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Literature, William Shakespeare



Lakyn Stewart Drama Essay 4-28-2013 Ophelia: The Victim of Hamlet's Actions William Shakespeare's production, Hamlet, is based off of tragedy and revenge. Prince Hamlet learns that the mournful death of his father is indeed a purposely carried out plan devised by no other than his uncle Claudius. Claudius murders the king for selfish intentions of taking over the throne along with King Hamlet's wife, Gertrude. He is successful in following out his disposition. Hamlet devotes his soul and mind to efforts of seeking out revenge on Claudius. In the meantime, his love for Ophelia is put on the backburner, which consequently leads to her insanity. Hamlet decides to hold a play in the castle, where the actors put on a show for the new king. Claudius is appalled at the nature of this play when he realizes that the plot reveals the truth of King Hamlet's murder. Claudius fears that Hamlet has gone mad and in his defense orders that Hamlet be sent to England. Hamlet is outraged and confronts his mother about her devious actions. He stabs Polonius who is eavesdropping behind the curtain because he thinks it is Claudius. After Polonius's death, Ophelia truly hit a breaking point; she is seen as being grief-stricken on the verge of going insane. She drowns not long after her father's death. Her brother, Laertes, returns and hears that Hamlet is the cause of all this death; he plans to get revenge on Hamlet. Claudius uses Laertes to kill Hamlet in a fencing battle; he poisons the sword that will strike Hamlet and the glass of wine that was given to him. Gertrude dies from the wine; Laertes is poisoned with his own sword as well as Hamlet. However, Hamlet stabs Claudius with the fatal sword and forces him to drink the remaining wine. In the end they all face death. When focusing on Shakespeare's character Ophelia, it is relevant to consider her

characteristics and how they contribute to the play itself. She is a character of great innocence that is seen as being pure and a virgin to love (1. 3. 31). Demonstrating her beauty through calm gestures and a softly spoken tone; she calls upon Hamlet with the upmost respect always addressing him as "my lord" or "my honored lord" (3. 1. 93). From the beginning Ophelia is introduced by Shakespeare as a character who is suffering through the confusions of love. She is asking advice from her brother on how she should interpret Hamlet's affections of love toward her. Ophelia then questions Hamlet's intentions and confides in her father's words. Ophelia "I do not know, my lord, what I should think" (1. 3. 104). Polonius "Marry, I will teach you. Think yourself a baby That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay, Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly, Or-not to crack the wind of the poor phrase, Running it thus-you'll tender me a fool" (1. 3. 109). This excerpt is a direct example of how Shakespeare sees women as being inferior to men. The initial conflict between her and the male figures in her life reveal that Ophelia is an obedient woman that obeys male authority. The ways in which Laertes and Polonius talk to her suggest that her private thoughts are in a large way dependent of what others tell her. When Polonius orders her to stop seeing Hamlet she immediately complies with his ruling. Her character portrays a lack of self confidence and the inability to think on her own. During act two, scene one, Ophelia is frightened by Hamlet because he is beginning to act mad. He approaches her all out of sorts but does not say a word. After this encounter she rushes to tell Polonius of Hamlet's strange behavior. Polonius agrees that Hamlet must be going crazy due to his prevailing love for Ophelia. Ophelia's effort in finding the cause of

Hamlet's madness shows a deep emotional connection between her and Hamlet. The fact that she finds it necessary to take these matters to the queen displays a genuine care for Hamlet's wellbeing. In the later portion of act three, scene one, Ophelia demonstrates her innocent and obedient behavior when her and Hamlet engage in a lover's quarrel. Even though Hamlet admits to never loving her she still prays that God will be with him and get him back to normal. The dialogue between Ophelia and Hamlet in act three, scene two is very promiscuous. " Lady, shall I lie in your lap? " (3. 2. 92) this phrase might be suggesting sexual matters during Shakespearian time. The method that Shakespeare used when promoting Hamlet to initiate the questions allows for Ophelia to respond very modestly; again giving her character an innocent persona. Ophelia responds by questioning what Hamlet means because she is so used to being told what to do and how to feel that she is somewhat caught off guard by his bluntness. Once Hamlet kills Polonius and Ophelia realizes what has happened she appears in act four, scene five, the stage directions here imply that she has gone insane [Enter OPHELIA Distracted]. She sings of her father's death and about losing her virginity. Her songs denote the causes for her insanity. The loss of her father and the heartache that comes with loving someone but not receiving mutual emotions are indications to her downfall. She continues in her grief as she sings songs with obscure meanings; leading other characters to believe she has completely lost it. Shakespeare diligently planned this scene in order to show that a character is capable of impersonating more than one set attribute. Ophelia represents a round character that was first described as innocent and pure but once the death of her father occurred she

developed into a darker unexplainable character. In scene four, act seven Laertes is informed of his sister's death. " One woe doth tread upon another's heel, So fast they follow. Your sister's drowned, Laertes" (4. 7. 162/163). The death of Ophelia was announced as an accident; on the day of her burial Hamlet confesses his love for Ophelia in front of Laertes, Claudius, and Gertrude. " I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers Could not with all their quantity of love Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her? " (5. 1. 249) Shakespeare never truly stated whether or not Ophelia died from natural causes or actually committed suicide because he wants Hamlet to continue to be interpreted by readers however they feel moved from his work. However, the drama led me to believe she committed suicide because all her life she was the victim to male authorizes who continued to press demands on her. As a character she was extremely submissive; this can be tied in with her death as well because the internal struggle brought about from Hamlet and her recent loss pushed her to a point of no return, she decided to end her life because she did not see another way out of her insanity.