

Ophelia

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Ophelia. In a world where life is spinning all around humanity with hurricane-like velocities, it can be challenging to find the calm in the eye of the storm, without being sucked into it's wrath. But what happens when a person becomes the storm? When they lose sight of the world around them and get lost in their own sanity, or lack of it? This was the circumstance for Ophelia in William Shakespeare's tragedy "Hamlet". Overcome with grief, confusion, and a slipping grasp of reality, Ophelia is a prime example of being beside oneself. With the help of director Kenneth Branagh, Kate Winslet took the role of Ophelia to new levels, exceptionally portraying the effect of insanity and madness in a way unlike any other. In act 4, scenes 5 and 7, Winslet steps outside the realm of reality and her own self while Branagh sets the stage to show that once insanity strikes, it can strike with a fatal blow.

When Branagh begins to stage the mental snap for Ophelia in act 4, scene 5, it shows Winslet in a padded, secluded holding cell below the parlor floor while she is being watched from a hole underneath a floor tile. She wears a straight jacket and continuously throws herself from wall to wall, seeming to be looking for a way to escape as she screams and mumbles to herself. This particular scene tells a lot of Ophelia's state of mind and her current level of internal frustration. Being as she is in a cell type room, throwing herself in all different directions, Branagh is showing the audience how Ophelia is trapped inside of a world where she doesn't know what direction to take, if she is even aware of the world around her at all. She is frantic, and although her screams hint at the pain and frustration she feels from her father's death and the toll her mind has experienced from her time with Hamlet, Winslet appears to be very set and determined in her ways. This is unlike in the

Michael Almereyda version, where a young Julia Stiles seems very aware of herself and of her surroundings.

She is free flowing and walking with a seeming certainty of herself, one that Winslet lacks. Yet the lack of certainty and calmness Winslet possesses only helps make the mindset of Ophelia at this point more informative of her state of mental wellbeing, making a greater impact to the viewer. When Branagh moves into the scene of bringing Ophelia out of her cell and having Queen Gertrude directly interact with her, the look of pure hatred on Winslet's face shows just how fed up she is with the things that have happened and the way she has been treated. Once she is greeted by the queen, however, her mood suddenly turns to sorrow and she shows how vulnerable she is with the look of desperation on her face and the way she almost pleads with her tone of voice. Arguably most significant point in the development of Ophelia's madness is when she is released from her straight jacket, symbolizing the release from the barriers inside of her mind.

Once bound within herself and locked away, Winslet is finally free to let her emotions run wild with a display of songs, hymns, and physical extortions. Director Gregory Doran shows Ophelia, played by Mariah Gale, roaming freely around as she pleases, entering the scene on her own free will, although she looks lost. How this nicely shows how Ophelia is lost inside of a world she once called her own, it doesn't give as a convincing look into the mindset of Ophelia. She reacts with a hatred towards Claudius, being very short and threatening with her words. She runs and twirls around the room, pulling at her hair and cap to show how she is at her wits end and cannot be trapped inside her own walls any longer. Once in the arms of Claudius,
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Winslet thrashes with defiance, taunting the new king while only addressing the women as she makes her departure.

She has no intent to reason with Claudius, or anyone for that matter, when she can barely reason with herself. It is with these decisions that Branagh and Winslet effectively show the break of Ophelia in a way unlike any other. Leading up to her mental break, we see that Ophelia was in a hidden, padded room being observed from above. The room is not lit well at all, the only lighting coming from a hole in the ceiling above when Queen Gertrude moved a flooring tile. This separation shows the significance of Ophelia being below what she once was, and that psychologically she is in a darker place now. Once a vibrant and kindhearted young woman, she is now filled with despair and insanity.

This is shown not only by her frantic and erratic physical displays, but by the darker room she is placed in and returns herself to in scene seven of act four. This is also demonstrated in the Doran version, however the separation isn't present between past and current states of mind. Instead, the entire chamber that the royal family and Ophelia roam is darkened, full of shadows and dismal emotions. Kate Winslet is very defined in the tone and volume of her voice. When speaking with Gertrude, she is quiet as if Ophelia is afraid others will hear her pain and weakness. However, when Claudius enters into the scene, Winslet is very taunting and defiant towards him due to her pure hatred for the new king.

The hall is quiet, yet the pitch, tone, and volume of Winslet's voice makes the room feel as if it is coming alive with emotion and derangement. This

choice can also be connected to Branagh trying to show that what may seem calm and steady on the outside, may not always be the case within. When the camera pans downward to show Winslet underneath the tile floor the placement below the floor, along with the downward angle of the camera, depict that at her current state Ophelia is beneath where she once held herself. Once Laertes enters the scene, the room Ophelia was once placed in lightens significantly. The door is open, removing the separation from Ophelia and the world around her. Her brother is also introduced into the scene, slightly raising her spirits, which we can tell from not only the lighting but from her physical expressions and change in the tone of her voice.

Humans as a species tend to lose sight of the real world when put under great deals of grief and stress. Mourning and confusion can take a significant toll on the mental and emotional well being of a person, occasionally pushing them into a downward spiral of desperation, craziness, and insanity. In the times of today, there are many more available and conventional ways of dealing with these effects of tragedy than there were in Shakespearean ages. Nevertheless, as Shakespeare writes in act 4, scene 7, " One woe doth tread upon another's heel, So fast they follow." Once these major storms arrive, they usually arrive on the backs of each other and seem to never end.

Today, our society is full of devastating occurrences that we do not always know how to cope with. We just need to have the strength to hold on to our sanity and our loved ones during these violent storms and seek for the calm after the storm, hoping that if we have become the storm ourselves that we may find peace in ourselves once more.