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Why Beatrice and Benedick Are Way Better than Claudio and Hero (Who Kinda Suck)

After doing a Shakespeare section in high school and this semester in this class, it seems like the relationship between Beatrice and Benedick is the most ideal love of Shakespeare compared to other relationships such as the ones between Claudio and Hero, Lysander and Hermia, and of course Romeo and Juliet. Not only are they different from other Shakespeare love stories, they are different from so many love stories from then until now. That's why in my opinion, even though Claudio and Hero are the "main" relationship in the play, people are more intrigued by the developing love between Benedick and Beatrice. The rest of this paper will be a list of why (at least in 2015) Benedick and Beatrice are the superior love story.

#1: A Crush

At the very beginning of the play after returning from war, Claudio proclaims that he is deeply in love with Hero and wants to ask her father for permission to marry her as soon as possible. On the other hand, Beatrice and Benedick do a lot to give the impression that neither is even the least bit interested in the other. To start, Hero and Claudio's relationship is based on first impressions like a 16th century Tinder. Without having even dated (or "courted" as they might have said back then), Claudio just up and decides that he wants to marry Hero. Why does he want to marry her? Have they gone through trials and tribulations? No. Has she spent years faithfully awaiting his return from war? Also, no. It's because Claudio saw Hero and thought she

was pretty. That was all it took. In the *first* scene in the *first* act, he says “In mine eye she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on” (1.1.168). While Claudio certainly had good intentions, his character is that of a young man. So that means that he still has the rest of his life to see pretty girls and maybe fall head over heels again. In short, “pretty” would be a good reason to flirt and potentially start a relationship, but he went straight for marriage.

On the other hand, Beatrice and Benedick’s love is a result of time spent attracted to one another, and what I would guess is years and years of each one secretly trying to convince themselves that they don’t really like the other one. In the beginning of the play, there is a somewhat obvious attraction between Beatrice and Benedick. Even though they haven’t been in a relationship in a long time, they still argue like the stereotypical “old married couple”. As soon as the opening act, they already argue like they are with as Benedick with quite a clever exchange highlighted by

Benedick: What, my dear Lady Disdain! are you yet living? (1.1.106)

Beatrice: Is it possible disdain should die while she hath

such meet food to feed it as Signior Benedick?

Courtesy itself must convert to disdain, if you come

in her presence. (1.1.107-110)

Benedick: Then is courtesy a turncoat. But it is certain I

am loved of all ladies, only you excepted: and I

would I could find in my heart that I had not a hard

heart; for, truly, I love none. (1.1.111-114)

If you change their words to modern English and add a laugh track, it would be an argument between the grandparents in a sitcom (think Frank and Marie in *Everybody Loves Raymond*). Even though their conversation appears to be showing contempt, it is actually quite the opposite. Their almost reluctant feelings are a great contrast to the crush that Claudio immediately convinced himself was true love.

It is also apparent that to Benedick, a woman should be more than just pretty as he appears to disagree with Claudio's focus on the beauty of Hero. Since he is a believer in his own perpetual bachelorhood, Benedick would not be persuaded to be anything other than single for something less than a quick-witted woman in whom he finds inner beauty. This is the biggest difference between him and Claudio whose first impression and decision is based solely on Hero's beauty.

#2: Acting Like They Don't Like Each Other

In 2015 and especially in my age group, a big part of the dating game unfortunately involves a game of "who can seem to care less?". While I could probably go off on a ten page tangent about how stupid of a way that is to go about dating, I will digress. So, even though I don't agree with it, the "I like you so much but I would *die* before I let you know I felt that way" dynamic between Benedick and Beatrice is regrettably relatable to both myself and other people my age. In the first scene, in the same conversation that I mentioned before, they still work hard to hide their true feelings. Even as Beatrice specifically asks if Benedick is ok after the war, she asks it with an insult because God forbid that people think she is in the least bit interested in him.

After he replies to both her question and her insult, they immediately go right at each other's throats in front of everyone. Later in the same scene, we hear Benedick say to Claudio

“I can see yet without spectacles and I see no such matter: there's her cousin, an she were not possessed with a fury, exceeds her as much in beauty as the first of May doth the last of December.” (1.1.170-173).

This is part of the conversation between those two about Claudio's newfound love for Hero. All of that summarized in modern English is Benedick saying *out loud* that he thinks Beatrice is very beautiful and the only problem with her is her attitude. I think that particular quote was snuck in by Shakespeare to clue in the audience because every other signal by Benedick up to this point would point away from him saying that out loud to anyone.

#3: They are Mental Equals

If there are two things that Beatrice and Benedick unquestionably have in common it is that they are clever and hard-headed. As an admittedly non-expert on relationships, I can still say that those two traits can't be one sided in a relationship. The quick witted one will be bored; while the hard headed one walks all over the other. Benedick actually admires Beatrice's wit and quick tongue because this proves that she is far from being inferior to him intellectually.

Benedick does have a respect for women that is made obvious when he says

“That a woman conceived me, I thank her; that she brought me up, I likewise give her most humble thanks: but that I will have a recheat winded in my

forehead, or hang my bugle in an invisible baldrick,
all women shall pardon me. Because I will not do
them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the
right to trust none..."(1.1.214-220)

In saying this, he makes it clear that he respects his mother, for giving birth to him and raising him. Also, by saying that he wouldn't want to insult a woman by being in a distrusting relationship, he is validating his respect for women in general. In any healthy relationship, whether it is romantic or not, that respect is a crucial part of its foundation.

To conclude, while Claudio and Hero's love story ended well, it was quite vanilla. The only problem they had was Hero's alleged infidelity which made it interesting to watch, but that situation was solved by minor characters who were imbeciles put in the play for comic relief. Without that one hiccup, Claudio and Hero are a "love at first sight and then they all lived happily ever after" love story. That is fine for a comedy and Disney movies, but to an audience in modern times, seeing a marriage arranged that simply, then continuing after Hero had been humiliated publicly would seem ridiculous and foolish (not to mention probably being called "objectifying" toward women). Not only in real life, but to an audience in 2015, Beatrice and Benedick's relationship would be much more satisfying to watch develop. No relationship is 100% perfect, and the way theirs unfolded was no exception. There was an obvious tension between the two reluctant lovers the entire time, and it was impossible to tell which way it was going to end between them. Also, Beatrice and Benedick were more realistic, because there was no magical moment where they see each other and go "they are the one for me". This is why Beatrice and Benedick truly are way better than Claudio and Hero (who really do kinda suck).