

Hamlet coursework essay



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“ Hamlet thou has cleft my heart in twain”

Most productions present Gertrude and Ophelia as sympathetic victims of Hamlet’s cruelty. As your starting point, refer to either the closet scene or the nunnery scene and, paying close attention to the language, show how it reveals the interaction between Hamlet and the women characters here and throughout the play.

Referring to Hamlet’s portrayal of a cruel character, the major victims that first come to mind are Ophelia, his girlfriend possibly his future wife and Gertrude, his mother.

The significance of Hamlet’s attitude and behaviour shows an important aspect of the play in the relationship with two women. It shows clearly intense relationships which cause Hamlet a certain amount of pain. He is trying to portray madness in his character with Ophelia in the nunnery scene and with Gertrude in the closet scene. Perhaps the reason of madness towards Gertrude is the fact that she has married his uncle. The reason behind the cruelty towards Ophelia could also be the fact that it is a kind of cruelty trying to push Ophelia away from him.

In the scene known as the closet scene we can see Hamlet and Gertrude alone altogether. He starts with an accusation “ You are the queen, your husband’s brother’s wife...” Shakespeare uses such language in order to strengthen Hamlet’s character, which tries to trap Gertrude, informing her of the incestuous performed by her with her husband’s brother. This dialogue in its own sense creates the atmosphere and the theme of the scene. Gertrude in her own self does fear Hamlet “ What will thou do? Thou wilt not murder

me...” this emphasises on the fear held within Gertrude, maybe it is the body language or rather face expressions of Hamlet towards Gertrude which causes to outbreaks the fear within her. As Hamlet kills Polonius, the uncertainty in the atmosphere becomes as strong as Hamlets anger, in this case we can say that it’s more of his madness which is portrayed. It shows to what extend he may go to take revenge, despite the fact that he is creating this commotion in the presence of his mother. Another factor is that he could be showing his power in order to prove a certain point to his mother, that he the dominant person of the conversation. Knowing the fact that he is holding a knife, yet he attempts to put the knife through the curtain, leading to the killing of his own love’s father, Polonius. As he gets more aggressive and violent in the scene, it shows the sort of respect he actually does have for his mother. Hamlet is not just portraying the dominant character yet also victimising his own mother.

There have been many times in the scene where Gertrude has tried to confront Hamlet proving her innocence but Hamlet insults her leaving her in the state where she has nothing to say in defence of proving her innocence. When Gertrude says “ what have I done, that thou dar’st wag thy tongue in noise so rude against me?” to what Hamlet replies, “ Such an act, that blurs the grace and blush of modesty” he accuses her of breaking the marriage with his father, due to adultery, and sexual desires, without even giving her a chance to speak her heart. Hamlet through his language which is not directly stating her into any category, but classes her as a desperate woman, who has no self respect, and has no mind to think for herself. But again this is quite typical of a man to think or say to a woman in Shakespeare’s times.

“ You cannot call it love, for at your age” hamlet clearly stereotypes her of her age, accusing her of this false marriage that she has had, with his father’s brother. Shakespeare has tried to show a contradiction between a mother and son relationship with the status of a man and a woman in the 12th century.

After all the accusation Hamlet succeeds in provoking Gertrude’s conscience into the guilt of the incest that she has performed, as the guilt is building up in Gertrude’s heart Hamlet shows another vibe of his madness by making it seem as if the Ghost is in the room where as Gertrude cannot see the sight of the Ghost. The madness of Hamlet portrays the assuredly to Gertrude that she is not at fault, but Hamlet himself is in sick health. At every point of the conversation she is reminded of the relationship rather the incest that has taken place by her own son, degrading her self values. “ Good night-but go not to my uncle’s bed...” Shakespeare uses such strong language for a Mother through her Son, emphasising on the fact that it is Hamlet who has used such language yet a mother being a woman has a control on her tongue even after hearing such insults and abuses from the person who is supposed to love her the most in her life. The way Hamlet feels about his mother reflects his views of women overall, the betrayal of women.

