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Misogyny in the Madness: A Feminist Critique of Hamlet's Treatment of Gertrude and Ophelia

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Abstract

This research critically reassesses William Shakespeare's Hamlet through feminist and human rights perspectives, emphasizing the toxic masculinity and microaggressions embedded in Hamlet's treatment of the female characters, Gertrude and Ophelia. The study challenges the traditional interpretations of Hamlet as a tragic hero, framing him as a hypocritical, narcissistic character driven by toxic masculinity and moral ambiguity. By contextualizing Hamlet's actions within the socio-cultural norms of Shakespeare's time, this analysis exposes the play's reinforcement of patriarchal structures and the marginalization of women. The research underscores the significance of recognizing and addressing these harmful gender dynamics in both literary criticism and broader societal contexts. Through a close examination of the narrative and character interactions, the study emphasizes the need for a critical reassessment of Hamlet and its portrayal of gender and power, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of the play's impact on contemporary discussions around feminism and human rights.

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Introduction

Reading *Hamlet* in today's age is quite disturbing, especially in the context of Hamlet's actions towards Ophelia and Gertrude. While there is no denying Shakespeare's artistic genius, there are certainly some gruesome feminist concerns that need to be discussed again, given the transformative ability of the audience or the reader. Contextualizing Shakespeare's misogynistic discourse within a socio-cultural scenario can be one way of making sense of Hamlet's behaviour towards the women involved in his life, but it is not

without the danger of belittling feminist concerns about the role of weak characterization and the little or no voice given to female characters.

This study seeks to highlight the human rights violations and microaggressions committed by Hamlet in the context of his relationships and behaviour towards his mother, Gertrude, and his lover, Ophelia, as well as his murder of Polonius. The hypocritical, unapologetic, and flawed nature of Hamlet makes him an overwhelmingly confused and unimpressive character, exhibiting traits such as narcissistic tendencies and

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toxic masculinity. This study reconstructs the suggestive inhumane expectations from women in Shakespeare's narrative that lead to microaggressions and human rights violations, making the point that Hamlet is not just an artistic failure but a frail and spineless character.

"Frailty, thy name is woman" (*Hamlet*, 1601)

Hamlet is one of the most popular plays of Shakespeare. There has been considerable criticism of Shakespeare in postcolonial literature, but this study takes a humanistic approach to this tragedy. It is interesting to note that a humanistic approach ultimately leads to feminist concerns; the most tragic characters in this play are the female characters. This study counters Hamlet's perception of women. Most of the literature and criticism on this play contextualize Hamlet's actions and frame them around his own trauma and madness. Gertrude is more of a villainous character for Hamlet than Claudius. Gertrude is brutally humiliated by Hamlet at various instances in the play. Legally, Gertrude is not in the wrong; she has nothing to do with the murder of the king. She marries Claudius after the king's death and has no knowledge of Claudius' antagonistic tendencies.

The issue of Hamlet's treatment of Gertrude and his character assassination is understated. The way Hamlet treats her inhumanly, with a great deal of verbal abuse, speaks volumes about his toxic masculinity and self-absorption. He lives in his own shell and interprets everything through his own subjectivity—his trauma, his father, his loss, his mother, his problems, and his grief. What about Gertrude's grief, which is not shown in the play? We do not have her soliloquies to understand her thoughts. This reflects a lack of empathy and depth in Shakespeare's characterization when it comes to female characters.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses a multidisciplinary framework to critically assess Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by integrating feminist theory and human rights discourse. Examining the play's gender dynamics, especially through Gertrude's and Ophelia's disadvantaged roles, is central to this framework. According to Akter (2024), feminist theory provides a lens through which the representation of female characters can be examined, exposing the pervasive impact of toxic masculinity and patriarchal systems.

In addition to dehumanizing the characters, Hamlet's verbal abuse and character assassination of the women in his life are examined as examples of microaggressions that mirror broader cultural views on gender. The framework also employs human rights discourse to highlight the moral implications of Hamlet's behavior, emphasizing how the autonomy and dignity of the female characters are violated. The study evaluates the ethical dimensions of Hamlet's actions

and situates them within a broader framework of human rights violations against women by examining the relationship between power, gender, and social norms.

