The Honor In Much Ado About Nothing

In the play Honor in Much Ado about Nothing, the motif of honor is widely prioritized. Since the play is based on Shakespeare's creativity, it courts the central theme of honor the way it was depicted in society during that period. As evident, honor was a preserve for the few, who took converged with the societal expectations, norms and generally, what the society mutually accepted as honorable. In that regard, it was regarded as a critical aspect which did not only illustrate once behavior but determined one's social status in the society. Therefore, the literature review would discuss the significance of honor, the difference between the male and female honor as well as to ascertain whether the aspects of honor in this text is harmful or not.

Significance of Honor in Much Ado about Nothing

According to Cook, honor determines the scope of the relationship between men and women in society (Cook, 187). For instance, marriages were primarily hinged on honor of the girl. The honor of the girl manifested itself through chastity, honesty and obedience and a girl who was not chaste not only brought dishonor to herself but to the potential husband and the whole family. Therefore, the honor was regarded as the most vital element any individual could possess. For example, when Claudio alleged that Hero was not chaste as thought, he goes ahead and slanders both Hero and his father publicly. The ordeal explains the degree upon which honor was highly regarded in society.

Similarly, Cheany asserts that honor brought respect to individuals it was bestowed upon. In most instances, women who were deemed to be people of high reputation were respected (Cheany, 32). They abide by the societal expectations and norms and never breached the trust that was bestowed on them. When Claudio rejects Hero for lack of honor and alleged sexual immorality without questioning who she got intimate with, it was those who were close to her who felt dishonored and took the blame for not raising her the honorable way. Consequently, the father was a subject of slander and criticism in the society as he was openly insulted by Claudio. Conversely, in a bid to reclaim the honor of a kinswoman, Benedick challenges Claudio for a duel knowing very well that he is much inferior and dishonored in the society. Therefore, the concept of honor brought immeasurable impact on people around an individual, and it was not confined to the person who obtained it as it spread to those individuals around directly or indirectly.

However, Friedman opines that honor was the used deliberately to highlight a patriarchal society the play was set (Friedman, 355). In the play, the codes that stipulate honor in women were so strict. They were never expected to question any decision made on their behalf by men nor turn down their advancements especially after the men are approved by their parents. For instance, Beatrice is regarded as headstrong since she talks so much, hopes to be a man to destroy some men she loathes or engages in heated exchanges with men. However, Hero has been used to demonstrate the retrogressive cultures which were perfectly crafted to pin women down or lay down a parameter to gauge their level of honor. For illustration, when Hero is referred to as a rotten orange since she failed to bring honor to his father by an alleged lack of chaste. Without even attempting to prove these allegations, Hero is painfully judged and regarded a disgrace to the father. All these misogynist perceptions and strict code imposed on

women point out to one thing; hypocrisy and male domination during the Elizabethan era.

The Differences between Female and Male Honors

The yardstick that is used to measure the honor in females and males in the play Much Ado about Nothing is laced with hypocrisy and other vices which exposes the double standard that existed in the society and the stringent measures that were imposed on women. According to Innes, the degree of honor in females is measured by the level of obedience to their fathers (Innes, 14). Obedience in women manifested itself through unconditional submission to the demands of one's father. A classic example is Hero when Claudio comes to their home, he does not talk to her, and he goes ahead and consult the father who promptly whispers to Hero. Hero is given firm instructions to do as the father has said and she goes ahead to court Claudio without taking into consideration her feelings and her preferences.

Similarly, Friedman holds that female honor was pegged on the chastity of a woman. The play portrays a society that employed double standards when evaluating the level of honor in various aspects (Friedman, 355). Women who gave themselves to men or who allegedly got intimate with men before marriage were shunned and regarded as dishonorable. For instance, Claudio blatantly accuses Hero of not being pure, and he is believed yet he has a questionable reputation which renders him as one of the most untrusted fellows among his kin. However, since he has brought up allegations of lack of chastity, he is promptly believed, and Hero scolded and ashamed. On the other hand, Beatrice, for her less regard in conforming to the societal expectations of chastity, she is looked down upon and regarded as divergent and non-conforming. Therefore, a woman of chaste was an honorable individual, but that chastity was dependent on the man’s definition and assertion of what it entails.

Honor in women was also depicted through how they relate with men. Innes opine that women who were submissive and did everything to please women were treated highly during the renaissance period (Innes, 17). For instance, Hero was regarded as a woman of honor until she was proven otherwise by Claudio. She was a loyal, fair and quiet woman around men. However, though Beatrice is a virgin, how she relates with men and her contempt to the norms about what it entails to be an honorable woman renders her a dishonorable character. She defiantly takes over any man, viciously conspire with Benedick to revenge against Claudio, and blatantly refuse to commit to marriage and even wishes to be a man to eat a heart of the people she loathes. He strained relationship with men, trickery and headstrong behavior does not make her honorable according to this play.

In contrast, Cheany highlights the various attributes that make a man honorable. First, he emphasizes that masculinity discerned men who are reputable or not (Cheany, 33). Benedick- a bastard, bachelor- challenges Claudio for a duel to avenge the disgrace he meted on Hero. He tries to use the fight for two purposes. First, to win the heart of Beatrice and avenge the dishonor that Claudio imposed on Hero. Second, to assert his position as one of the honorable men in this society. Therefore, one way in which man showed their honor was through masculinity and wars. It poses a stark contrast in the way honor in women was depicted.

Further, Cook contributes that honor in men was dependent on class (Cook, 194). Dogberry is referred to as an ass in a conversation with Leonato. Men who were from perceived inferior classes were associated with lack of honor. The concept brings out the hypocrisy that laced the

whole motif of honor in this play. Since Dogberry and Verges were from a lower class, their opinions on any issue never counted, and they would be mocked, ridiculed and treated with contempt due to their low social class. Therefore, honor in men was directly linked to their social class.

Does Honor do Bad or Good at the End?

According to Cook, the concept of honor is satirically portrayed to highlight the insecurities of a male-dominated society which imposes rules and norms of women to disempower them (Cook, 202) deliberately. The stringent standards which Beatrice goes against are measures placed by men to continually dominate the females and render them submissive and live according to their expectations. For instance, Hero fakes death and disguises herself into another person to ensure that she proves Claudio wrong about his allegations of her being promiscuous. On the other hand, Friedman notes that honor in this society was exaggerated and depicted to highlight the gender disparity between men and women (Friedman, 357). The norms gagged them and denied them the liberty to express themselves or make congruent decisions on their own.

However, Innes notes that the concept of honor was as per the standards of the Elizabethan era (Innes, 15). Though it may seem retrogressive in the modern world, women during that period strived to reach such levels, and by conforming to the norms of the society, women received higher value and commanded respect in the community. Therefore, since the criteria for achieving honor was stringent; women who met it felt they had reached self-actualization which was the noblest thing any woman could do during that period.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the motif of honor in the play is comically crafted to highlight the double standard, hypocrisy and all the societal stereotyping which imposed stringent norms on women. However, the characters like Beatrice have been placed to ensure that the concept is challenged and the witty and spirit of comradeship among women was the key to test the whole idea as dictated by society. Though it was crafted to favor men, the concept unmasks men and exposes their weaknesses and insecurities.