

# Much ado about nothing presentation of women in the play

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In the play the way the characters interact with each other is somewhat dependent on class, however largely dependent on gender. A general theme in the play is that the male characters often see the women as deceivers "trust none" and almost expect them to cheat, resulting in many a joke based on becoming a cuckold. The plot, women being slandered by mischief-makers whose lover or husband is led to believe she has been unfaithful to him can give us an idea of Shakespearean view (someone who lived in a society where women were submissive to men) as he uses a similar plot again in three more plays including Othello.

In Shakespearean comedy there is always confusion, in this case with many mistakes, but ends with it being put back together again (at a wedding) reinforcing that a stereotypical man should have a woman at his side. When looking at the presentation of women in the play, the two significant female characters: Beatrice and Hero, appear to be on the opposite side of the stereotypical spectrum. Beatrice, possibly the most intriguing character in the whole play, speaks and behaves with more than usual freedom.

She is unique as she not only possesses a brain, but delights in the use of it, presenting a challenge to all the male characters. She behaves far from the typical Elizabethan woman emphasized in Act 1 scenes where in response to Elongates wish for Beatrice to get married she proclaims she will not be fitted with a husband "till god make men of some other mettle than earth." In complete contrast, Hero does not take Beatrice's advice to wait and "let him be a handsome fellow," she is completely submissive to her father and doesn't even get to respond in the play.

As the reader can see, marriage is a central part of the play and the way the character's approach marriage can give us a real insight into the presentation of women. I have already mentioned Beatrice talks about being "fitted" with a husband, this is a notion which suggests that in the play marriage was seen as the woman giving herself to the man. When Beatrice professes her love for Benedict he says that he will "stop her mouth" with a kiss, showing a man expects to almost "tame" a woman and she is expected to be submissive to him.

The idea of a woman being completely submissive to their husband is presented when Hero and Ursula describe Beatrice "wild spirits" to be "caught" for Benedict. This suggests that she is now at Benedict's disposal and has almost become his pet. Despite Beatrice's reversal in her views on marriage, she had to be tamed to conform to society. Hero however, who is depicted as the model woman in the play, is quite happy to marry Claudio despite being "wooed" by Don Pedro.

This presents the socially accepted women as people who are almost thankful to be noticed by men and are quite happy to agree to any proposal they might have. The contrast between Hero and Beatrice highlights the effect of a dominant male in Elizabethan society. Hero has to conform to her father who insists she get married. However, Beatrice does not have a father present in Messina at the time and therefore is not under pressure to marry a man leaving it up to her own discretion.

This highlights how women are presented as the object which fathers use to increase the social standing of all men that see women as objects. Claudio uses the metaphor "rotten orange" to describe Hero. In today's society one would expect the orange would represent her beauty on the outside and the sweetness of her character on the inside. However, as she was described as rotten, the inside of the orange for Claudio represented Hero's chastity. This suggests that the most important thing for a man was a woman's beauty and chastity not her character, reinforcing the presentation of women as objects.

As does the fact that Don Pedro "wooed" Hero and then after winning Hero over passed her over to Claudio as if it did not matter that she has been tricked. Women as deceivers--- Margaret Links to not having a father Links to cuckolding , perhaps showing us how it was an accepted thing for women to be almost controlled by their father and even for them to dictate to whom a woman would get married to (as if the father uses their daughter as a way of increasing the social standing of their family name).

This is slightly ironic as later in the play Beatrice herself is said to be "caught" for Benedict by Hero and Ursula after they compared her spirit to a "haggard of the rock" and she decides to bind their love in a "holy band," both the catching of an animal and a band suggests that the marriage may be restrictive and she will be "tamed" and domesticated by Benedict as Hero is by her father.

Beatrice's reversal stems from over hearing a conversation where she finds out that her wit seems not to be appreciated "mock me into air." She is

forced to liaise that it is not the way other women think she should behave and it doesn't gain her popularity " no glory lives behind the back of such" for behaving in this manner.

