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Vital Passages Response Paper (Incomplete Sample!)

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet.*

Mrs. Rutan

AP Literature and Composition

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**Hamlet’s Plague on Denmark**

*Hamlet*—by William Shakespeare—takes us through the way family, madness, and murder can destroy an entire household. The tragic fact is that even though Claudius is the first and foremost murderer in the kingdom, Hamlet’s actions cause even more pain and anguish than Claudius’ ever could have. Hamlet’s actions and his farce of madness (to catch the king), inadvertently escalates to more murder, death and actual lunacy. Shakespeare seems to show us an interesting view of the world in the 1500s and Shakespeare shows us the way gender, politics, and economic status influenced the world he lived in; thus, these things become popular themes in his tragic play set in Denmark. *Hamlet*, the play, tells us quite a bit about the world of Shakespeare and even parallels our world today.

Ophelia is an interesting character to study in terms of gender roles. Ophelia becomes one of the most tragic figures in the play; her love for Hamlet pushes her to insanity and her insinuated suicide. It seems apparent that women have little to no power in this time period. One powerful passage that reveals this gender inequality is:

Note! Citing a play is different than citing a book—keep this in mind when you write your responses for the play, *Oedipus the King*.

“[Sings] *By Gis and by Saint Charity,*

*Alack and fie for shame*

*Young men will do’t, if they come to ‘it;*

*By Cock, they are to blame.*

*Quoth she, ‘Before you tumbled me,*

*You promised me to wed’”* (IV. v. 59-64).

Depending on how you read this, it appears that Ophelia has suffered one of the worst female betrayals. Her sing-song lines “before you tumbled me,/You promised me to wed” (IV. V. 63-64) could reveal that she gave herself—physically—to Hamlet in the hopes that they would get married; however, as we know, the couple don’t get married and Hamlet brutally attacks Ophelia’s character. He basically calls her whore and tells her to “get thee to a nunnery” (III. i. 122). It seems apparent that Ophelia has been used and deceived—a common occurrence for women in Shakespeare’s time and even today. It is implied that she foolishly gave Hamlet her virginity because he promised to “wed” her, and as the play reveals, Hamlet breaks that promise. He betrayed her. His perfidy leads to her tragic downfall and it is apparent that women are disposable and easily dismissed in this play through Ophelia’s mad song from Act Four.