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FEMINISM IN SHAKESPEAREAN LITERATURE: ROLE OF WOMEN IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAY "HAMLET"

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Abstract

This paper is a feminist based reading and comparison of women portrayed in Shakespearean plays. The reading although compared from the feminist perspective, is not a completely blown feminist reading of Shakespeare's works. The focus of the study consists of the social circumstances and the wonderful actions of the male characters and how these impact on the lives of the female characters. The relationships between the man and the women characters are often identified by the physical and the psychological deception and their feelings. Men allow their egos and attitudes to persuade their decisions, attack spiritually and destroy virtuous women who are forced to become victims of political intrigues and machinations. This paper also tries to analyse the way Shakespeare tried to portray women as energetic, independent and not inferior to the patriarchal behaviour and nature of men during those times. He enjoyed the element of cross dressing men and women in order to hide the gender

disparity. As a result the paper tries to draw the conclusion that Shakespeare was a writer who identified feminism in his works long before the notion of feminism emerged in Europe. Truly, he is a man, who lived way ahead of this time.

Keywords: feminism, literature, Shakespeare's works, social circumstances etc

Introduction

It has often been said that Shakespeare was ahead of his own time. Ben Jonson already said in 1623, He was not of an age, but for all time, and he was right, because to this day people read his plays and adapt and appropriate his works. In the introduction to King Lear it is stated that what perhaps most distinguishes

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Shakespeare's language from everyday modern usage is its richness, density and flexibility, the cumulative effects to open up and implications in such a way that the possibilities for interpretation seem inexhaustible. This statement shows true by the v fact that there is hundreds of Shakespeare's modification from all over the world.

This paper is feminist based reading and comparison of women portrayed in Shakespearean plays. The reading, although attracted from the feminist perspective, is not a fully blown feminist reading of Shakespeare's works. The focus of the study comprises of the social circumstances and the misogynistic actions of the male characters and how these impact on the lives of the female characters. The relationships between the male and the female characters are often characterised by the physical and the psychological causes and their feelings. Men allow their egos to persuade their decisions, attack their mental health and destroy virtuous women who forced to become victims of political indifferences and machinations. Shakespeare represents two kinds of women throughout his plays:

- (i) Women who reject to submit to men and want equal rights.
- (ii) Submissive women who carry out the roles of an Elizabethan women.

Those who followed the roles of an Elizabethan woman, which is to be submissive to men, also demonstrate that bowing down to patriarchal rules does not guarantee happiness for women. Infect, it may actually lead to their domination and victimization. Furthermore, all female characters, whether submissive or not, suffered the consequences of male dominance and victimization. However, the females who lived up to the women roles of the affectionate society endure more than the women who fought against male supremacy.

The present study is based upon the exhaustive analysis of the selected plays in the light of feminist theories and deconstructive approaches. The major proposition of the study is that Shakespearean tragedies have presented and projected women in these plays as lesser beings and negative stereotypes.

The following research questions are outline to streamline the study:

- (i) Are women presented as minor and inferior to men?
- (ii) Do women hold socially and financially a uniform position with men?
- (iii) Are women presented as immoral, devoid of human values and as negative stereotypes?
- (iv) Do Shakespearean tragedies reinforce or undermine patriarchy?

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- (v) Are women presented as fully developed human beings who can decide about their own lives?

Women in Hamlet

There are only two female characters in Hamlet. Both of these characters are considered from the male and protective towards Ophelia, the dearest of Hamlet is a good daughter of her father and a best sister of her brother. She stands for what Marilyn French calls the in-law aspect of the feminine, thereby a woman is attached with divine. Ophelia absolutely obeys her parents, even at the cost of her own feelings. Laertes displays the double standard widespread in the sixteenth century for men and women. A man's honour is not a stake for indulging in affairs outside the institution of marriage. But Ophelia is to ruin her honour from any such alliance. She gives Laertes her word that she will keep his dictates in her memory and he himself will keep the key to it. There is no doubt about the superior position of the brother as compared to the sister. Ophelia's father compares her to a partridge which cannot repel for itself. Polonius makes it clear that Hamlet, being a man can walk with a longer tether than can be given to Ophelia. She loves Hamlet but, avoids and abstains herself from Hamlet when forbidden by brother and father. Subsequently, Prince Hamlet accuses Ophelia, and through her the whole woman kind of faithlessness and treachery, of hypocrisy and falsehood.