By reinterpreting Hamlet's actions as expressions of misogyny and patriarchal entitlement, this approach challenges the conventional interpretation of him as a tragic hero. This framework analyses Shakespeare's literary devices, including characterization, imagery, and dialogue, using feminist and human rights perspectives, alongside a formalist approach, to determine how these elements support or challenge prevailing gender ideologies within the play.

Furthermore, an intersectional approach offers a more nuanced interpretation of the female characters' roles and challenges by examining how gender, class, and power interact to shape their experiences, drawing on the work of Frazer (2020). This methodology challenges conventional interpretations of *Hamlet* that often overlook the play's reinforcement of problematic gender relations by analysing the text through multiple theoretical perspectives. The study underscores the importance of addressing these issues not only in literary analysis but also within a broader cultural context, as argued by Sweileh (2024), who advocates for a more inclusive and critical approach to gender in literature and society.

Literature Review

The enigmatic and complex nature of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has captivated audiences and scholars alike for centuries, yielding a vast and diverse array of interpretations. As a cultural touchstone, *Hamlet*'s exploration of human existence, morality, and the human condition continues to resonate with contemporary audiences. This literature review aims to distill the rich and varied scholarship on *Hamlet*, examining the major themes, character analysis, and critical approaches that have shaped our understanding of this protagonist. Here are some research works on *Hamlet*:

Jacques Lacan, in his seminal work *Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet* (1959), explores the complexities of desire in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. According to Lacan, Hamlet's quest for revenge is fueled by his unconscious mind, particularly his repressed desire for his mother, Gertrude. This Oedipal fixation hinders Hamlet's ability to act decisively against Claudius, who has assumed his father's role.

"The desire of the subject...is a desire to obtain absolute difference, a difference which would be absolute difference, the difference which would make him fully himself." (Lacan, 1959, p. 25)

Hamlet's conflicting desires further exacerbate his paralysis. For instance, his unconscious desire for maternal affection and

approval, his need for validation from his father's ghost, and his struggle to establish a sense of self amidst conflicting emotions and loyalties contribute to his inaction.

"The Hamlet complex...is a complex of contradictions, a complex of the simultaneous desire for and prohibition of the object of desire." (Lacan, 1959, p. 32)

Elaine Showalter, in her article *Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism* (1985), challenges traditional patriarchal interpretations, arguing that they perpetuate negative stereotypes of women as weak and irrational. Showalter contends that feminist criticism must reclaim Ophelia's narrative, recognizing her as a symbol of female resistance.

Showalter interprets Ophelia's descent into madness as a desperate response to societal constraints that silence and marginalize her. "Ophelia's madness is a specifically feminine form of protest, a way of expressing the unspeakable and the unspoken." (Showalter, 1985, p. 78). Showalter sees Ophelia's story as a testament to women's struggles against patriarchal oppression, highlighting her attempts to assert agency and autonomy. She emphasizes the need for feminist critics to reevaluate Ophelia's character, acknowledging her complexity and challenging dominant patriarchal narratives. "Feminist criticism must take responsibility for reinterpreting Ophelia's story, for reclaiming her from the distortions of patriarchal culture." (Showalter, 1985, p. 90)

Homi K. Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), offers a postcolonial perspective on the play, highlighting the struggles for cultural identity and autonomy in the face of colonialism. He argues that the narrative can be seen as a contest between dominant and marginalized cultures, with Hamlet's character embodying the complexities of hybridity and ambivalence. Bhabha contends that Hamlet's Denmark represents a colonial discourse, where the dominant culture imposes its values on the marginalized. "The colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference." (Bhabha, 1994, p. 112).

Bhabha sees Hamlet's mimicry of his father's ghost and Claudius' authority as a form of resistance, subverting the dominant colonialist narrative. "Mimicry is a sign of a double articulation, a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline which 'appropriates' the other as it visualizes power." (Bhabha, 1994, p. 112)

Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial analysis of Hamlet further focuses on the play's ambivalence toward colonialism. He

argues that Hamlet's character embodies the colonial hybrid, caught between Western rationality and the primitive instincts of his father's ghost.

