

Starting with this speech, explore how Shakespeare presents how characters change in the play.

Shakespeare presents many of the characters in the play as constantly changing their minds, and the prime example of this is Benedick. Shakespeare uses prose to show how Benedick's change of heart towards love is less significant than Beatrice's, later on in the play, as she speaks in verse. Verse is often used as a signal to the audience that an important decision is being made, for example Beatrice choosing to marry Benedick would mean that she would lose much of her freedom. She would also be expected to be silent, obedient and chaste, as these were the ideals for women at the time. However Benedick loses nothing, indeed he gains "property" and perhaps, in the future, even an inheritance from his bride's family. The contrasting use of language in Beatrice and Benedick's speeches highlights the arguments surrounding a woman's place in society, at Shakespeare's time of writing and how power dynamics changed within married couples. The changing role and position of women was a source of great debate at the time, exemplified in the argument Benedick has with himself about the merits of an ideal bride.

Shakespeare uses the metaphor of food to highlight how Benedick's attitudes towards love have changed, particularly in the line: "doth not the appetite alter? A man loves the meat...". The word "meat" is very prosaic and blunt, which could suggest that women were judged purely on their looks and ability to please their man. It also reinforces the idea that women were not expected to make witty banter or intelligent conversation with their friends. Unlike Leonato, Don Pedro and Claudio, who are always exchanging quips. This also seems out of character for Benedick, who appeared proud of his life as a bachelor and enjoyed the "merry war of wits" between him and Beatrice (suggesting that he respected a woman's intellect, rather than just her body). This may suggest that Benedick has completely changed personality since his "gulling", suggesting a new-found (and almost animalistic) attitude to love. This may imply that love has the ability to twist people's - seemingly solid - ideas about a person.

This theme of objectification is reflected later on in the play, when Claudio "slanders" Hero with the line: "She is but the sign and semblance of her honour". This once again reflects how women were often the focus of men's sexist criticisms. This line also highlights how quickly the opinions of people in this play can change - Claudio was only recently describing Hero as an expensive "jewel" however now he is brutally calling her a "wanton" (whore). Additionally, Hero is also later described as a "rotten orange", which would suggest that she has turned sour, or changed. This shows how women were treated if they were found to be unchaste, but also highlights the theme of appearance vs reality in the play, and how deception can cloud people's opinions of one another. We also see how women were expected to live up to very high standards in society, and looked down upon if they changed these rules in any way.

Shakespeare also uses a series of very long sentences in this extract, which would suggest that Benedick's revelation has even changed the way he speaks. This