Gertrude, the wife of Hamlet the king, is portrayed as a negative stereotype of a woman. French calls such women as the outlaw aspect of the feminine. Such women are associated with darkness and sexuality. They are whores and bitches. Her remarries Claudius, the brother of king Hamlet, within days of the death of her husband. The Gertrude who does emerge clearly in Hamlet is a woman defined by her desire for station and affection, as well as by her tendency to use men to fulfil her instinct for self-preservation which of course makes her extremely dependent upon the men in her life. It is her conduct that has forced the Prince Hamlet to the thought of do suicide. She wept like Niobe at the funeral of her husband, but within days enters into a new wedlock. She is portrayed as a faithless and disloyal woman. She turns her back upon the memory of her loving husband and with rude delay marries Claudius, in violation of social and religious principles. Shocked at her misbehavior, her son Prince Hamlet utters his judgment against her mother, frailty thy name is woman. Even the prince Hamlet distracts her mother as the property of his father. He behaves like a typical male, reinforcing the dictates of patriarchy. He comes up with a sweeping and general judgement against women. Gertrude's right to remarry is not accepted. Prince Hamlet calls her mother the most pernicious woman, a damned smiling villain. Nowhere else such titles and labels are given to a man for remarriage after the death of his wife. This is

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nothing but the double standards patriarchal uphold and reinforces.

Later on, Prince Hamlet further condemns her mother for her remarriage. Earlier, a father and a brother controlled the life of a daughter and a sister, now a son keeps his eye upon her mother. Prince Hamlet the remarriage of his mother is the violation of modesty and grace. He finds it as the disgrace of virtue and love itself. He questions the right of a mature woman to decide about her life. He does not respect the choice of her mother and wants her mother to view things from his eye sight. He declares it as shameful and humiliating event. He forces his mother to retain herself from her husband. This is the presentation of patriarchy in its neat form.

Of all the works that Shakespeare created throughout his career the women of William Shakespeare's Hamlet appear to be frail, passive figures used as pawns and dying prematurely after the mistreatment of men. However, there is more to Gertrude and Ophelia complicated. Even though Hamlet is certainly not a play based on women, both female characters are more active than their vices and virtues previously lead us to believe. A closer inspection reveals that the true roles these female characters took on had purpose; these women were not as passive as they seem at first glance.

Our first concept of Gertrude is influenced by Hamlet's reply to learning she has married her brother –in-law after he has murdered her husband. Hamlet shows anger and displeasure toward her, believing that she should remain faithful to the memory of his father the king. Yet, there is no evidence that she knows of the murder Claudius has committed. It appears she has allowed herself to be tempting by Claudius, but once again there is no evidence of whether the tempting has taken place before the death of King Hamlet or afterwards.

Feminist critics analyse how women are represented in literature and the political reasons for gender roles. Barry writes that feminist critics investigate how women are represented in literature, and whether women are different from men due to biology or social constructions. Furthermore, feminist critics read literature as political in relation to patriarchy and examine female roles as women characters are viewed as the other. Barry also explains how feminist criticism has switched perspectives throughout the years.

Literature often shows that women are the emotional and passive gender in literature, but female characters with a bigger role are often dynamic and contradict these roles. Of course, there is a difference between literature written today where one is aware of the fight for women's empowerment, and literature written in the

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early 17th century. Even though literature written in the early 17th century did not deliberately illustrate inequality in contemporary society, it often shows women's condition in patriarchy. Millett argues that, within stereotypes and sex roles, there are

Differences between femininity and masculinity. She explains that it is stated that women are domestic, virtuous, and passive. While men are ambitious, aggressive, and active. However, Millett notes that these structures, where women are feminine and passive and men are active and masculine, are not based on biology.

From today's perspective, it is surprising that excessive erotic desire to be dangerous in itself. It was not evil just outside of marriage, but also inside the marriage.

