

Ophelia Character Analysis

Ophelia's role in the play revolves around her relationships with three men. She is the daughter of Polonius, the sister of Laertes, and up until the beginning of the play's events, she has also been romantically involved with Hamlet. Ophelia's relationships with these men restrict her agency and eventually lead to her death. From her very first scene, men tell Ophelia what to do. In Act One, scene three, where we first meet her, Laertes and Polonius admonish Ophelia not to trust Hamlet's expressions of love. Despite the force of their warnings, Laertes and Polonius both trust Ophelia to make her own decisions. However, as the question of Hamlet's state of mind increasingly dire, Polonius tightens the reins on his daughter. At the top of Act Three Polonius forces Ophelia to return Hamlet's letters and renounce his affections. Ophelia obeys, but her action sends Hamlet into a fit of misogynistic rage. Soon after, Hamlet mistakenly kills Polonius. The combination of her former lover's cruelty and her father's death sends Ophelia into a fit of grief. In Act Four she spirals into madness and dies under ambiguous circumstances. Ophelia's tragedy lies in the way she loses her innocence through no fault of her own.