Fredric Jameson, in his Marxist analysis of Hamlet (1991), views the play as a reflection of the ideological contradictions of Shakespeare's time. He argues that Hamlet reflects a society in flux, transitioning from a traditional noble-based system to a modern, economically driven one. Hamlet's inner turmoil stems from being torn between two conflicting value systems: the old aristocratic code and the emerging selfish ethos of capitalism. "The Hamlet complex can be seen as a symptom of a transitional period between feudalism and capitalism." (Jameson, 1991, p. 23).

Jameson further argues that the play portrays a power struggle between the established aristocracy and the rising mercantile class, symbolized by Claudius's ascension to the throne. He asserts that Hamlet's iconic soliloquy reveals the commodification of human life, where existence becomes a mere transaction. "Hamlet's famous 'to be or not to be' soliloquy can be seen as a moment of reification, in which human existence is reduced to a mere commodity." (Jameson, 1991, p. 45). Through this analysis, Jameson reveals how ideology shapes cultural narratives, using Hamlet as a case study to illuminate the cultural logic of late capitalism.

Furthermore, another study by Zhao Xuefei (2022) sheds light on the nature of Hamlet's soliloquies, focusing on a formalist approach to explore various innovative figurative and stylistic devices. He also illustrates the enigma of life and death associated with Hamlet's famous soliloquy, "To be or not to be, that is the question..." (Act 3, Scene 1, p. 152), within a psycholinguistic framework.

Zhao Xuefei (2022) states, "All narrative fiction has a discourse or textual level and a story world." The choice of language is highly varied and often emotionally charged, creating a compelling atmosphere. In literary discourse, only the addresser at the discourse level above the story world—that is, the author—is the ultimate source of coherence and literary significance (Xuefei, 2022, p. 68). By shedding light on the double-layered structure in literary discourse, he successfully examines a distinctive dimension of Hamlet.

Amor (2022), in his article, examines and justifies the complex ideologies of 'meta-self', 'hyperreality', and 'transversing self' by highlighting the portrayal of disease and corruption in Hamlet and King Lear, referring to the infections and pestilences of the Early Modern period. He argues that "Hamlet's agonising self comes from internalizing the murderous order imposed on him by his father's ghost. This

interiorisation constitutes a whole cycle of gestation leading towards a new rebirth ending with the exorcism of the ghost from his mind and soul to replace it with a meta-self” (Amor, 2022, p. 69). Thus, this article provides deep insight into the creation of the meta-self by scrutinizing multiple historical, sociological, and psychological aspects during times of pandemics.

Besides all these reviews, this research article challenges the traditional notion of Hamlet as a tragic hero, instead presenting him as a complex and problematic protagonist. Through a critical examination of Shakespeare’s text, it becomes clear that Hamlet’s actions and words perpetuate harmful microaggressions, reinforcing a patriarchal society that marginalizes women and minority groups. Furthermore, Hamlet’s behavior exhibits a disturbing pattern of entitlement, narcissism, and emotional manipulation, which warrants a reevaluation of his character as a villain rather than a hero. This reinterpretation sheds new light on the play’s commentary on toxic masculinity, societal oppression, and the devastating consequences of unchecked power. By acknowledging Hamlet’s villainous nature, we can gain a deeper understanding of how Shakespeare’s work reflects and critiques the problematic attitudes of his time, and how these issues persist in contemporary society.

Significance of Study

A thematic analysis of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* offers a compelling perspective on the intricate portrayal of gender dynamics and interpersonal relationships within the play. The depiction of Hamlet’s interactions with Ophelia and Gertrude raises significant feminist concerns that resonate even in today’s society. While acknowledging Shakespeare’s literary genius, it is crucial to engage with the disturbing aspects of the play that highlight issues of misogyny, weak female characterization, and the lack of agency given to female characters.

By contextualizing Hamlet’s behavior within the socio-cultural norms of the time, we can better understand the underlying power dynamics at play and the implications for the female characters involved. The study delves into the human rights violations and microaggressions perpetrated by Hamlet, particularly in his relationships with Gertrude and Ophelia, as well as his actions, such as the murder of Polonius. Hamlet’s hypocritical and unapologetic nature, coupled with his narcissistic tendencies and toxic masculinity, paints a picture of a deeply flawed and conflicted character.