In his works, Shakespeare not only describes the subjective tragic pains, but also the objective tragedy of the state and the world. In Shakespeare's plays, play is not confined to the individual, whose content is a tragedy of life in general. The tragic heroes like Hamlet are people of different eras, people and their tragedy is the tragedy of humanity at that time.

In the dramatic tragedies, why is man unhappy and what interferes with his

happiness. This is the question. In order to answer these questions correctly, the artist examines life in many ways. Shakespeare's tragedies encompass various aspects of friendship and love between individuals, society, the state, international relations and life in general. The wealth of life experience of a playwright is astonishing, as we watch or read his plays on the stage, and the Renaissance England is fully embodied in our eyes. There is hardly a sphere that the playwright did not know and did not properly reflect in his works. It is no accident that he is a lawyer, a geographer, a philosopher and a naturalist.

As the first women Shakespeare writes in Hamlet, Gertrude and Ophelia serve as the springboard for the progression of essential action that Shakespeare develops in his female characters throughout these plays. Ophelia and Gertrude lack the operative awareness that the later female characters possess. This does not mean that the women of Hamlet are irrelevant to the plot, their actions have a profound effect on the development of the tragedy. They simply lack the perceptive power of the females who follow them. While the other women use their awareness to advance their own agendas, Gertrude and Ophelia never seem to grasp as great an understanding of the world they live in as they do the women who follow them.

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The women of Hamlet are presented in a limited manner: through their relationships with the male characters in the play. In this portrayal, Gertrude and Ophelia serve as objects that the men manipulate for their own designs; but the women's reaction, which are largely symbolic, drive the tragedy to its inevitable conclusion. While Gertrude and Ophelia may have no intention of using their sexuality or madness to influence the actions of the male characters, their influence cannot be denied.

The actual strengths of the male characters are never explicitly expressed because, as Linda Bamber remarks, "Gertrude and Ophelia are psychologically and morally neutral characters who take on the colorations of the plays mood". This mood usually reflects the desires of the men. Gertrude accepts her function as the queen who serves the bidding of the king, while Ophelia allows Polonius, Laertes, and Hamlet to direct her actions. However, Gertrude and Ophelia appear to be more passive than the women in the later tragedies because they are not the only representatives of the feminine other. They share the presence of the other with the plays protagonist, Hamlet.

But the essence of Shakespeare's tragedies is not only the actual portrayal of

the era. The playwright reveals how the most complex dialect of the human spirit and the tragedy of life affected him. His works are not passive figures, crushed by external factors, and even in the drama there is no mechanistic environment. In Shakespeare's dramas, the only factor is man and his relationship to other people, nature, society and state. But the state and the strata have their own characteristics and power. They are described in a certain way, and even the forces of society and nature are portrayed as human beings. Therefore, Shakespeare humanism is not the basis of abstract understanding, but the core of his work.

Even though the extensively perceptive women share the same fate as the females acting with less awareness, the importance of the feminine other should not be judged by its inability to survive in a patriarchal society. The ingenuity and determination that the women possess in contesting the restricting order in their lives substantiates the strength of their characters. The power of feminine other lies not in assimilating itself into the patriarchal system, but in challenging the restraints it finds imposed upon its existence. Through wielding the unconventional authority of the feminine other, the women receive the attention they demand and deserve.

Actually, many manuals were provided as a practical guidance on how to

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achieve a harmonious marriage. These included positions as gender and age equality. The husband should not have been too old and it was equally essential that the low born noble man took a woman and vice versa. An important condition for a harmonious married life was according to contemporary ideas, home. Renaissance author's manuals on marriage and family pointed out that it was the woman who created the home.

It is notable that the duty of women to keep house, to be modest and not to speak much was very closely connected. A Woman who was unstable and who did not spend much time at home was regarded as dangerous because she made her husband unsure about her fidelity to him. Similarly, excessive talkativeness was damnable and suspect because it was associated with freedom, Self- confidence and rebelliousness potential for infidelity. Secretive woman was a kind woman, while a woman too talkative and bantering represented rebelliousness and evilness

It is my contention that female characters make essential contribution to these works. They are more than mere reflections of the male characters needs and desires and more than mindless victims of the men in their lives. The women do their best to deal with whatever circumstances they find themselves in. It is important for readers to remember that the society

presented in Shakespeare's tragic plays is a patriarchal world in which women are powerless to escape traditional roles. Linda Bamber suggests that the roles of the males and the females fall into the categories of the masculine self and the feminine other. She further observes that in tragedy the privileges of the self are attributed to the masculine hero". Whatever the male protagonist considers being of importance defines the makeup of the self.

