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# Characters Analysis in Shakespeare's Hamlet: Gertrude and Ophelia

## Gertrude and Ophelia

In Shakespeare's play Hamlet, the only two women in the play are Hamlet's mother Gertrude and Hamlet's love interest Ophelia. Gertrude and Ophelia share similarities in both Hamlet's view of them and in Shakespeare's description of them. Hamlet views both women by their morals and Shakespeare depicts both Gertrude and Ophelia as dependent on men.

Hamlet views Gertrude and Ophelia as deceiving and being defined by their morals. Hamlet is disgusted with Gertrude's quick marriage to Claudius which he views as morally wrong and describes as "most wicked speed, to post/with such dexterity to incestuous sheets" (I.2.156-157) and "an act/that blurs the grace and blush of modesty" (III.4.41-42). Hamlet also tells Ophelia to "get thee to a nunnery" (III.3.121) so that she wouldn't "be a breeder of sinners" (III.3.122). Hamlet also views Ophelia and Gertrude as deceiving. He doubts whether Gertrude had really loved his father due to her quick remarriage after his death and insufficient mourning. He says that when he was alive "she would hang on him/as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on" (1.2.143-144) but "yet, within a month" (1.2.145) she marries Claudius and that "a beast that wants discourse of reason/would have mourned longer" (I.2.150-151). He also tells Ophelia that he is aware of her deceit by telling her:

I have heard of your paintings too, well enough.

God has given you one face and you make

yourselves another (3.1.143-146).

Hamlet expresses a lot of concern regarding both Gertrude and Ophelia's morality and views women in general as deceitful because of Gertrude's quick marriage to Claudius after the death of his father.

Shakespeare's description of Gertrude and Ophelia depicts them as dependent on men. Ophelia is easily manipulated and influenced by men. She is obedient and does what the men in her life, her brother Laertes and her father Polonius tells her to do, such as when she replies "I shall obey my lord" (I.3.135) when Polonius tells her to avoid Hamlet by saying:

From this time

Be somewhat scanter of your maiden presence.

Set your entreatments at a higher rate

Than a command to parley (I.3.119-122).

Ophelia was reliant on her father and she loses him when he dies. As a result she becomes

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mad and Claudius describes her as becoming “divided from herself and her fair judgment” (IV.4.85). Gertrude is also dependent on men as seen when she marries Claudius right after her first husband was murdered. After Hamlet’s angry confrontation with Gertrude, Gertrude agrees to take Hamlet’s advice that she won’t “let the bloat king tempt [her] again to bed” (III.4.182) and not to tell anyone what Hamlet has told her by saying:

Be thou assured, if words be made of breath

And breath of life, I have no life to breathe

What thou hast said to me. (III.4.197-199)

but right after, she goes back to Claudius and tells him that Hamlet is as “mad as the sea and wind when both contend” (IV.1.7). Through such actions, Shakespeare depicts Gertrude and Ophelia as dependent on men as Ophelia goes mad and commits suicide and Gertrude remarries right after they lose the men that they depended on in their lives.

In Shakespeare's play, Hamlet, the two women in the play, Gertrude and Ophelia share similarities with each other in both Hamlet’s view of them and Shakespeare’s depiction of them. Hamlet sees both women as deceiving and being defined by their morals because of what he sees as Gertrude being unfaithful to his father by marrying Claudius. Shakespeare’s depiction of Gertrude and Ophelia presents them as dependent on men as Ophelia goes mad and commits suicide after she loses her father and Gertrude remarries after her first husband’s death.