Through a deconstruction of the inhumane expectations placed on women within Shakespeare’s narrative, the study sheds light on the ways in which these societal norms lead to microaggressions and human rights violations. It challenges

the traditional view of Hamlet as a tragic hero and instead positions him as a character fraught with insecurities and shortcomings. By dissecting Hamlet’s interactions with the female characters in the play, the study underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the harmful gender dynamics present in literature and society at large.

Textual Analysis

There are many approaches and techniques through which we can examine various literary texts. Practically, it is the reader’s choice through which they can interpret any piece of literary writing according to their perspectives and prejudices. If we view Shakespeare’s writings as works of art, independent of their socio-cultural context, it becomes essential to focus on the literary and artistic techniques he employs in his poetic and dramatic works. The true essence of art lies in its craftsmanship. As Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky argued in his 1917 essay *Art as Technique*, art achieves its impact through the deliberate use of form and technique.

“Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.” (Shklovsky, 1917)

Thus, viewing *Hamlet* through a formalist lens, we can examine the innovative techniques Shakespeare introduces in his plays and sonnets. His writing style, distinguished from that of his contemporaries, is marked by clarity and precision. Shakespeare’s creative works reflect his exceptional intellectual prowess and artistic ingenuity, evident in the intricate layers of meaning and form embedded within his texts. These quotable and universal lines are embodiments of his artistic genius.

Hamlet: “What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals!” (Act 2, Scene 2, p. 130)

Lord Polonius: “Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice.” (Act 1, Scene 3, p. 78)

“The brevity is the soul of wit.” (Act 2, Scene 2, p. 116)

The ideologies and thoughts conveyed by Shakespeare through his characters’ dialogues make use of various poetic devices such as metaphor, simile, irony, foreshadowing, soliloquy, alliteration, and many more. He frequently employs idioms and phrases.

Hamlet: “Conscience does make cowards of us all.” (Act 3, Scene 1, p. 152)

“If his chief good and market of his time be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.” (Act 4, Scene 4, p. 220)

One of the most appealing features of his poetry is that he writes in both prose and verse, and these forms together create a magnetic and charismatic effect. Through his sublime and inimitable use of blank verse—a particular form of rhythm,

rhyme, and allegory his poetry produces a rich and gratifying effect for readers. Moreover, his characters' intelligence is evident in their soliloquies, where they express ideas full of wisdom and intellectual depth. From all these arguments, we can conclude that Shakespeare is a great artistic genius who is perfectly able to inculcate artfulness in his literary works.

This article, however, explores various socio-cultural dimensions and underlying feminist concerns that have been central to debates among critics and researchers, offering a nuanced examination of these perspectives.

Therefore, by interpreting Shakespeare's *Hamlet* within its social context, we can argue that he was writing in an era where women were not considered a dynamic and vigorous part of society. They did not play an active role in various spheres of life. Their lives were largely confined to male authority. They were not engaged in creative, visionary, or innovative activities. From subsequent references, we can elucidate that women had little to no voice. Their thoughts and perspectives were not self-constructed; rather, they were dependent on their brothers, partners, and guardians. This may explain why Shakespeare was unable to portray strong and assertive female characters like Austen's Elizabeth Bennet (1813), Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847), and Ibsen's Nora (1879), who broke away from traditional societal stereotypes.

Hypocrisy in Hamlet's Character:

Hamlet, the protagonist of the play, is a young university boy whose concerns about life are intellectual and philosophical. One of his most famous soliloquies, "*To be or not to be, that's the question, whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer*" (Act 3, Scene 1, p. 152), is regarded as a masterpiece of philosophical thought. He suffers from mental trauma and heartbreak because of the death of his father, Hamlet I, and the subsequent early marriage of his mother. Throughout the play, Hamlet sounds sarcastic. He utters ironic and caustic dialogues. For instance, when King Claudius expresses his sympathies toward Hamlet's grief, he says:

King Claudius: "How is it that the clouds still hang on you?"
Hamlet counters sardonically:

Hamlet: "Not so, my lord; I am too much i' the sun." (*Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 2, p. 62).