The other usually represents the opposite of the self .whatever most significantly challenges the masculine self. Whatever matters most in the tragedy, comedy, or romance .Shakespeare associates with the feminine. It is this feminine other that reflects the threatening forces that challenge the agenda of the self. The females represent that part of society that the masculine self cannot control. According to Marilyn French, Women are identified with culture, control of the animal man, and morality. French notes that the feminine principle supports and nourishes the self are civilizing restraints. Since these feminine virtues reflect the power of civilization the self cannot dominate, the men in the tragedies assert their control over the females by victimizing them; it is the only way that the men can display the importance of their power. Since the menacing feminine other forces the empowered masculine self to lash out, the females often find

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themselves sharing the same agenda that guides the male protagonists in these plays.

This tragedy of the female characters can be observed through their agendas in the play. By analyzing and comparing the behaviour of Ophelia and Gertrude (Hamlet). We can see that women cannot avoid the inevitable destiny of death. What makes these deaths even more tragic is that these women serve as the unwitting catalysts for their own destruction although they cannot be held responsible for the circumstances that force them to act as they do. The women participate in their own destruction because they possess what Linda Bamber describes as “secure” other, personality traits. The women never question the stability of their own identities. Certainly none of the women in the play, Ophelia worries or changes her mind about who she is” Rather, they question their external relationships with the men in their lives. Bamber perceives this questioning of the males through the men’s inner lives. The tragic heroes, moreover, give the illusion of having an inner life. They have thoughts and feelings which are hidden from the other characters and sometimes even from them. Since the men do not even know their own emotions at times is it any wonder the women question their relationships Also, because the women do not doubt their own qualities in the presence of the hero, the men never see the women as human and consistent of change. As Bamber observes,”

women do not change in Shakespearean tragedy, they do not respond to the events of the play, to the suffering, with new capabilities”. Even though Ophelia may go mad, or the other women may be aware of the power they possess through patriarchal roles, Bamber maintains that the women never develop in response to their own feelings but to those of the males.

In essence, it is Hamlet’s obsession with his mother’s sexuality which ignites the central actions of the tragedy, without Gertrude’s sexual impulses, Hamlet would never stalk her as he does. Hamlet’s fascination blinds him to the fact that Gertrude and Claudius are separate people, who are married. According to Juliet Dusin.

Juliet Dusinberre, Gertrude’s marriage denies hamlet access to either Gertrude or Claudius as individuals. His mother’s sexual impulses cause Hamlet to transfer his revengeful feelings from Claudius to Gertrude. According to Hamlet’s way of thinking, if she loves Claudius then surely she is as guilty as Claudius in the murder of Hamlet. Peter Erickson notes that Hamlet is more upset about his mother’s individual desires, which ignore his father’s memory, than he is about Claudius actions. Gertrude stands out because her remarriage calls attention to her own separate desires, desires that Hamlet finds painful to contemplate. Since

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Gertrude's sexual desires lead her to marry her husband's brother an act usually prohibited by the patriarchy, Hamlet's inability to view his mother as a person with human needs and wants drives him to discard his role as feminine other and to take on the part of the masculine self, who must deal actively and violently with his feelings.

Marilyn French observes: the speed of Gertrude's remarriage violates Hamlet's sensibilities because of what it betrays, sexual desire in Gertrude, desire great enough to lead her to ignore standard social forms. Since Gertrude's desires violate the standards of the patriarchal order, her actions receive far more attention than those of Claudius, whose murderous actions are more acceptable to the warrior society of medieval Denmark. According to Madelon Gohike, Gertrude's cooperation in Hamlet's death is unnecessary; it hardly matters whether Gertrude was implicated in the actual death of Hamlet. Adultery is itself a form of violence and as great a crime. If adultery is as great a crime as murder, then it is not surprising that Hamlet fixes his attention on his mother's role more than on Claudius's.

