

Ophelia and Gertrude. Two different women who seem to be trapped in the same circumstances in relation to Hamlet.

Gertrude, Hamlet's mother and the Queen of Denmark. She is married to the present King, Claudius, who is suspected by Hamlet to have killed his father, King Hamlet, who also happens to be Claudius's brother. Gertrude has somehow ended up in the plot of King Hamlet's death and in the eyes of her son, seems to be a monster and an aide to an adulterating deed.

Ophelia, the daughter of Polonius who is the King's trusted councilor and is later killed in the play and he forbids his daughter to see Hamlet because of the possibility that he beseech her name and her virginity. She truly loves Hamlet and is devastated when he shuns her and pretends to be mad.

Hamlet's treatment towards these two women shapes and brings life to their characters and eventually bring s an end to their characters as well.

Gertrude is a kind and loving mother. The kind that guards after her son through thick and through thin and loves unconditionally. Hamlet had suspected her of aiding in the killing of King Hamlet. That will be discussed later.

Her character is the one character in the play that I believe does not develop but rather stays identical to the scene in which she is introduced(Act I, scene II). She is shown to be a quiet, "stand by your man" type individual who is easily influenced.

This is my belief because in the second scene of the play, Hamlet is shown to be crushed by his mother's hasty remarriage. If marriage within the family was common in the days of Shakespeare, then this is understandable, but, in any other case, this would be considered an act of betrayal that was obviously brought on by some outside pressure, probably from Claudius.

There is, however, a slight change in her personality that is not quite noticeable. At the end of the play, the King and Laertes(Polonius's son) have plotted to kill Hamlet for reasons that are irrelevant to my point. One part of the plot was to have Hamlet drink out of a poisoned cup. It so happens that, in some confusion, the Queen ends up with the cup in her hand. Even after the King's warnings not to drink from the cup(she is unaware of the plot), she does. She does in complete defiance of her husband's wishes. I have interpreted this in this way because of the line the Queen speaks before she drinks from the cup. "I will, my lord, I pray you pardon me."<sup>1</sup>

This shows that in the case that she might have lived on and not died from the poison in her cup, we(the readers) would see a completely different woman had she found out

about the

plot by Claudius to not only kill King Hamlet, but young Hamlet as well.

The one thing, I believe, that she would have stood up for is her son, if only she had had a chance.

There is a large part of this play that seems to be lacking in information to provide reason to this attitude.

Hamlet meets with a ghost (seemingly that of his father) who tells him of Claudius's plot to kill him. After the ghost is done telling the story of his death, he specifically tells Hamlet to punish only Claudius for his foul deed, but "Taint not thy mind nor let thy soul contrive against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven."<sup>2</sup> Generally, he's trying to tell him to punish Claudius and only Claudius. I don't understand this since earlier in the play he refers to the Queen as a "most seeming-virtuous queen."<sup>3</sup>

Either I have misinterpreted the previous passage or there is a major flaw in the attitude toward Gertrude.

The one other time in the play that we see the Queen standing up for herself or actually giving some sort of argument is when she and Polonius decide to confront Hamlet on his behavior toward the King. Since the revealing of Claudius's involvement in Hamlet's father's death, Hamlet has been putting on an act of madness.

After some very rude gestures on the part of Hamlet, Polonius and the Queen decide to confront him on his rudeness to the King. Here, the Queen is very strict and domineering which irritates Hamlet. He threatens her and after some confusion, Hamlet kills Polonius who is hiding behind the curtain listening to the conversation.

This brings on the involvement of Laertes (Polonius's son) in the plot to kill Hamlet.

In any case, Gertrude shows some backbone in this scene, but, even though Hamlet had threatened her, she still loved him and treated him the same way that she had treated him before the confrontation. This, though very unnoticeable, is a very large character flaw.

Ophelia, a young lady born to the King's faithful advisor, Polonius and sister to Laertes.

The first time we see Ophelia in the play is in scene III, when she is saying good-bye to her brother who has been granted passage back to Paris.

She is warned, by her brother, that she should beware of Hamlet's love, for, it is not the love of a regular man. Prince's go about choosing their wives at random. She is said to be careful to protect her good name, and her virginity.

In this scene, Ophelia's love still has no definition towards Hamlet. She seems indifferent when her brother is talking to her, but, when her father talks to her, and she tells him

about the strong love in between them, Polonius ridicules the possibility of such love. He orders

Ophelia to end the friendship, and, like the obedient daughter she is, she does.

