

# Feminism and the tempest essay sample

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Feminist theory aims to understand the nature of inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. To do Feminist Research is to put the social construction of gender at the center of one's inquiry. Feminist theory is about seeing gender as a basic organizing principle which profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete conditions of our lives. In the play *The Tempest*, by William Shakespeare Miranda is a perfect example of a woman's role in literature from a feminist theorist perspective. In *The Tempest*, Miranda's prescribed gender role and physical stature account for her naturally being subordinate to males.

In Literature there are many instances when women are objectified solely because of their physical stature. Since women are generally smaller in size, her social hierarchy is inferior to the man. Gender is defined as masculine or feminine attributes that are socially fixed to their biological sex in opposition to each other. Scholar Germaine Greer states that, "the male sex/masculine gender embrace the positive side of the opposition and the female sex/feminine gender, the negative side"(4). A woman's physical stature excludes her from being superior, since superior is determined by masculine attributes. Furthermore, Joanne S. Frye, author of *Living Stories: Women and the Novel*, states that, images of women are analyzed by men based on physical appearance, as opposed to intellectual capacity. A woman is not seen for her inner beauty, only judged by what can be identified by bodily manifestation. The woman's physical appearance is a primary factor as to why she is seen as subordinate to the male.

In *The Tempest* Miranda is often objectified solely because of her physical appearance. To explain, Miranda is seen a beautiful woman, nothing more

that a sex object. Ferdinand's first thoughts of Miranda are revealed when he states, "most sure, the goddess/on whom these airs attend! – vouchsafe my prayer/may know if you remain upon this island" (1. 2. 505-507). Without knowing this woman's name Ferdinand is interested and hopes that she inhabits the island he was trapped in. Physically not only is Miranda seen as a sex object by Ferdinand, her physical stature prompts Ferdinand to believe she is not as capable as himself in a physical task. An example of this is when Ferdinand states, "no precious creature... I had rather crack my sinews, break my back, than you should such dishonor undergo while I sit lazy by"(3. 1. 30-33). Ferdinand is against Miranda helping him in physical duty solely because of her physical appearance. Clearly, Miranda is objectified by her status as a woman, objectified both physically and sexually through out the play.

In literature women often thrive on affection, while men thrive on individualism. The inability for a woman to stand alone makes her vulnerable for attachment; regardless of the reality of her ignorance. Dr. Sandra Harding states that masculinity is defined through separation, while femininity is defined through attachment."(60). It becomes clear that females are supplementary vulnerable by individualism, while men thrive upon it. Also, women and men handle, and experience issues of dependency differently; women will look to others for help while men will face things on an isolated level. When a woman cannot handle themselves as well as men on their own, they naturally become inferior to them.

In *The Tempest* Miranda is the only female character; the fact she had no female companion made her vulnerable to search in ignorance for attachment. Ferdinand is the character who rescues her from isolation on the island and offers her both his love and a crown. When Miranda states, “ I am your wife if you will marry me. If not, I’ll die your maid. To be your fellow you may deny me, but I’ll be your servant whether you will or no.” (3. 1. 70-74) Miranda fulfills her need for attachment and feels as though she can prosper with the aid of her “ love”. Furthermore, in the play Miranda is very dependant on her male figure (Prospero); she had no say as to what transpired and was never even told the truth as to how she ended up in the predicament she lived her whole life in (trapped on as inhabitant island), thus exemplifying the ignorance her social hierarchy (as a female) labels her with. An example of this is when Miranda states, “ you have often Begun to tell me what I am but stopped And left me in bootless inquisition.” (1. 2. 35-40) it becomes clear that Miranda is the inferior character in this situation and this is the result of the dependency she relied on from Prospero. Miranda’s need for attachment is a main reason why she becomes inferior to the male characters in the play that plot action in solidarity.

If a woman’s priority is to pledge obedience to the male; she will become inferior to him. Tita Baumlín author of the book *Holy Estates: Marriage and Monarchy in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* states that, “ in Shakespeare’s time father’s interactions with daughters encourage them to be subordinate”. If the female listens to the fathers words as commands she will then become an object that can be controlled by that male figure. Although every father would demand respect, there is a line between respect

and objectification. Baumlin also argues that marriages were meant to replicate the social and political order, “ metaphors of bondage in marriage tracts of the period were intended to reinforce the ruler’s absolute power”. Criteria such as these demonstrate how females are clearly objectified; when the females’ number one priority is to please the male, that female has become inferior to him.

In *The Tempest* there are several examples where a women’s role in a relationship creates inferiority. Claribel, although loath to marry her father’s choice, had to weigh her obedience to her father against her own desires. Obviously, her obedience to her father weighed more heavily than her own desires about marriage. Furthermore, throughout the play Miranda has no choice but to accept what the male tells her. For example, several times in the span of one conversation Prospero demands Miranda listen to him when he states, “ dost thou hear?” (1. 2126). Not only does Prospero demand Miranda listen, he picks and chooses what information Miranda will know and what he will hide from her. To explain, while speaking with Miranda Prosper puts her to sleep with his magic so that she would not hear what he said. When Prospero states, “ here cease more questions thou are inclined to sleep...I know thou canst not choose.” (1. 2. 220-222) Miranda’s natural instinct to obey the male figures in her life creates a level of superiority to those males.

To conclude, Miranda’s prescribed sexual category and physical physique account for her naturally being secondary to males. Miranda was objectified from a feminist perspective because of her physical stature. Her appearance

led Miranda to be seen as a sex object, and less than capable of completing a task that a male would be expected to handle. Furthermore, the females need for attachment, clearly expressed by Miranda makes her inferior to men who are more competent on their own. With this in mind, when a woman's priority is to be obedient to her male figure, whether it is her father or soul mate, that male will dominate the relationship and control the affairs that take place. Feminism is the lens that brings into focus particular questions. The over ideological goal of feminist research in human sciences is to correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position. The next time you read a piece of literature the illustrations of different strands of feminist theory will forever stand in your mind.

#### Work Cited

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