Although Gertrude's sexuality initiates many of the conflicts in the tragedy, it is important to remember that she also has a strong personality. French points out that Gertrude is a loving concerned mother, a

compassionate queen, a loving wife who is also able to comment with force and intelligence on Polonius' tediousness and the player queen's protestations. Gertrude sees Polonius for what he is a manipulator and does pick up the prayer queen's tone. Furthermore, Gertrude is aware of the effects of her actions on others, as Carolyn Heilbrun observes if there is one quality that has characterized every speech of Gertrude in the play, it is the ability to see reality clearly, and to express it. Gertrude displays this ability several times throughout the tragedy. When Claudius informs her that Polonius knows what Hamlet , Gertrude responds, I doubt it is no other but the main , His father's death and our overhasty marriage' Instead of telling Claudius that Polonius has the answer, Gertrude provides the most obvious, logical explanation, neither does she merely reflect Claudius's opinion. As Heilbrun notes: it is not the statement of a dull, slothful woman who can only echo her husband's words. Moreover, in the closet scene Gertrude acknowledges her sexual violation of patriarchal value: Thou turn my eyes into my very soul, and there I see such black and grained spots as will not leave their tinct. It becomes clear that Gertrude knows that her sensual desires have ignited Hamlet's actions and Claudius's too, as she learns later in the scene.

While Gertrude is aware of her actions, effects, Ophelia represents the other

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extreme. Linda Bamber contends that Ophelia is not developed as a woman with a choice to make. While this assessment is accurate, I believe Ophelia has no other choices while Polonius lives and manipulates her. In her father's presence, Ophelia unwillingly betrays Hamlet as well as herself. Juliet Dusinberre describes this betrayal: When her father and the king overhear her conversation with Hamlet, she is inevitably false to Hamlet. Because of this deception and her alliance with his mother's husband, Hamlet categorizes Ophelia with his mother, no independent view of Ophelia is possible because he can see her only as an extension of his agonized relation to his mother. In Hamlet's mind, Ophelia represents the same violation of patriarchal standards that Gertrude presents to him, ironically, Hamlet's denial of Ophelia's feminine other occurs because she is manipulated by the masculine self of the patriarchy.

Shakespeare never allows his male characters or his readers for that matter to observe any dynamic changes in the women, their actions develop out of their initial situations. Bamber points out the significance of this fact. They may surprise us, but only because we did not understand who they were to begin with, not because they seem to become something new.

While the male characters associated with the protagonists receive critical attention the females in the major tragedies have received less attention even though their actions are essential to the tragic outcomes. Obviously, the men convey the central themes in these tragedies through their actions and personalities. But how important are the women to the workings of Shakespeare's tragic designs? Are they simply victims of the men's actions, which in turn are a reflection of the patriarchal society of Shakespeare's time, or do the female characters actually contribute some essential part of themselves to the strength and life of the four major tragedies?

Although the strong female figures die in the same fashion as the weaker ones their similar fates should not distract from their credibility as tragic characters. After all, most of the male characters involved in the initial action of the tragedies die too. The women remain vital to the central action of the tragedies because without them, the men would not be able to fulfill their roles as the major protagonists to the degree the play demand. A closer look into the characters of Ophelia and Gertrude will reveal the obvious necessity of their roles in Hamlet. Even though their awareness of the reality they live in is very limited, Gertrude and Ophelia still play major roles in the action of the play.

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Women in Shakespeare are a topic within the especially general discussion of Shakespeare's dramatic and poetic works. Main characters such as Dark Lady of the sonnets have elicited a substantial amount of criticism which received added impetus during the second wave feminism of the 1960's. A considerable number of book – length studies and academic articles investigate the topic, and several moons of Uranus are named after women in Shakespeare.

The males, however, advance from one emotion to another throughout the plays. Their actions result from an inner turmoil of feelings which originate within themselves but are prompted by a variety of external factors. Whatever the initial cause, the women's external durability only serves to irritate the unsettled mental state of the male protagonists. Since the feminine other represents the civilized reality that the masculine self is maneuvered into attacking by other outside forces, no less, the women unwillingly bring the wrath of the male characters upon themselves simply by living the life that the patriarchal world has determined for them. In attempting to deal with the male relationships in the only ways provided for them, the women find themselves placed in the pathway of destruction.