In the Nunnery scene, we can see that Hamlet is dominating Ophelia, which is a typical olden day’s interaction between a man and a woman. Ophelia takes many insults and abuses from Hamlet, even though knowing that he is completely turned mad, she still loves him and wants him the way he is. This particular aspect shows the true love of Ophelia, yet she does not answer him back and takes all the insults portraying the feminine weakness. Hamlet

mock Ophelia by saying “ Go to thee nunnery...” he is trying to make a point that, she is innocent, she will be corrupted by a man. The only way she will be able to save her virginity is if she went to the nunnery, again mocking her feelings and playing with her emotions. In a sense that is ways of making some one suffer by the strong language.

Perhaps Hamlet himself is aware of the fact that whatever has happened or will happen Ophelia still does love him, despite who ever is behind the reason of them two being drifted apart true love always comes back. Another reason could also be the fact the he is showing the kind cruelty towards her to make such circumstances in which they both drift apart. In this scene hamlet is basically challenging Ophelia of her innocence, that she will corrupt someone. We can see how much into himself hamlet is in this scene, mocking every single sentence spoken by Ophelia, he is too busy erupting his anger out that is leading to Ophelia being pressured by her love and by her own father.

Referring back to the scenario of Ophelia and Gertrude being the sympathetic victims of Hamlet emphasises the depth of the cruelty shown by hamlet in the nunnery and closet scene. At both times he has dominated both the women. Through such strong language even his mother, thinking that she has jeopardised the relationship, of a son and a mother only because of her uncontrolled sexual desires. She has been a major victim of Hamlet's at every point of the play criticised of the incest that she has performed.

Ophelia in another aspect has also been a major victim of Hamlet's she again has been dominated and controlled by Hamlet and his madness. " Hamlet thou has cleft my heart in twain" this is the evidence of the impact of Hamlet's cruelty which caused Ophelia pain and suffering. She is accused of betraying him, using him for sexual desires only. Whereas Ophelia even now has faith in him. The murder of Ophelia's father that was done by Hamlet again, leads to the unstableness of her mental state. In which she commits suicide. If it wasn't for Hamlet's madness and his urge of taking revenge, he might have still had Ophelia if she had been treated in a non-victimising way.

The whole perspective of women being the victim's of cruelty shows the impact held on women at the times of Shakespeare. If one comes to think that what is cruelty? Cruelty is simply causing pain or suffering. Hamlet has caused pain or even suffering quite deliberately using harsh language to her girlfriend and mother. His main objective to cause pain and suffering for Gertrude is quite blunt, the fact that she has married her husband's brother, Hamlet at every point tried to insult her through is planned attack on his mother. This at some point of the scene does get interrupted by the unexpected caused by Hamlet to Polonius, yet Hamlet tries not to devote his attention and carries on with his mission to pursue Gertrude's conscience. It's reminding her that it is an incest, which in the Shakespeare times was considered being against the Catholic Church rules.

In the 12th century the dominant religious was catholic, Christianity. The Catholic Church had forbidden the incest and all life's major decisions were practically run by the church. People that did commit incest were then accused of adultery therefore in the consequences had to be taken around the

town to be mocked and humiliated by the public. The subordination of woman at the Elizabethan times was that the lives of women were controlled by the men. Therefore if a woman became a widow, she was regarded as have loosened value. At a widow stage of her life a women could not be independent or have any rights to stand up by men, till she was remarried. Therefore whilst a woman was unmarried of her young stage of life, her life would be controlled by her father. As she would get married her life would then be controlled by her husband. Women had no power and were subject to the authority of men.

This shows why Ophelia had to obey her father Polonius and do as he said, because at the time she had no choice considering the time they were living in. perhaps what Hamlet really wanted from Ophelia is to forget the love they shared and move on, because they future may have held nothing in store for Ophelia and Hamlet. Hamlet in his own position devoting all his attention towards taking revenge, he would want his mother's side and to be away from Claudius. Gertrude in another sense had to marry the king, to stay within the royal family, and re-gain the status that she had lost by the death of King Hamlet.

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