After some time in the play passes, Ophelia is suddenly strongly frightened by an act by Prince Hamlet.

He comes into her room, half naked(which was very uncommon at the time), his doublet unbuttoned and his stockings hung loose around his ankles. He didn't say what was wrong but he was terribly upset. He left without making a stir.

As soon as Polonius heard of this occurrence, he decided that it was in mad love for Ophelia that Hamlet did this and he was even more upset after Ophelia had told him that she was refusing to see him or receive any on his letters.

Polonius, without hesitation, rushes to the King to tell him of the act committed to Ophelia.

As soon as Polonius sees the Queen and King he starts telling them about Hamlet's love for Ophelia and how strong it is and he also reads a love letter, from Hamlet to Ophelia, that he has found:

"Doubt thou stars are fire,  
Doubt that the sun doth move,  
Doubt truth to be a liar,  
But never doubt I love.

O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers. I have not art  
to beckon my groans. But that I love thee best, O most best,  
believe it. Adieu.

Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this  
machine is to him, Hamlet".4

This establishes that, even though Hamlet cannot show it, he loves Ophelia dearly and it is known that if he did show her, then his cover as a madman would be blown.

The King, unconvinced of his nephew's madness, asks for some solid proof of Hamlet's love. Polonius and the King agree that they will set up a meeting between Hamlet and Ophelia and will hide and watch.

Hamlet is surprised when he meets Ophelia. She hands back all of the little presents that he had given her, and at this point, Hamlet loses it. He completely blows up on Ophelia and all of his bottled up anger since his mother's remarriage is burdened on her.

He even starts suspecting her, and that there might be others listening to his conversation with her.

In his madness, he utters a threat that the King must have heard: "I say we will have no mo marriage. Those that are married already - all but one - shall live".5

Not only had Hamlet mentioned a threat, but he treated Ophelia with very little respect in regards to their love. "Get thee to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?"6

Ophelia is left terrified and quite convinced of Hamlet's madness. Claudius is still

unsure of the situation, but he is sure that the way that Hamlet behaved cannot be excused for love(at this time, Polonius decides he will set a meeting with Gertrude to talk to Hamlet while he hides behind the great tapestry that hangs in Gertrude's room).

Quite some time has passed and in the confrontation between Hamlet and Gertrude with Polonius hiding, had resulted in the death of Polonius by Hamlet. This proved to be the deed that completely threw Ophelia over the edge. She went mad that her father was murdered by the man she loves. Everyone had understood how she felt.

Word of Polonius's murder had worked it's way to Laertes who immediately left for Denmark and the threat is made even more dangerous by his sudden barging into the room full of fury. His situation is even worsened when he sees his sister madly singing to herself of love and death.

The Queen interrupts a conversation that Laertes and the King are having, two scenes later. Ophelia has drowned. She seemed to be drinking from a river when she fell in and made no attempt to get out. She is called a suicide and Laertes vows to get revenge on Hamlet.

What seems peculiar is that no one questions the Queen as to how she knows every single detail to Ophelia's death. It seems strange to me that if the Queen had been witness to the death that she would have pulled her out, but didn't. You've already told me that it was word-of-mouth that got word of the death to the Queen, but then how come whoever did see this death didn't pull her out and watched her die? This question is definitely a dent in the storyline that is quite vital to the understanding of the Queen's position towards Ophelia. The Queen supposedly loved Ophelia and wanted her to marry Hamlet some day, so it seems strange to me that her reaction to the death was not more dire or severe than it was.

Ophelia's funeral was held in a secluded place with a minimal amount of people because of the way that she died, suicide. Because suicide was and to the present day is a sin, the departed died with a grave sin to their name and therefore could not be buried in the same area as the people who died without sin. It was because of this that there was a small amount of people at her funeral.

Hamlet is there, hiding and watching the funeral processions not knowing who they're for. Only when he finds out that she had died had he realized how much he really did love her.

It is truly a shame that Hamlet had not treated the women in his life with the respect that they deserve.

Ophelia, a devoted and true love that died over the fact that the man she loved so dearly had also killed her father.

Gertrude, a loving mother that died at the hands of her husband through a poisoned

cup intended for her son.

Both of these cases show that the downfall of the women was due only to Hamlet's actions and behavior and that if he hadn't acted the way he did, the women would still be alive, as well as he.

"To be, or not to be, that is the question:

suffer

outrageous fortune,

troubles

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to

The slings and arrows of

Or to take arms against a sea of

And by opposing, end them."7