

Portrayal of women in hamlet essay



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“ Frailty, Thy name is woman,” quoted by Shakespeare himself, alluding to the claimed inherent weakness of womens’ character. In Shakespeare’s Hamlet, women are portrayed in a very sexual manner and are looked down upon, which is a result of the Prince’s deep seated issues. One issue that Hamlet faces is misogyny towards women, which is an ongoing problem throughout the entire play. The second issue that Hamlet deals with is the Oedipus Complex, which can be seen through the remarks that he makes to his mother.

The portrayal of misogyny is seen throughout various sections of the work. Hamlet seems to direct his misogyny mainly toward Ophelia, which is revealed by making sexual comments, metaphorically referring to Ophelia as a puppet, and putting Ophelia’s worth and chastity into question. First, during the play directed by himself, Hamlet starts to make sexual remarks to Ophelia. Hamlet snickers as he says, “ That’s a fair thought to lie between a maids’ legs” (Act III, ii, 114).

This demonstrates his misogyny, as Hamlet is sexually humiliating Ophelia in front of the audience, including her father Polonius. Following, Hamlet uses the metaphor of a puppet, hinting to Ophelia that she shall ‘ perform’ for him sexually. Hamlet suggests that he could “ interpret between [her] and [her] love if [he] could see the puppets dallying” (Act III, ii, 236-237), he also mentions that she could “ take off [his] edge” but it might make her moan a little (Act III, ii, 239). Essentially, Hamlet is telling Ophelia to perform a little ‘ puppet show’ of love for him.

In addition, Hamlet puts Ophelia's worth and her chastity into question.

Hamlet asks, " Are you honest? / Are you fair? / That if you are honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty" (Act III, si, 103-108). By Hamlet asking if Ophelia is chaste, is also puts her worth into question because during the time period, a females worth was measured by her virginity. If she were unchaste, no man would want her. These three points display the issue that Hamlet has with women by the misogynous comments he makes.

Not only is misogyny used to belittle women, there can also be signs of this seen through how Hamlet relates with the Oedipus Complex. The Theory of the Oedipus Complex is shown through the character of Hamlet in various aspects such as how he looks down upon his mother, becoming angry with his mother's choices, and expressing the disgust that he has toward the thought of his mother being with Claudius. Hamlet frowns upon his mothers quick remarriage after his fathers tragic death. Hamlet explains in anger, " A bloody deed.

Almost as bad, good mother as kill a king and marry with his brother" (Act III, iv, 28-29). This displays the Oedipus Complex, as Hamlet discovers that subconsciously he envies his uncle as he wishes to do the same. This can also relate to the theme of loyalty versus betrayal as Hamlet is hinting at how un loyal his mother is being toward his father and how much betrayal Hamlet is feeling from her. Next, Hamlet thought very highly of his mother until she married Claudius and he becomes very angry with her.

Hamlet exclaims, "Thou wretched rash, intruding fool farewell/ I took thee for thy better" (Act III, iv, 32-34). Hamlet has realized that he was mistaken about his mother being a good person and he is now releasing all of the anger he holds against her. Finally, Hamlet tells his mother of the disgust he has of the thought of her making love to Claudius. Hamlet describes, "Nay, but to live in the rank sweat of an enseamed bed/ stew'd in corruption/ honeying and making love over the nasty sty!" (Act III, iv, 92-94).

Hamlet is commenting on the fact that it is both ironic and disgusting that his mother is 'honeying' or sweet talking as she is making love to a 'nasty pig sty' referring to Claudius. This could also give out a clue to the audience that Hamlet is jealous of Claudius, that he should be the one his mother is sweet talking instead. This strengthens the proof that Hamlet is still stuck in his phallic stage. These three points come to an agreement that Hamlet may be struggling with the Oedipus Complex.

The two issues of misogyny and the Oedipus Complex come together to prove how the women in Hamlet's life are portrayed as sexual deviants and inferiors. The women of the Prince's life are portrayed very sexually and are looked down upon in Shakespeare's Hamlet, due to his deep seated issues. The first issue of misogyny directed toward Ophelia revealed Hamlet's struggle. Also, the theory of the Oedipus Complex is evident throughout the way Hamlet speaks to his mother. To conclude, Hamlet's issues persuade him to act in a certain, hateful and sexual way toward the women in his life.