The tone " taming my wild heart" in which she speaks in what may be called her speech of reversal suggests that she understands this is the right way for a women to live her life and the very fact that she is thinking about marriage " holy band" even before it is confirmed that Benedict is actually in love with her suggests that for women in the play/at that time it was their ultimate goal to get married and all the dottiness about remaining a bachelor was a mask to cover up their true feelings hence the relief she feels when she finds out Benedicts love and possibly explains why their exchange at the masked ball was so fiery and aggressive, to cover (as a mask does) up their underlying love and wish to be married like society (Leona and Antonio) suggests. Despite previously saying that one could burn him at the " stake" and his views would remain, Benedict quickly changes heart to, " the world must be peopled. However, Benedicts speech is written in prose and is very matter of fact " I will be horribly in love with her. Unlike Beatrice where it is more romantic, showing how women are presented to be slightly softer romantics but it is the men " if I do not take pity on her I am a villain" who are expected to take in the woman. Throughout the play we also get a sense that the men see the women as deceivers " I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none" and almost expect them to cheat, shown by the fact that instead of a cuckold being a suggesting that it is somewhat a certainty that a wife will be unfaithful.

When the bastard Don John, who is a self-professed "plain-dealing villain" slanders Hero, they're very quick to come up with the plan to disgrace her in front of the whole congregation, not try and speak with her and find out whether the allegations even have substance. The fact that Don Pedro and even Claudio (who was going to marry Hero) almost immediately believe in Don John (someone who admitted "you may think I love you not") and even starts planning his revenge (possibly showing how the most important factor for a man was a woman's chastity due to the extreme nature of his revenge) on Hero shows that although it was a surprise it wasn't something which shocked the men and by agreeing to go to the window in the evening gives us the impression that they are expecting the evening to confirm what they have just been told.

The fact that Claudio is so quick to entertain the idea that Hero has been unfaithful (foreshadowed in the party scene,) and men are so worried about becoming a cuckold could stem from marriages not possibly meaning as much in comparison to what they mean today. After all, it was Don Pedro that actually "wooed" Hero. This links to the fact that although the men often see the women as deceivers, the women (in this case Hero) seem to have to put up with the fact that Hero was manipulated by two men.

Although, Hero seemed to be happy about the whole thing (or had to be under the influence of her father) again further suggesting that it was a woman's goal to get married and it didn't particularly matter who it was to, Don Pedro or indeed Claudio.

This suggests that it was somewhat a career option for a woman hence why they may appear to become domesticated and this could also link to why men are so worried about being cuckolded because the pair decided to get married quickly "marry her tonight" without actually knowing each other really well. Claudio describes Hero as "a Jewel," something which looks wonderful and is hard to find, by using a metaphor and describing her in this way suggests that Claudio may see Hero as an object to admire and possess, rather than someone to love. The fact that when he is denouncing her at the wedding he describes her as a "rotten orange," you may think that an orange would be used to describe her beauty on the outside and her sweetness on the inside although actually the inside refers to her chastity once again showing us that looks and chastity are, in the eyes of men, more important than personality.

Although, in response to how quick Claudio lives in the allegations, another interpretation may be that Shakespeare made his characters worried about others "the prince woe for himself" deceiving or betraying them no matter what gender and are just generally susceptible to being caught out by a mischief maker shown when Don John manages to convince Claudio that he has heard Don Pedro "swear his affection" for Hero, this is a method Shakespeare used for comedic purposes. During the play it becomes apparent that a man places a great deal of importance on a woman's Chastity. Leonato berates "do not pop thin eyes" Hero to the very point where he wishes her dead and wishes that she was not from his blood so he could say "no part of it is mine." The metaphor where he says she has fallen into

a "pit of ink" and there isn't enough drops of water in the sea to clean her emphasis that it is the highest of almost all offences.

However, when the full story transpired and it became clear that it was in fact Margaret who and therefore different rules were applied for a different class of woman, suggesting that Chastity was a must in an upper class woman yet for men and woman of the lower classes it was more acceptable to entertain someone before marriage if they even get married at all.

Although, the fact that Broacher, the very person that deceived the princes is the person that proves Margaret was not aware of the plot shows that even a lowly male servant, who has committed a terrible crime still has the status in society to prove that Margaret was innocent. In the play it is not even mentioned that Margaret is at the wedding. As she does not speak up, it is either clear that she was not present or simply she would not be believed due to her gender and social standing.

However, in Kenneth Branch film Margaret was present and the actor interpreted her face to look horrified, perhaps for Hero but also maybe suggesting that even a woman of lower class would find it horrific for her actions to come out in front of all the people present. Conclusion - modern interpretation better but still gender gap. Coalescence OF MARGE-RAT AND URSULA? class Leona- dogberry CONCLUSION-- One of the most interesting ideas in the play is that the traditional couple are perhaps not really in love, but the odd couple are. --Beatrice most horrible line in play I. E market place The fact that a woman says it may show that actually woman are not much



different to men who go off and fight a war it is just society that stops them from doing it