

The treatment of women in hamlet and the revengers tragedy



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Compare the treatment of women in hamlet and the revenger??™s tragedy (act 1). In Jacobean times women were seen as being submissive to men.

They were seen in the light of the binary oppositions. While men were active, women were passive. Men were expected to speak whilst women silently listened. In The? Revenger??™s Tragedy? women were viewed as sexual objects, this is shown when Lussurioso wanted Castiza for his sexual pleasure. Moreover, in hamlet women were viewed the same. Ophelia would seem in every respect having the mercy of the male figures within her life, however, is certainly a victim figure. Hamlet??™s treatment of Ophelia is wrong in every way. He alternates between protests of undying love and cruelty such as his cold and accusing speech in the nunnery scene.

In brief, Hamlet throughout the play uses Ophelia as a tool in his revenge plan. It could be suggested that it is Queen Gertrudes behavior that has prompted Hamlets unforgivable treatment of Ophelia. She disobeyed the patriarchal bounds of femininity by marrying so soon after her husbands death and not remaining in passive grief and obedient devotion to his memory. This provides Hamlet with a model of womens infidelity. His bitterness leads him to believe that all women are untrustworthy.

Ophelia suffered as a result of Hamlets patriarchal values of womanhood. With regard to her father and brother, the two direct ruling male forces in her life, makes her a victim. Dutifully obeying their views against pursuing a relationship with Hamlet, she rejects his advances, which of course she believes to be genuine. Poloniuss conviction, in which one cant help believing, stems from his heart desire to marry his daughter off to such an

eligible husband as the prince of Denmark, rather than a genuine belief in his daughters role in causing Hamlets madness.

When Hamlet murders her father, Ophelia enters a double realm of guilt, believing herself to be to blame for both Hamlets madness and her fathers death. As a result she becomes mad. Although at one level this decline into madness sets Ophelia up definitely as a victim figure, on a deeper level perhaps her madness itself can be seen as Ophelias active rejection of patriarchal restraint.

By women going against patriarchal restraint and the social expectations of being quiet, passive and desiring nothing, the audience at the time probably felt ill at ease and uneasy. It was turning their world upside down just as it would be during time of carnival.