice's actions and behavior as outrageous. This is largely due to her outspoken nature and position within a strongly patriarchal hierarchy. Shakespeare places her alongside other characters in order to emphasize certain characteristics which ultimately make her more suitable for a marriage with Benedick. Beatrice's vulgar mouth and coarse persona when discussing the prospects of marriage initially seemed shocking; "I had rather hear a dog bark at a crow than a man swear he love me" Beatrice objectifies men here and places them amongst the likes of crows and dogs to demonstrate their insignificance. She thereby revealed how she doesn't need the love of any man to be validated as a woman. Typically a patriarchal society was quick to objectify women and see them as an 'item' of which to be seen rather than heard. This is demonstrated by Benedick who professes himself "A professed tyrant of their sex". Therefore in the early stages of the play we

view the couple as mutually incompatible, but by the end they can be perceived as more viable because Benedick softens his position towards her as evidenced by the sonnet “fashioned by his own pure hand”. Benedick demonstrates he is willing to step out of the patriarchal hierarchy in order to show his love and admiration for Beatrice despite the fact he will be mocked by his male friends “In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke”. At several occasions in the play relationships are rendered as wild and unpredictable through their explicit comparison with animals, however both Benedick and Beatrice put aside this and reveal how they are willing to endure this for the love of one another.

Throughout the play as the two share a war of words and as the story unfolds the relationship of the two fickle lovers can be perceived as questionable for various reasons. Beatrice’s integral existence appears to oppose this entirely. Beatrice is often used as a pawn of euphemism within the narrative and her role here can be viewed as ambiguous in its meaning to the play. Beatrice’s early use of innuendo allows the audience to comprehend the genre of the play as comic reflects; “I am sure he is in the fleet. I would he had board me”. The double meaning and sexual connotations of the language Beatrice uses portrays her as a comic and sharp figure within the plot and as well as setting her aside from the dull and bland likes of women who are seen and not heard such as Hero, her suggestion that she yearns for an intimate relationship with Benedick reveal how she knows he is a good lover due a past relationship. Further emphasized by her praise of Benedick; “And a good soldier to a lady, but is he to a lord?”. The literature devices such as Antanaclasis and Acutezza as

well as her repetitive use of; antonomasia; “ I pray you, is Signor Mountanto returned” throughout highlights how Beatrice isn’t marginalized like other women within the play whilst properly establishing comic aspects which are able to root much ado in this genre. Due to this clarity, it is also possible that the relationship between Benedick and Beatrice can be deemed more viable for this very reason as a traditional comic genre is traditionally known to end happily. A contemporary audience is more likely to be satisfied as Beatrice’s power as a woman is accepted as norm in modern society and the dynamic of the relationship is deemed much more palatable.

In addition, Shakespeare further proposes that Benedick and Beatrice are realistic and are ultimately supposed to be together through the familiarization of the audience to the context of their past relationship “ indeed my lord, he lent me awhile, and I gave him use for it, a double heart for a single one”. This clearly highlights how the pair have had a previously relationship meaning their two hearts are already bonded by history and love. Despite the negative connotations and the circumstances that may have occurred; the context of their relationship with one another being set over a number of years instead of compressed into the pressurized space of a few days and being juxtaposed to the likes of Claudio and Hero allow the audience to deem their love as genuine and that they are indeed supposed to be together. They have found each other again. Likewise, being set in such a gloriously unflawed and picture perfect place as Messina also adds to the viability of Benedick and Beatrice’s relationship being successful and their squabbles and harsh exchanges being resolved by the end of the play. The audience; as soon as they’re introduced to such a smudge less and

remote ambience, are under the impression all shall come to a happy and satisfying resolution. This is further reinforced by Leonato announcing “ Never came trouble to my house in the likeness of your grace”. The euphemistic title, fully rooting *Much Ado* in a comic light, also seems to lend viability to the possibility of happiness with the explicit suggestion that “ nothing” will go wrong and despite any conflict all shall be resolved in a positive way.

Shakespeare through structure seems to subtly hint that Benedick and Beatrice’s relationship is meant to be and that by the end of the play they will end up together. Several parallels emerge between the two characters for instance the introduction of deception as a foundation of the plot which drives key events forward. For instance both characters find themselves in a situation where they are being deceived by friends in terms of one another’s feelings towards each other, the accessibility to both events via dramatic irony allow the audience to view the characters as intertwined and destined for one another. Both are consecutively referred to as animals through these scenes; “ Bait the hook well this fish will bite” and “ greedily devour the treacherous bait”. The similarities and lexical field revealed here to fishing and the repetition of bait; suggest how the pair are clueless and have been lured in so easily by something that seems appealing, such as the promise of love, emphasizing how the two, despite their denial, are actually longing for love but it is in fact a harmless deception on which they are both hooked. Moreover to this, Benedick makes it clear that he does indeed long for Beatrice’s affection in place of her ‘ disdain’; “ She speaks poniards and every word stabs”. The use of a metaphor to describe such a violent and

painful act reveals the effect of the words upon Benedick highlighting his vulnerability. Although at first sight it may seem as such encounters tear the two further apart, Benedick immense hurt and care for Beatrice's opinion emphasizes his concealed love for her thus bringing them closer together.

Shakespeare uses devices in order to draw attention to the two characters mutual compatibility and inevitable love for one another, portraying the characters as 'giving into the love'. "And Benedick love on. I will requite thee, taming my wild heart to thy loving hand". This explicit moment of self-realization highlights how she has always loved Benedick but is willing to 'tame' her animalistic and savage heart in an effort to return his love. The use of iambic-pentameter implies the immense significance of Beatrice's soliloquy and highlights her smoldering love for Benedick and how she will give into it despite her earlier disdain for marriage. Further reinforcing the feasibility of their love coming to a satisfying conclusion.

In conclusion, the romanticized dreamy setting in which the play is set, along with the genre of the play and the foundations the plot is set upon lends a very real possibility that the audience can be satisfied in the portrayal of the dynamic relationship of Beatrice and Benedick. As stated above, the juxtaposition of Claudio and Hero also offers a helping hand to this, as the audience is given great insight into two extremes of relationships. One being extremely unrealistic and paper-thin, whilst the other is brimming with hidden passion and love driven squabbles. Contextualizing Beatrice and Benedick's relationship in this fashion truly lets the audience see past their struggles and past, allowing the pair to be viewed as a flawed yet vastly realistic couple.