Ironically, this path to self-destruction presents itself in the social and personal awareness that flows through the female characters of the major tragedies. Shakespeare develops a pattern of increasing awareness in the roles of the female characters from the first of the four plays (Hamlet) to the last. In Hamlet, the males easily manipulate the women in order to carry out their own devices and strategies, even though Ophelia and Gertrude prove to be essential components of the tragedy, their power lies in symbolic reactions rather than in direct actions.

Feminist critics analyse how women are represented in literature and the political reasons for gender roles. Barry writes that feminist critics investigate how women are represented in literature, and whether women are different from men due to biology or social construction. Furthermore, feminist critics read literature as political in relation to patriarchy and examine female roles as women characters are viewed as the other. Barry also explains how feminist criticism has switched perspectives throughout the years. For instance, in the 1970s, the focus was on men and inequality. In the 1980s, the focus switched to the female character instead of the male character. Also, it focused on a reconstruction of the picture of women. In turn, it has empowered women's literature and female authors. Bennett states that feminist criticism looks at the complexity of

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gender differences. The literary text must be closely read to understand patriarchal and hierarchal structures.

Since the mid- 1970s, feminist critics have focused on the deconstruction of literature. Deconstruction was here a reaction towards essentialism, which was questioned. Essentialism argues that there are clear differences between men and women, and one is either a man or a woman. For instance, one is passive or active, rational or irrational, dependent or independent. It is not possible, according to essentialists, to be both passive and active. Deconstruction proposes a theory of contradiction. That is, one can be a mother and a father, and one can be rational and irrational. It can be discussed which perspective and theory are truly feminist. On the one hand, to identify what is feminine and masculine confirms gender differences and contributes to the question of patriarchy and how to prevent it. On the other hand, when a man or a woman is given an identity and characteristics because of their biological gender, it contributes to the gender gap. To fight patriarchy, the distinction of femininity and masculinity must be erased to allow men and women an opportunity to create their own identity without considering feminine and masculine characteristics.

Women have often been a man's property, though not as distinctively today in first-world countries as in history, either as a wife or a daughter. Mills compares women to slaves who must work for the family. Not only was the woman the property of her husband, but also a property of her father before marriage. The father either accepted the marriage with a certain man or denied it. It was up to him and not to the daughter he was to give away.

Although women had a significant role in the family, since she took care of the household and gave birth to continue the generation, the most significant relationship was between men, for instance, brothers-in-law or the relationship between the father and the future husband. It was unnatural for a woman to be unaware of her natural place and to not listen to her father's laws or rules. Therefore, she was established to suffer from a disease.

Hysteria was often an explanation when women did not behave according to gender stereotypes in patriarchy, for instance when they expressed sexual desires. It was unwomanly for a woman to be openly sexual. Men chose women for marriage, and they wanted them to be pure and to be devoted to their man. Millett argues that, for women, sex and lust were associated with guilt, and it was not natural for them to have sexual drives. On the one hand, women were

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objects to please men's sexual desires. On the other hand, women were to be moral, pure and virgins. Chastity was an important part of femininity. Fletcher states that the requirement of chastity was, as we have seen, the overriding measure of female gender. Woman not only had to be chaste, as we have seen, the overriding measure of female gender. Woman not only had to be chaste but had to be seen to be chaste: silence, humility and modesty were the signifiers that she was so.

This tragedy of the female characters can be observed through their agendas in the plays. By analysing and comparing the behaviour of Ophelia and Gertrude (Hamlet). We can see that women cannot avoid the inevitable destiny of death. What makes these deaths even more tragic is that these women serve as the unwitting catalysts for their own destruction although they cannot be held responsible for the circumstances that force them to act as they do. The women participate in their own destruction because they possess what Linda Bamber describes as Secure other personality traits. The women never question the stability of their own identities. Certainly none of the women in the play, Ophelia worries or changes her mind about who she is" Rather, they question their external relationships with the men in their lives. Bamber perceives this questioning of the males through the men's inner lives. The tragic heroes, moreover, give the illusion of

