

Ophelia's weakness

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



In classic works of literature, all characters have certain flaws, and Shakespeare's tragedies' characters in particular have faults that ultimately lead to their ruination. In Hamlet, Ophelia's flaws eventually kill her. In the beginning of the play, it is clear through her thoughts and actions that that Ophelia is an obedient person. But upon closer inspection, the audience can see that she is not merely an obedient, but completely dependent and weak character. In fact, her needy nature is unmistakable from the beginning.

OPH: " I do not know, my lord, what I should think." POL: " Marry, I will teach you. Think yourself a baby..." (Act I, Scene III, lines 105-106) Her cruel clashings with Hamlet, which go against her feelings for him, demonstrate her absolute obedience to her father. For example, from the start Ophelia told her father that she is fond of Hamlet: " My lord, he hath importuned me with love / In honorable fashion." (Act I, Scene IV, lines 111-112) In relating this to Polonius, she implies that Hamlet is a decent and honorable man, and that she does have feelings for him. Ophelia's later actions sacrifice these personal feelings by order of her father, proving her total submission to his authority. Ophelia specifically agrees with her father not to see Hamlet again: " I shall obey, my lord..." (Act I, Scene IV, line 136) This shows that Polonius has complete control over his daughter, with her desire to please her father as the direct cause. Ophelia has an innate desire to please others, even if it means forfeiting her own feelings, and her obedience apparently springs from this. However, I wonder if Ophelia's drastic actions stem from something other than obedience-- such as her character. Her compliance seems to go deeper than her trying to please her father, and her thoughts and actions show what a weak character she really is. For instance, when

Hamlet bullies her and tells her to retreat to a nunnery where she could no longer harm anyone, she does not defend herself. Instead, after he stalks away from her, she is filled with self-pity. " O woe is me t'have seen what I have seen/ see what I see..." (Act III, Scene I, lines 154-155) Ophelia does not appear to be a strong enough person to come to her own defense, even when Hamlet is mocking everything that she is. Her " woe is me" shame comes from the fact that she is rarely reprimanded since she always strives to please. Furthermore, when Polonius dies, Ophelia loses her primary guidance and, instead of trying her hand at thinking for herself, she appeals to her brother for help in solving her problems. " My brother shall know of it/ and so I thank you for your good counsel..." (Act IV, Scene V, line 69) She recognizes that she is not strong enough to survive by herself without constant leadership and direction. Polonius's manipulative ways are irreplaceable to Ophelia. " I would give you some violets/ but they withered all when my father died..." (Act IV, Scene V, lines 177-178) Violets are a known symbol of faithfulness; Ophelia feels betrayed that her father has died and left her, and this is why she says that the violets withered at his death. His domineering authority must have inhibited her emotional growth by allowing her only to think and feel what she was told, causing her to look entirely to him as to how she should live her life. Ophelia's lack of independence is what leads to her demise. When the Queen is explaining Ophelia's death, she says, " At which time / she chanted snatches of old lauds / as one incapable of her own distress or like a creature / native and endured unto that element..." (Act IV, Scene VII, lines 177-180) This tragedy

is a reminder of the importance of being an independent and strong person, and not to place our fate into the hands of others.