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Hamlet and Ophelia Melancholy, grief, and madness have pervaded the works of a great many playwrights, and Shakespeare is not an exception.

The mechanical regularities of such emotional maladies as they are presented within Hamlet, not only allow his audience to sympathize with the tragic prince Hamlet, but to provide the very complexities necessary in understanding the tragedy of his lady Ophelia as well. It is the poor Ophelia who suffers at her lover's discretion because of decisions she was obligated to make on behalf of her weak societal position. Hamlet provides his own self-torture and does fall victim to melancholia and grief, however, his madness is feigned. They each share a common connection: the loss of a parental figure. Hamlet loses his father as a result of a horrible murder, as does Ophelia. In her situation is more severe because it is her lover who murders her father and all other hopes for her future as well. Ultimately, it is also more detrimental to her character and causes her melancholy and grief to quickly turn to irretrievable madness. Critics argue that Hamlet has the first reason to be hurt by Ophelia because she follows her father's admonitions regarding Hamlet's true intentions for their beginning love.

In Act 3, scene 1, line 91 Hamlet begins with his malicious sarcasm toward her. "I humbly thank you, well, well, well," he says to her regarding her initial pleasantries (Johnson 1208). Before this scene, he has heard the King and Polonius establishing a plan to deduce his unusual and grief-stricken behavior. Hamlet is well aware that this plan merely uses Ophelia as a tool, and as such, she does not have much option of refusing without angering not only her busybody father but the conniving King as well. Hamlet readily refuses that he cared for her.

He tells her and all of his uninvited listeners, “ No, not I, I never gave you aught” (lines 94-95). Some critics stress, as does J. Dover Wilson, that Hamlet has a right to direct his anger to Ophelia because even though many critics “ in their sympathy with Ophelia they have forgotten that it is not Hamlet who has ‘ repelled’ her, but she him” (Wilson 159). It is possible that Wilson does not see the potential harm to Ophelia should she disobey her authority figures (i. e.

her father and her king). Furthermore, Ophelia cannot know “ that Hamlet’s attitude toward her reflects his disillusionment in his mother. . . to her, Hamlet’s inconstancy can only mean deceitfulness or madness” (Lidz 158). She is undeniably caught in a trap that has been laid, in part, but her lover whom she does love and idealize.

Her shock is genuine when Hamlet demands “ get thee to a nunnery” (line 120). The connotations of the dual meaning of “ nunnery” is enough in and of itself to make her run estranged from her once sweet prince, and it is the beginning of her sanity’s unraveling as well. Hamlet’s melancholy permits him the flexibility of character to convey manic-depressive actions while Ophelia’s is much more overwhelming and painful. “ Shakespeare is ambiguous about the reality of Hamlet’s sanity and depicts him as on the border, fluctuating between sanity and madness” (Lidz 156).

Hamlet mourns for his father, but it is the bitterness and ill-will that he harbors towards his mother for her hasty marriage to his uncle that is his most reoccurring occupation. His thoughts of Ophelia are secondary at best. When it happens that Hamlet accidentally slays Polonius, he does not appear

to be thinking of the potential effect of his actions on Ophelia. Hamlet has sealed her fate, and along with the “vacillations in his attitude and behavior toward her could not but be extremely unsettling to the very young woman who idolized him” she does not have much in the way that is positive for her (Lidz 157).

Throughout the entire murder scene in Act 3, Scene 4, Hamlet does not remark about the damage he has done to Ophelia. His emotional upswing is devoted entirely to his mother, and while his emotions are not an imitation, he does admit that he “essentially is not in madness, / But mad in craft” (lines 187-188). Ophelia is then left to mourn her father, but it is not his death alone that spurs her insanity. Her predicament is such that she is forced to fear and hate her father’s murderer who is also her lover and the one person to whom all of her future hopes were pinned – Prince Hamlet.” Her entire orientation to the