having an inner life. They have thoughts and feelings which are hidden from the other characters and sometimes even from themselves. Since the men do not even know their own emotions at times is it any wonder the women question their relationships Also, because the women do not doubt their own qualities in the presence of the male protagonists, the men never see the women as human and capable of change. As Bamber observes," women do not change in Shakespearean tragedy, they do not respond to the events of the play, to the suffering, with new capabilities". Even though Ophelia may go mad, or the other women may be aware of the power they possess through patriarchal roles, Bamber maintains that the women never develop in response to their own inner needs but to those of the males.

In Hamlet, there are also some personality traits which are generally believed as belonging to women, such as his hesitations, evasion of princely duties and emotional dependence. As Elaine Showalter analyses through the numerous castings of Hamlet on stage, Hamlet is often portrayed as a woman.

Even Gertrude acts out of character during the duel when she directly disobeys Claudius and drinks a toast in honour of Hamlet. Although she previously spoke her mind, this is the first time Gertrude

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disregards the commands of her husband. When Claudius cries, Gertrude do not drink, the queen replies, "I will my lord, I pray you pardon me". Even though the queen dies as a result of her defiance, her death is not in vain. Heilburn verifies this claim: Before she dies she does not waste time on vituperation, she warns Hamlet that the drink is poisoned to prevent his drinking it. Gertrude's meaningful death enables Hamlet to finally justify his revenge on Claudius for his murderous crimes. Without Gertrude's rebellion, Hamlet would not have fulfilled his duty to the ghost. Ironically, the feminine other that Hamlet denies in the beginning of the tragedy becomes instrumental in aiding the masculine self that he has embraced in order to carry out his tragic vengeance.

It is perhaps because Hamlet's emotional vulnerability can so readily be conceptualized as feminine that this is the only heroic male role in Shakespeare which has been regularly acted by women.

As the only prince of Denmark and the successor to the crown, Hamlet is expected to shoulder the duties of leading and defending his country and of redressing the ills of the society. However, when Denmark is plunged in a sea of troubles, Hamlet chooses to stay away. Hamlet knows clearly that Denmark is in crisis and declares that "The time is out of joint" but what he

says next will disappoint his people, for a prince is not expected to have complained his duty. Instead of equipping his mind with resolution to redress the social ills and destroy any foreign invasion, Hamlet unfittingly questions fate why this mission is placed on him. In this sense, Hamlet is really a coward a deserter.

Public and national affairs do not interest Hamlet whose mind is devoted to private and family matters. Throughout the play, most of the time he is engrossed in the matter of his mother's remarriage and his own dilemma, only occasionally do his remarks touch upon the big issues concerning the state. The obsession with domestic matters is generally defined as effeminate, especially in a male dominated society, and Hamlet thus becomes a woman by giving up his male domain.

The other side of the coin shows that it is due to his femininity that Hamlet maintains a tender heart toward his people. Unlike Fortinbras, Laertes and even the Greek hero Pyrrhus who are determined to avenge their fathers, Hamlet is never ready for the revenge since he cannot harden his heart to kill anyone, including his enemies. His humanistic and democratic concepts and his peace loving mind win him the adoration of his friends and subjects. Hamlet's reputation as a kind prince prevents Claudius from taking actions against him for

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fear that the public would rise in defence of Hamlet. If in peaceful times, Hamlet would surely become a good king, but the femininity in him weakens his name as a prince when faced with internal chaos and external threats.

As soon as Polonius and Laertes learn of Hamlet's affection for Ophelia, they forbid her to develop her relation with him. Both the father and brother see that her love will be futile, for Hamlet's choice of love must be circumscribed onto the voice and yielding of that body whereof he is the head. At the same time they both doubt about Hamlet's love and feel that Hamlet would not be a good lover. What Hamlet does later justifies their judgment on him.

To say fairly, Hamlet is not a libertine though his words are somewhat vulgar in some cases. He does love Ophelia and vows to be faithful to her, as he confesses at the funeral of Ophelia. A man in love not only adores his beloved, but also protects her and offers her the sense of security. Hamlet adores Ophelia's beauty and purity, but he cannot perform the role of a protector since he himself is like a girl, needing a lover's care. As mentioned earlier on, Hamlet has been living with the tender care of his parents as a mamma's boy, and his life has been one of talking but not giving, as a result, he has no idea how to love others.

