Hermia vs. Helena in A Midsummer Night’s Dream

In every friendship there are similarities and differences between the two people. In William Shakespeare’s play A Midsummer Night’s Dream there are foil characters, like in most works of literature. In A Midsummer Night’s Dream the characters Hermia and Helena are foils since the similarities and differences between their personalities highlight the other’s qualities. Hermia and Helena are similar in the way they run off into the woods to catch their lovers, and different in how they deal with conflict and self esteem. While Hermia and Helena are similar in the way handle love, and different in how they deal with conflict and self esteem.

One of the many similarities between Hermia and Helena is that they both run off into the woods, chasing after their lovers, which shows readers that they are both passionate about love. After being told by her father that she can’t marry Lysander and must marry Demetrius, Hermia makes a plan to meet up in the woods and get married. A bit later, Hermia tells her best friend Helena about her plan to run off into the woods to marry Lysander behind her father’s back. Hermia says to Helena: “And in the wood where often you and I / Upon faint primrose beds where wont to lie / Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet, / There my Lysander and myself shall meet” (1.1.219-132). Since Hermia is so passionate about her love for Lysander she disobeys her father’s ruling about the marriage. In the attempt to win over Demetrius, Helena makes a plan to tell Demetrius about Hermia’s plan since Demetrius loves Hermia, and knowing that Helena is helping the relationship will change his mind, making him fall in love with her. Helena tells the audience about her plan to tell Demetrius Hermia’s secret. “I will go tell him of fair Hermia’s flight. / Then to the wood will he tomorrow night / Pursue her. And, for this intelligence / If I have thanks, it is a clear expense” (1.1.252-255) Like Hermia, Helena is also very passionate for love. She
makes a plan to go into the forest after Demetrius who is after Hermia. Hermia and Helena’s passion for love drive them into the woods in order to meet up with their lovers.

One difference between Hermia and Helena is in the way they each deal with conflict, Hermia being quite fierce while Helena is a complete poltroon. At one point in the play, Lysander get put under the love potion by Robin. When Lysander woke the first person he saw was Helena. Once Hermia found out Lysander had the hots for Helena, the two girls got into a big fight. After a fight with Hermia, Helena describes Hermia to Demetrius: “O, When she is angry, she is keen and shrewd. / She was a vixen when she went to school, / And though she be but little, she is fierce”(3.2.340-343). The two girls deal with conflict very differently. Hermia deals with conflict physically and with aggression. Hermia comes across to Helena as angry and impulsive. Unlike Hermia, Helena deals with conflict in a much different and calm manner. After her big fight with Hermia she thinks to herself: “I have no gift at all in Shrewishness / I am a right maid for my cowardice” (3.2.316-317). While Hermia is aggressive fierce, Helena uses her words during conflict much more than Hermia. Although Hermia and Helena can be similar their argument styles are completely different.

Another difference between Hermia and Helena is their self esteem, Hermia being very confident while on the other hand Helena has no backbone. Hermia is very confident about everything; her looks, her skills, and pretty much anything she tries. Hermia says to herself; “I am as fair now as I was erewhile” (3.2.286). Since her confidence level is very high, she is able to say things like the fact that she is beautiful. Unlike Hermia, Helena’s self esteem is much lower. When Lysander magically falls in love with Hermia she thinks she is being mocked. She says to herself: “I’m as Ugly as a bear” (2.2.100). Usually people find being loved a pleasure and don’t second guess it. Since Helena’s self esteem is so low she can’t look past the fact that she is not being mocked. Hermia and Helena’s Self Esteem levels are very different and makes them complete foils.

In A Midsummer Night’s Dream Hermia and Helena share many qualities in their personalities and differ in many too, making them foils. Helena and Hermia are similar in the way they both run off into the woods to find their lovers, and different in the way they
deal with conflict. Hermia is very aggressive and Helena is a poltroon. They are also
different in their self esteem levels, Hermia is very confident and Helena is not.
Friendship is a beautiful thing, that only happens when each person is different in a little
way.