
Summary: Misogyny As a Deeply Rooted Piece In The Hamlet Play

The integral hatred of women is expressed thoroughly in Hamlet, written by William Shakespeare. This fundamental hatred and misogyny is displayed by Hamlet and often directed towards the two main female characters in the story of which there are Ophelia, Laertes brother, Hamlet's lover, daughter of Polonius, and Gertrude, Hamlet's mother and wife of King Hamlet and Claudius. The character of Gertrude is obsessively stereotyped into the role of a "sex maniac" which is often seen in the canon of classic western literature. Ophelia is also subject to her sexuality, as dialogue she is a part of often, if not most of the time, has hidden sexual and demeaning innuendos. This can include dialogue with Laertes, Polonius, Gertrude, and especially Hamlet. Even Hamlet himself, is extremely insensitive to the feelings of the women in the play, and subjects them to cruel remarks about their choices and sexuality. Overall, the story of Hamlet is one that perpetuates patriarchy and portrays harsh gender stereotypes as normalities in the female experience. The female role in Hamlet is no less than misogynistic. An example of a problematic representation of women in the play is the character of Gertrude.

Gertrude is used as a symbol for all women and their stereotypical sexual nature. It was because of her lust for Claudius, and Claudius' lust for her that drove Claudius to murder his own brother and marry Gertrude. Hamlet obviously is deeply upset and agitated by this ordeal, and reflects on it in one of his first soliloquies of the play in which he states, "Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him / As if increase of appetite had grown / by what it fed on; and yet within a month_let me not think on't_frailty thy name is woman!". Hamlet starts his soliloquy by reflecting on his mother's deeply hurtful relationship with Claudius, as he was married to him in only a month after his father's death, However, Hamlet ends this tirade of emotion with an angry generalization of all women. In essence, Hamlet believes that all women are sexually hungry and prone to their own sexual desires, which to be fair, Gertrude is. Nevertheless, if he had just viewed Gertrude in this way he would have metaphorically stated that Gertrude was frail and not women in general. Nevertheless, for the main character of the famous play Hamlet to suggest that women are weak is a telltale sign of how people in the Elizabethan era viewed women on a day to day basis. While engaging in dialogue with King Hamlet, Prince Hamlet states, "O villain, villain, smiling damned villain! / My tables. Meet it is I set it down / that one may smile, and smile, and be a villain". This shows how Hamlet, even when discussing with his father that Claudius was the one who physically murdered King Hamlet, Hamlet still partially blames his mother as she played a minor part in the murder. Even her former husband, King Hamlet, displayed his distaste of Gertrude when talking to Hamlet: "Though lewdness court in a shape of heaven, / So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd, / Will sate itself in a celestial bed / And prey on garbage". Claudius tells Hamlet that Gertrude was now bored of "lawful loving" when he states that lust will "sate itself in a celestial bed", projecting Gertrude's behaviour as a cold-hearted whore with incestuous desires.

The other half of female representation in Hamlet is Ophelia. Although Hamlet's lover, she is toyed with by Hamlet, and shackled down by their patriarchy to obey the agendas of the male figures in her own family. The patronization of Ophelia can be seen throughout the first act of the movie where she is given advice to by both her brother and her father.

Laertes advises Ophelia not to be in an intimate relationship with Hamlet because he is the prince of Denmark, and for the collective population to find that the prince is in a love relationship with a lower class citizen would be dishonourable to the family's reputation. Laertes also metaphorically compares Ophelia's virginity as a "chaste treasure", claiming that it is a valuable commodity that needs to be cherished. This ideology can be reflected back to the elizabethan society that the play was written in. In the words of Hope Fletcher, "Virginity and maidenhood were bargaining tools for women at this time and perhaps the only real asset they could lay claim to; as a maiden, a woman had a greater ability to choose her destiny and rise in society. However, once virginity was lost outside of marriage, outside of a husband, a woman lost her only power"(Hope Fletcher, *Virginity in Elizabethan England*). Polonius reinstates Laertes advice on Ophelia's relationship with Hamlet when states that Hamlets vows of love are false, "for they are brokers", sneakily claiming that Hamlets vows of love are the coins in exchange for a valuable commodity, being her virginity. Even when Ophelia tells him outright that Hamlet and her have a sort of relationship going on, Polonius tells her that he will teach her what he thinks!

Polonius is suggesting that Ophelia should not think of Hamlet's vows seriously, and teaches her what to think by telling her that she should not accept Hamlet's relationship vow because it would be damaging to his own image. Polonius even tells Ophelia what to think on the matter to pander to his own agenda, and for Ophelia not to think for herself and talk back to Polonius, which can be seen as a mirror into the patriarchal domination of females in elizabethan society, which reflects into the play. In the western canon of female stereotypes, Ophelia plays the role of a submissive and naive individual, this forced standard put upon Ophelia is also the reason that she commits suicide near the end of the play. As Polonius was murdered, she now has no man she can take direct orders from, and through this grief, commits suicide. The unseen force of misogyny was ultimately what led to Ophelia's tragic death.

As the main character of Hamlet, Hamlet himself is incredibly misogynistic in his ideologies of women. This inherent misogyny can be seen in his soliloquies, wherein we engage with Hamlet's inner thoughts and reflection on his own life, and his interactions with Gertrude and Ophelia in the play. Ophelia was unfortunately subject to this misogyny when Ophelia is ordered by Claudius and Polonius to meet with Hamlet while they eavesdrop on their conversation, "get thee to a nunnery. Why, wouldst thou be a / breeder of sinners?...What should such fellows as I do crawling between / earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves all, believe / none of us". Hamlet urges Ophelia to join a nunnery, or brothel in the church, so she can keep her virginity, and not give birth to "sinners", giving us an insight into the shadowy lens that Hamlet looks the world through. During this tirade, Hamlet also ceases to see both himself and Ophelia as individuals, and instead, refers to the men as "we". This use of pronoun shows that Hamlet is so blind on the differences that men and women play in society, combined with his inherent misogyny, that he fails to see the hurt that he is causing Ophelia. Hamlet then ends his tirade by generalizing all women into one misogynist ideology. 'I have heard of your paintings well enough. God hath given you a face and you make yourselves another. You jig and amble, and you lisp, you nickname god's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance". Hamlet overgeneralizes women by saying that they are inherently two-faced, a dangerous sentiment, if it was said in today's day and age, one would be labeled a sexist. Hamlet also says that women pretend to put on a seductive mask, and get away with it, because they act like they do not know any better, putting women in a box by saying that they lustfully show off their bodies and lust to appease to men's desires in search of a better life.

Misogyny is a deeply rooted piece in the play Hamlet by William Shakespeare that characterizes women by their sexuality, and relegates women to traditional gender roles in a patriarchal society. Both female characters in the play are seen as secondary beings with essentialist feminine flaws just because they are women. Gertrude, who is in the box of canon literature, a stereotype of a sex driven female, and Ophelia, who's feelings are secondary in the eyes of all the men she interacts with in the play, objectified and treated as a commodity because of her chastity, and has the inability to think for herself in most, if not all situations. Even the main character of Hamlet, is shown as having misogynistic viewpoints and ideologies in the differences between men and women, and is seen patronising the two women at some point in the play. As to reflect in the real world, maybe the problem of misogyny can be solved if we looked at individuals from who they are and their actions, instead of collecting their common stereotypical traits, in order to form a collective, overbearing, and overgeneralized group that they belong to.

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