

Evidence that Women in the Play have Power

Act 1, Scene 5, lines 42-46

Evidence that Claudius courted Gertrude in order to make her his wife, despite the fact that she was married to the late King Hamlet

Act 1, Scene 2, lines 106-112

Evidence that Claudius attempts to ingratiate himself to Hamlet, in order to keep Gertrude happy with him

Act 4, Scene 5, lines 80-81

Evidence that Claudius pretends to have sympathy for the fact that Hamlet had left for England, despite the fact that it was by Claudius' hand that Hamlet was sent away, also in attempt to keep Gertrude happy with him

Act 1, Scene 3, lines 10-44

Evidence that Laertes tries to prevent Ophelia from getting involved with any man, but especially Hamlet

Act 1, Scene 3, 127-135

Evidence that Polonius tries to prevent Ophelia from getting involved with any man, also especially Hamlet

Act 1, Scene 2, lines 146-159

Evidence of Hamlet's anger with Gertrude for marrying Claudius and defiling the memory of her late husband and their marriage bonds

Act 3, scene 4, lines 11-218

Evidence that Hamlet seeks Gertrude's help in seeking revenge against Claudius, as, in Hamlet's eyes, her support is vital in the battle against her husband

Act 5, Scene 1, lines 257-260

Evidence that Hamlet and Laertes are seen to fight over Ophelia in her open grave

Act 5, Scene 1, lines 271-273

Evidence that being the person who loved Ophelia most is important enough to fight for in the eyes of Hamlet and Laertes

Act 5, Scene 1, lines 276-286

More evidence that being the person who loved Ophelia most is important enough to fight for in the eyes of Hamlet and Laertes

Hamlet Journal Assignment- Power of Women

As society during which Shakespeare's Hamlet takes place is patriarchal and oppressive to women, the female characters in the play are not willingly dominant, nor do they have physical power over the men. However, the women have psychological power simply because they are women, and thus are considered important, if only to carry out roles that are designed for them by society. This psychological domination is seen in both of the main female characters in the play- Gertrude, Hamlet's mother and Queen of Denmark, and Ophelia, Hamlet's presumed lover, daughter of Polonius, and sister of Laertes.

The women in Hamlet have psychological power over the men in the play, as seen in the two main female characters, Gertrude and Ophelia. The role of wife in the eyes of society during the time during which Hamlet takes place is one of obeisance and loyalty, and yet is a position of power for a woman, as married people were often looked upon with more esteem than the unwed. Thus, women were greatly coveted as wives.

Gertrude as a woman and as Queen of Denmark was especially coveted- Claudius courts her (Act 1, Scene 5, lines 42-46), even while she is married to King Hamlet, in order to ensure his position as King after he murders Hamlet, and doesn't tell her about his plan to murder her late husband, as her knowledge of his plan might lead her to get involved and prevent his plan from succeeding. Claudius also, once he and Gertrude are wed, goes out of his way to keep her satisfied, in such ways as ingratiating himself to her son, Hamlet (Act 1, Scene 2, lines 106-112) and making himself appear sympathetic to the loss of her son to England (Act 4, Scene 5, lines 80-81) in fear that she might lose interest in him. Ophelia is also presumably courted, by Hamlet- however, her brother, Laertes (Act 1, Scene 3, lines 10-44), as well as her father, Polonius (Act 1, Scene 3, 127-135), both aware of the importance of women in marriage, attempt to prevent Ophelia from giving herself to anyone. Because it occurs so soon after the death of her late husband, the marriage of Gertrude to Claudius is, in Hamlet's eyes, scandalous- he believes that Gertrude is disrespecting the memory of King Hamlet and the importance of their marriage, and becomes angry and upset at her (Act 1, Scene 2, lines 146-159). This anger towards Gertrude is an example of her psychological power over Hamlet- was she not in a role of importance in Hamlet's eyes, her marriage to Claudius would not have effected Hamlet as much, if at all. One last example of Gertrude's power over the men in Hamlet is when Hamlet goes to her for support with his scheme to kill Claudius in fear that without her help, Gertrude might serve to foil his plans (Act 3, scene 4, lines 11-218). A final example of Ophelia's psychological power over the men in Hamlet occurs when, at the end of the play, she meets her death by drowning in a river (Act 4, Scene 7, lines 166-183) . The feud between Hamlet and Laertes, piqued when Hamlet murders Laertes' father, Polonius, is even more incensed when Ophelia dies, as the two men are seen to fight, in Ophelia's grave (Act 5, Scene 1, lines 257-260), to prove their greater love for her (Act 5, Scene 1, lines 271-273 and lines 276-286). Ophelia becomes something of an icon of their dislike for one another, and thus is elevated to an even higher level of power over Hamlet and Laertes- was she an unimportant personage in the eyes of Laertes, he would not have quite as much reason for hatred of Hamlet, and the eventual death of both Hamlet and Laertes may not have occurred in the fashion that it did, with one slaying the other in a sword fight instigated by Laertes in the name of Ophelia.

The fact that the women in Hamlet have psychological power over the men has a great

effect on the outcome of the play. Were Gertrude to not have been seen as important in the eyes of Claudius and thus pursued by and married to him, King Hamlet would not have died in the way that he did, and Claudius would not have become King. Had Gertrude also not been courted by Hamlet to be a part of his plans to slay his uncle, the play might not have ended the way it did, and Hamlet may have ended up murdered before he was able to carry out his revenge against Claudius. Similar changes may have happened to the play's outcome had Ophelia not been psychologically dominant over the men in the play. If Ophelia's character was unimportant to the others in the play, especially Hamlet and Laertes, her death would not have caused such a stir between the two, and their dislike for each other might not have led to their mutual demise by the hand of the other.