At the beginning of the play, readers express sympathy and tenderness toward Hamlet's misfortune. However, when the text is read and analyzed critically, it becomes evident that Hamlet is cynical, diplomatic, and skeptical in his actions. He possesses a confused and self-absorbed personality. He appears to be in love with Ophelia, but in reality, he does not love her. Throughout the play, he never treats Ophelia as his beloved. He consistently insults her and speaks defamatory

phrases about her chastity. In the course of a conversation with Ophelia, Hamlet argues:

Hamlet: "Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness..." (Act 3, Scene 1, p. 154),

and then, in the same conversation, he tells Ophelia not to trust him, stating that he does not love her:

Hamlet: "You should not have believed me; for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it: I loved you not." (*Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 1, p. 154).

Ironically, he does not openly confess his love to Ophelia throughout the play. We only hear a strong confession from Hamlet in the churchyard when he quarrels with Laertes during Ophelia's funeral rites:

Hamlet: "I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers, if you added all their love together, couldn't match mine. What are you going to do for her?" (*Hamlet*, Act 5, Scene 1, p. 266).

A careful examination of this scene clearly reveals Hamlet's hypocritical nature. Another act that makes him appear hypocritical in the eyes of most readers is the unreasonable murder of Lord Polonius and his friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet portrays King Claudius as the villain of the play because he kills his brother and marries his widow, but what about Hamlet himself? He murders Lord Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern to satisfy his skeptical mind, yet he never feels guilt for his insidious actions. He tells Horatio about the plan he devised to return to Denmark, saying:

"Why, man, they did make love to this employment; they are not near my conscience; their defeat does by their own insinuation grow. 'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes between the pass and fell incensed points of mighty opposites..." (Act 5, Scene 2, p. 272).

In short, from all these arguments, we can conclude that Hamlet is more hypocritical, political, and duplicitous in nature compared to King Claudius. This portrayal makes Hamlet appear as an antagonist rather than a protagonist in the eyes of many critics.

Microaggressions Used by Shakespeare in the Play *Hamlet*

No doubt, Shakespeare is a well-known literary figure who earned his name in literature by giving aesthetic compactness and thematic coherence to all his literary works. However, we cannot neglect the fact that Shakespeare has been accused of being an artistic failure by the famous T. S. Eliot. By presenting characters such as King Claudius, Lord Polonius, and Laertes, he compels readers to consider that he himself may have had misogynistic tendencies. The portrayal of Hamlet reflects the patriarchal notion that men have the right to dictate women's choices, emphasizing male control over

female autonomy. A close reading of the text reveals Shakespeare's use of microaggressions throughout the play.

In the opening scenes, Gertrude is introduced as a selfish and opportunistic woman who quickly forgets her first husband, King Hamlet, and marries his brother, Claudius. Shakespeare's depiction of Gertrude is deliberately unflattering, encouraging readers to view her with disdain. For instance, during the confrontation between Hamlet and Gertrude in her chamber after the performance of *The Mousetrap*, Hamlet harshly criticizes his mother's actions, further reinforcing this negative portrayal.

Hamlet: "Mother, you have my father much offended." (Act 3, Scene 4, p. 194)

Gertrude: "O, what a rash and bloody deed is this!" (Act 3, Scene 4, p. 194)

Hamlet: "A bloody deed! Almost as bad, good mother, to kill a king and marry with his brother." (Act 3, Scene 4, p. 194)

Furthermore, in an argument with Ophelia, Hamlet claims that a woman's love is brief:

Hamlet: "Is this a prologue, or the posy of a ring?"
Ophelia: "'Tis brief, my lord."

Hamlet: "As women's love." (Act 3, Scene 2, p. 170)

All these statements suggest that Shakespeare encourages readers to expect lifelong loyalty from women and to view remarriage as a sign of lustfulness. Moreover, by portraying Ophelia as confused, passive, and dependent, he undermines her individuality. For instance, when Polonius questions Ophelia about Hamlet's affections, she replies:

Ophelia: "I do not know, my lord, what I should think." (Act 1, Scene 3, p. 80)

This illustrates that Ophelia is depicted as lacking her own independent judgment. The following dialogues of Laertes and Lord Polonius further reveal the misogynistic and chauvinistic attitudes embedded in male characters:

Lord Polonius: "Marry, I'll teach you: think yourself a baby... Tender yourself more dearly." (Act 1, Scene 3, p. 80)

Laertes: "For Hamlet and the trifling of his favour, hold it a fashion and a toy in blood." (Act 1, Scene 3, p. 76)

Laertes: "Then weigh what loss your honour may sustain... or your chaste treasure open to his unmastered importunity."

