



Get thee to a nunnery

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

Hamlet:

I did love you once.

Ophelia:

Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

Hamlet:

You should not have believ'd me, for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it. I lov'd you not.

Ophelia:

I was the more deceiv'd.

Hamlet:

Get thee to a nunn'ry, why would'st thou be a breeder of sinners?

[Hamlet Act 3, scene 1, 114–121](#)

In this heartbreaking scene, it's hard to tell how much of what Hamlet says is sincere, and how much an act [*see* [ANTIC DISPOSITION](#)]. The critics have never ceased arguing this question. We do know that his mother's recent remarriage has intensified Hamlet's sexual revulsion—he's recently likened the sexual act to tumbling in a sty.

Here, the prince denies ever having loved Ophelia, right after claiming that he did love her once. This may be just a game Hamlet is playing, but perhaps he means that what seemed like love to him once now seems false and repulsive. Using a horticultural metaphor, he casts doubt on his own motives: the "old stock" (original nature) of man is so corrupt that the grafting of virtue can never wholly eradicate the "relish" (taste) of corruption. In his famous line "Get thee to a nunn'ry," he exhorts Ophelia to put herself away so that she may never breed sinners like Hamlet.

Specialists in Shakespeare's bawdy language are fond of noting that "nunnery" was common Elizabethan slang for "brothel," and that therefore Hamlet's command is ironic and even more despairing than it seems. The pun would accord with the paradoxical nature of the prince's speech, but there is little evidence elsewhere in the scene that Hamlet intends a double entendre.

Copyright Notice

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information

Shakespeare Quotes: Get thee to a nunnery

storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:
<http://www.enotes.com/shakespeare-quotes>