

How Hamlet Feels About Ophelia

Evidence of how Hamlet feels:

Ophelia - "He hath... made many tenders of his affection to me."

"he hath importuned me with love in honorable fashion"

"his doublet all unbraced"

"he took me by the wrist and held me hard"

Hamlet - "No, not I, I never gave you aught"

"that if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty"

"the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd"

"you should not have believed me, for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it"

"I loved you not"

"Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?"

"or if thou wilt marry, marry a fool, for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them"

"you nickname God's creatures and make your wantonness ignorance"

"I say we will have no more marriage"

"Lady, shall I lie in your lap?"

"Do you think I mean country matters?"

"That's a fair thought to lie between maid's legs"

"I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers could not with all their quantity of love make up my sum"

The evidence from the play seems to prove that Hamlet did, in fact, love Ophelia, but it is a complicated love. It is clear from the beginning that he does have an interest in her because he gives her letters expressing his affection. She tells her father, Polonius that his love is "honorable", making it seem as if she believes he really cares for her. At this time, his love seems romantic and full of deep caring.

Later on, Hamlet comes to speak to Ophelia when no one else is around. Her description of the incident to her father is far from her earlier view. When he comes

to her with his "doublet all unbraced" he seems to be crazy but perhaps he came to her from comfort. He may have run to her to tell her his feelings or to tell her what he had discovered about his father. Either way he just could not bring himself to reveal it. This made him frustrated and so he "took [her] by the wrist and [held] her hard", wishing he could say what he felt. This proves that he loves her enough to go to her when he is distraught, but he does not trust her enough to tell her the truth. This is perhaps a just assumption, even though he does not know that yet.

It is so hard to understand Hamlet's true feelings toward Ophelia because of the contradicting ways that he acts. In Act III, Scene I, this is most evident when Ophelia returns the love letters Hamlet wrote to her. When she rejects his advances, he is so hurt he lashes out at her. Hamlet has always seen Ophelia as innocent and virtuous. Yet, she is a woman, and Hamlet has described women as "frail" beings whose "love is brief." Although this may have been the case with only his mother, he applies it to every other woman in his life. Perhaps he also doubted her honesty because he knew about her plan with Polonius and Claudius to eavesdrop on him. He is unsure of her purity and her love for him therefore he tells her, "get thee to a nunnery." If she is as chaste and innocent as he has thought, then this world of murder, lust, and adultery is no place for her. It will corrupt her as it has Gertrude. He does not want her to be a "breeder of sinners." However, there is a double meaning in his statement. In Elizabethan times the word "nunnery" was slang for a brothel. If she has already been corrupted she should go to a place where she belongs. If he had no feelings for her he would not take the time to speak to her as passionately as he does. Because he is unsure of her feelings he can never fully express his to her. Instead, in order to seem strong and protect himself he tells her he "loved her not", contradicting his earlier statement "I loved you once." Later he proceeds to flirt with her. He asks her if he may "lie in [her] lap," because it is a "fair thought to lie between maids' legs." He is perhaps mocking her by alluding to the fact that they have slept together before but now he does not care about her. By doing this he is trying to convince himself that he does not care.

The character of Ophelia's main purpose in the play is primarily symbolic. She is symbolic of "woman", "feminine passivity" and "love". She is merely a pawn for all the men in the play to use to their advantage. Through her, the reader is able to discover Hamlet's attitude toward women. She also provides a clearer view of Hamlet's thoughts. She is seen as a simple girl, but not extremely deep or intelligent. When a viewer of the play sees the contrast between the two, they can not help but appreciate Hamlet's thoughtful and contemplative nature. She makes Hamlet seem extremely intelligent, which is important for his character development.

Overall, the relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia can never truly be known, only speculated. Hamlet's feelings towards her are never clear, though it can be assumed that he did love her but his emotions regarding his mother got in the way of their relationship.

