
Shakespeare and the objectification of women

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Helena: A Midsummer Night's Dream



Helena

Here, Helena is depicted as half dog because the comparison Helena makes between herself and a spaniel says a lot about what her love for Demetrius has done to her dignity and the way she views herself. A man does not consider a dog his equal, nor does he treat it with the same respect or empathy as he does another human being. By comparing herself to a dog, Helena assumes a position less than equal to Demetrius and as a result, degrades herself and wishes for Demetrius to degrade her as well. In addition, dogs are submissive to their owners and compliant with their wishes. Overall, when Helena's love leads her to take on this role, similar to a dog, in Demetrius's life, she gives up her power and individuality to serve Demetrius and remain loyal to him.

“I am your Spaniel. And Demetrius, The more you beat me, I will fawn on you” (2.1. 188-189).



Emilia: Othello



Emilia

Here, Emilia is illustrated as half hamburger because the comparison she makes between herself, Desdemona, and the men in their lives, shows the way in which she views her place in society in relation to men. Emilia sees herself as food, an inanimate object that has no autonomy and serves only the purpose of benefiting whoever eats it. Men, on the other hand, are the stomach who selfishly eats the food for its own personal gain. Essentially, Emilia explains that men take advantage of women with no regard for how their actions affect women. Women are an object used by men to excel in society and are discarded of once they have served their purpose.

"Tis not a year or two shows us a man. They are all but stomachs, and we all but food; They eat us hungerly, and, when they are full, They belch us" (3.4. 92-94).



Portia: The Merchant of Venice



Portia

Here the objectification of Portia is represented by the three caskets her father leaves behind to determine who will marry her. Portia is held prisoner by her father's dying wishes which have left her without her autonomy and without her freedom. Portia does not have a choice in who she marries, thus, she does not have a choice in what her future holds for her. The three caskets, when placed in front of a potential suitor, turns the pursuit for Portia's hand in marriage into a game in which Portia is a prize, or an object, to be won. Overall, the caskets serve as a metaphorical barrier that her father has trapped her behind, forcing her to be obedient to the plays male characters and keeping her from being independent from men.

“the lottery of my destiny
Bars me the right of
voluntary choosing.” (2.1.
15-16).



Isabella: Measure for Measure



"Ay, as the gosses were they
view themselves; which are as easily
broke as they make pawns. women!
Help Heaven! measure their creation nor in
profit by them" (II. iv)

Isabella

Here, Isabella is illustrated to be half mirror to represent her remarks about herself, as a woman, and her place in society in response to Lord Angelo's statement that women are weak. Isabella explains that, like the way Angelo views them, women are fragile and break easily; However, Isabella goes on to say that they are only fragile because they are ruined by the men who take advantage of them. Because men step on the backs of women in order to move up in the world, women have suffered and endured great oppression that has rendered them broken and objectified. Fragility is not a characteristic of women; it is a result of oppression.

"Ay, as the glasses where they view themselves; Which are as easy broke as they make forms. Women! Help Heaven! men their creation mar In profiting by them." (2.4. 135-139).

