

Good essay about melancholy, madness, and misogyny: a literary analysis of act 1,...

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



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" Hamlet is a coarse and barbarous play. One might think the product is a work of a drunken savage's imagination."—Voltaire

After being considered to be Shakespeare's well-known, most popular and most loved play for some time, many persons would tend to disagree with Voltaire's quote. It can be assumed that Hamlet has retained its popularity for a decent period of time because it deals with very topical and interesting issues. As it relates specifically to Act 1, Scene 2, many critics dispute the significance of this scene to the overall development of the play's themes and plot structure. In fact, some might consider that this scene from Hamlet is not important to the development of the plot, but, rather, it is the scene, Act 1, Scene 5, where the ghost of Hamlet's father tells how Hamlet's father was killed by Claudius, his brother, is actually the central driving force of the main plot within Hamlet; nevertheless, Act 1, Scene 2 within Hamlet is crucial to the development and unfolding of the plot of the play, as it should, since it focuses on its major themes of melancholy, misogyny, and madness. The scene depicted in Act 1, Scene 2 of William Shakespeare's Hamlet shows the disorder or the madness within the state of Denmark and this madness, in turn, reflects Hamlet's mental state. For instance, in the following lines spoken by Claudius in the opening of the scene gives a subtle hint of the condition of the state of Denmark: " Young Fortinbras, / Holding a weak supposal of our worth/Or thinking by our late dear brother's death/ Or state to be disjoint and out of frame" (1. 2. 26-29). In other words, Claudius is saying that Fortinbras assumes that since Hamlet's father is now in disorder,

disarray, or "disjointed." However, it is quite ironic that Claudius should say this because in the Elizabethan Society, the societal order was rigidly stratified with king occupy the most important position after God. The Elizabethan audience would have recognized this irony even more after listening to Hamlet's first soliloquy, specifically lines 150-157. This shows the moral disorder which is lurking at beneath the veneer of a happy royal marriage, which would later on be exposed within the play by the ghost of Hamlet's father. This disorder within the state of Denmark caused by the death of the head of state, Hamlet's father, can be likened to a mental disorder or madness.

Additionally, in Claudius's opening speech contradictory terms are mixed together such as: "green" and "death"(ll. 2, 3) "our sometime sister" and "our queen"(ll. 12, 13), "mirth in funeral" and "dirge in marriage (ll. 18, 19). This juxtaposition of contradictory terms subtly allude to the disordered or chaotic state of affairs within the kingdom of Denmark, as a result of Hamlet the elder's death. The disorder within Denmark has created a maddening world, especially for Hamlet, who cannot understand his mother's almost insensitive response to his father's death.

The scene depicted in Act 1, Scene 2 of William Shakespeare's Hamlet shows the disorder or the madness within the state of Denmark and this madness, in turn, reflects Hamlet's mental state. For example, in Hamlet's first soliloquy in Act 1, Scene 2, lines 129-136, there is a slight indication of a mental disorder, as depicted by the following: "Oh, that this too, too sullied/flesh would melt,/Thaw, and resolve itself into/dew,/ Or that the everlasting had not fixed his canon 'gainst self slaughter" These lines reveal

Hamlet's desire to commit suicide. Some might argue that a person having suicidal tendencies are symptoms of a mental instability or disorder. If that line of reasoning was to be used in analyzing these lines spoken by Hamlet, then one can assume that the death of Hamlet's father had caused him have a mental disorder (namely depression), and this mental depression is the cause of him having suicidal tendencies. Hamlet's depressed or disorder mental state is not only affected by the death of his father, but by his mother's reaction to his father's death, as expressed by the following lines:

" Let me not think on't. Frailty, thy

A little month, or 'ere those shoes

were old

With which she followed my poor

father's body,

Like Niobe, all tears. Why she, even

she--

O God, a beast that wants discourse

of reason

Would have mourned longer!--

married with my uncle (1. 2. 150-161)

Note the unequal lengths of the lines, which give them a disjointed appearance on the page. This disjointedness reveals the disjointedness, disorientation, or disorder of Hamlet's mind, as he tries to come to grips with

what his mother has done by marrying his uncle within a " little month" after the death of his father. Of course, madness is a prevalent theme throughout the play with Hamlet putting on an " antic disposition" or pretending to be mad so that he could deceive persons concerning his intentions and motives. He promised to this to the ghost of his father in Act 1, Scene 5, line 194.

Ophelia, who was in love with Hamlet, later went mad drowned herself after love went unrequited in Act 4, Scene 7.

The scene illustrated in Act 1, Scene 2 of Hamlet attempts to contradict the overall mood of the play, which is melancholic; however, it is pretended and is a sham, and subtly alludes to some aspects of metatheatre. The scene illustrated in Act 1, Scene 2 of Hamlet attempts to contradict the overall mood of the play, which is melancholic; however, it is pretended and is a sham, and subtly alludes to some aspects of metatheatre. The scene found in Act 1, Scene 2 is staged in a room of state at the Elsinore Castle, and diction being used by Claudius attempts to contrast the overall mood of the play which is melancholic; however, as indicated previously this does not work as pleasant words such as " green" " mirth" " marriage" are juxtaposed with " death", " funeral" and " dirge" (ll. 2, 3, 18, 19). Of course, these words do not correspond with each other, they do not fit. It can be assumed that Shakespeare is allowing the audience to recognize that this scene does not fit in with the rest of the play. Additionally, the diction also suggests that Claudius's attempt at creating a joyful atmosphere is a weak one because it is pretended. This is quite ironic because pretence, especially within the concept of metatheatre, is a prevalent one throughout the play, as Hamlet seeks to " put on an antic disposition" as he promises the ghost of his father

in Act 1, Scene 5, l. 194. An example of pretence within the concept of metatheatre is exemplified in Act 3, Scene 2, where Hamlet orders "players" or actors to act out a scene similar to the one the ghost of his father described of how Claudius killed Hamlet's father couple acts before. The scene within Act 1, Scene 2 initially reveals to the reader Hamlet's misogynistic attitudes towards women. The scene within Act 1, Scene 2 initially reveals to the reader Hamlet's misogynistic attitudes towards women. Hamlet's misogynistic attitude towards women is revealed in the following quote: "Frailty, thy/ name is woman!" (1. 2. 150). Of course, as stated previously, Hamlet is making this statement in reference to how quickly Gertrude decided to marry so quickly after the death of his father. This negative attitude towards women is further portrayed in his interactions with Ophelia later on in the play. For instance, in Act 3, Scene 2, where he insulted Ophelia and her social standing as a lady by asking her if he should lie on her lap, and thereby, treating her like a common whore (line 105). Ophelia told him that she thought "nothing", and Hamlet then said the following crude statement: "That's a fair thought to lie between maiden's legs" (line 111). In Elizabethan times, the woman's vagina (or specifically clitoris) was sometimes referred to as "nothing." Hamlet refused to give Ophelia the courtesy of behaving like a gentleman, and speaking to her respectfully.

In conclusion, Act 1, Scene 2 is important to the overall development of the thematic issues and the Hamlet's plot's structure because this scene allows the audience to glimpse how Shakespeare treats the thematic issues of melancholy, madness, and misogyny which are crucial to the unfolding of the

play's plot, and the creation of the conflict within the play. It is to be believed that Hamlet will always be Shakespeare's most popular play, as it deals with issues which are still relevant for our time; thus, concurring with Ben Johnson's statement which said that Shakespeare was not only for the Elizabethan age but "for all time."

Work Cited

Shakespeare, William . " Hamlet: Prince of Denmark." Gutenberg Project. Gutenberg Project, n. d. Web. 7 Dec. 2013. .