Hamlet needs his mother's love, his father's protection, his friend's fidelity, his subject's admiration and his lover's adoration and devotion. In return he gives nothing to them. He chides his mother's hasty remarriage without mercy, ignores his father's order, sends his two childhood friends to death, shows no concern about the destiny of his country, and most unforgivably he indirectly causes Ophelia's death. To Hamlet, what others need and hope for go next to his own needs. That decides how he treats Ophelia. Despite his passionate declaration of love, he makes use of Ophelia, through whom he makes people believe that he has gone insane. Later, when he speaks those vulgar words to realize verbally his own sexual fancy, he never thinks about their effect on innocent Ophelia. So, what Hamlet does to Ophelia disqualifies him as a man-lover.

To the two women most important in his life, Hamlet does not give them whole hearted love and protection; instead he denounces and tortures them. He says sharply of his mother's disloyalty and loathes the fact that he is born out of her body. He distresses Ophelia when he suddenly changes his daring assertion "I did love you once" to the cruel denial "I loved you not" More than that he assigns many contemptuous terms to women.

In a society dominated by masculine culture, manly virtues are adored, femininity

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in man is repudiated. Hamlet who has an idealistic vision of man and a meditative temperament is ashamed of the dearth of masculinity in his character, especially when compared with other men around him. His father performed heroic deeds while alive, even in his ghostly form, he still walks martially in his armor. Young Fortinbras, Laertes and Greek hero Pyrrhus all have a father to avenge, and all are ready for action. In contrast, Hamlet who has a more justified cause than Fortinbras and Laertes whose fathers deserve their deaths more or less is all the time mentally wrestling with the idea of killing. He even feels inferior to his friend Horatio whose maturity and sobriety are a foil to his childishness and impetuosity. While he sees his difference in these heroic men, he is agonised to discover his affinity with women. Gertrude and Ophelia become a mirror of Hamlet's image. In Gertrude, he sees his frailty and in Ophelia, he sees his passivity. Hamlet is fully aware of these defects in his character and hates himself for that. So, many times he degrades himself to be "an ass" "a beast" "a rogue" "a slave," a villain" and a coward. In one of the monologues he makes after listening to the players reciting of Priam's slaughter, he voices both his self-hatred and his hatred of women.

Hamlet's tragedy is not merely a result of his excessive thinking, but also his reluctance to be reconciled with the femininity in him. He does show some of

masculine traits, but his too idealistic and contemplative temperament all the time direct him to compare himself with other men, but only to discover his identification with women. He naively adores the masculinity in his father. As a matter of fact, feminine and masculine traits coexist in everyone only that in some men their masculine aspects prevail and their feminine aspects tend to be ignored. The biblical myth of human creation also confirms the concept of man and woman being united in one. When God takes one rib out of Adam to make Eve, both male and female traits have been embedded in them. There is Eve in Adam and there is Adam in Eve. So a man does not need to be troubled by his anima, and a woman has no need boast of her animus. A most reasonable judgment of one's gender identity is to acknowledge and come to terms with his or her anima and animus, like Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* who can well combine the two sides of her character and finally win the adoration and affection of Bassanio.

If Hamlet's mind had not been corrupted by the patriarchal concept of woman as being an inferior gender, and if he could have broken the opposition of masculinity and femininity, he might not have been tortured too much by the feminine traits in him, and he might have been really ready for action.

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The key words connected to feminism are idea. Feminism is just an idea we have developed. Just because the word itself did not exist during Shakespeare's time doesn't mean there weren't strong women before, or that Shakespeare didn't have a thought that maybe women were worth more than what his society allowed. Perhaps he thought that women were just as strong, capable and intelligent as men were, Gender roles play such a major theme in almost all of Shakespeare's work' It's possible to think that he believed in an idea

to modern day feminism. Instead of coming out and saying something about a woman's role in society he used gender roles in his plays to show the audience that a woman is capable of conquering a man's role.

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