These discussions justify the controlling and manipulative attitudes of Laertes and Polonius. Ophelia, as a rational young woman, is not bound to justify her actions, yet they exercise authority to suppress her autonomy. Being part of a patriarchal society, Laertes imposes restrictions on Ophelia, advising her to ignore Hamlet's affection and warning that love would compromise her honour. In essence, by portraying fragile female characters and dominant male figures, and by using multiple microaggressions against women, Shakespeare exposes the patriarchal dimensions of his narrative.

Feminist Concerns about *Hamlet*

Reading *Hamlet* through a modern lens exposes the toxic masculinity and hostility Hamlet exhibits toward female characters. From a feminist perspective, his treatment of Gertrude and Ophelia reflects patriarchal attitudes that objectify, silence, and blame women, revealing the play's underlying critique of gender inequality. He is a figure driven by toxic masculinity, demonstrating aggression, emotional insensitivity, and discrimination toward Ophelia and Gertrude. Hamlet: "Frailty, thy name is woman." (Act 1, Scene 2, p. 66) However, women are not inherently frail; rather, such labels undermine their integrity and individuality. Following his father's death and Gertrude's remarriage to Claudius, Hamlet repeatedly attacks his mother's character:

"O, God! A beast that wants discourse of reason would have mourned longer..." (*Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 2, p. 66)

"O, most wicked speed, to post with such dexterity to incestuous sheets!" (*Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 2, p. 66)

Later, he condemns her further:

"Such an act that blurs the grace and blush of modesty... makes marriage vows as false as dicers' oaths." (*Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 3, p. 169)

Hamlet's resentment toward Gertrude stems from her remarriage, yet she has done nothing morally wrong. She simply chooses to remarry after her husband's death. In contrast, Hamlet interprets this as moral corruption. Similarly, his remarks about Ophelia's chastity are deeply derogatory:

Hamlet: "Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?" (Act 3, Scene 1, p. 156)

"If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry... get thee to a nunnery." (Act 3, Scene 1, p. 156)

Hamlet denounces women's reproductive roles, portraying them as sources of sin. This reinforces a degrading and unjust representation of women. In essence, Shakespeare presents female characters such as Ophelia and Gertrude as weak-willed and lacking intellectual autonomy.

Human Rights Violation in *Hamlet*

As discussed earlier, Hamlet's character is deeply flawed, politically manipulative, and morally questionable. His behavior reflects multiple violations of human dignity. As Polonius remarks, "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (Act 2, Scene 2, p. 124), suggesting that Hamlet's madness is deliberate. Through this feigned insanity, he insults Gertrude and rejects Ophelia with cruelty. His language is often slanderous and ethically unjustifiable.

Hamlet: "Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell." (*Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 4, p. 196)

His interactions with Ophelia are often filled with obscene implications:

Hamlet: “God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another... get you to a nunnery.” (Act 3, Scene 1, p. 156)

In his exchange with Polonius, he mocks him disrespectfully:

Hamlet: “These tedious old fools.” (Act 2, Scene 2, p. 124)

Such remarks demonstrate a disregard for human dignity. Moreover, Hamlet commits serious moral transgressions, including the unjustified murders of Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern. These actions raise questions about justice and authority, suggesting that even royal power fails to uphold ethical standards.

In summary, *Hamlet* presents a morally corrupted world through its exaggerated and flawed characters.

Conclusion

In the tragic narrative of *Hamlet*, Shakespeare constructs a powerful critique of patriarchal society, exposing gender inequality and the damaging effects of toxic masculinity. Through Hamlet’s treatment of Ophelia and Gertrude, the play highlights the consequences of male dominance and the objectification of women. Ultimately, the play challenges the notion that women are inherently flawed, instead revealing that it is patriarchal interpretation that distorts their identity. This timeless work serves as a powerful reflection on feminism and human rights, reminding us that justice can only be achieved when the dignity and agency of women are recognized.

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