

# Model One Idea and Two Mediums Essay

## Comparing Ophelia's Death in Two Mediums

Ophelia's death marks one of the most memorable and devastating moments in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Shakespeare's description of Ophelia's demise has inspired countless writers, poets, and artists who have sought to recreate this pivotal moment in song, prose, and paint. One of the most well-known of these works is Sir John Everett Millais's painting *Ophelia*. Both Shakespeare's poetry and Millais's colors seek to capture the moment that Ophelia chooses to end her life, symbolically sealing Hamlet's fate and madness in the process. Despite their similarities, each medium distinguishes itself, choosing to express and thus reveal different interpretations of Ophelia's fateful decision. While Shakespeare's portrayal of Ophelia's death marks a dramatic shift in the plot of the play, Millais's painting allows viewers to linger and focus on the meaning of her death, the reasons behind her choice, and the religious imagery supporting her case as a martyr to Hamlet's ambitions.

introduction  
identifies works by  
title, author, and  
medium

a thesis states the  
focus or main idea of  
the essay

In the play, Ophelia's death scene is narrated by Queen Gertrude to Laertes. "One woe doth tread upon another's heel, / So fast they follow; your sister's drown'd, Laertes" (Shakespeare 118). Overcome with grief after her father's murder, Ophelia slips and falls into the river while gathering flowers. Her mother describes her form: "her clothes spread wide / and, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up" (Shakespeare 119). The scene itself moves quickly. After falling into the water and drifting on the surface, Queen Gertrude reveals that Ophelia made no effort to save herself. Oblivious to the danger, she "chaunted snatches of old tunes" (Shakespeare). Gertrude reflects with a mix of pity and distress on Ophelia's madness, "as one incapable of her own distress, / Or like a creature native and indued / Unto that element" (Shakespeare 119). Ophelia's final resting place is a "muddy death" as she was dragged down by the weight of her clothes "heavy with their drink" (Shakespeare 119). In this moment, Ophelia's death is portrayed through the pain and distress of a grieving queen and brother. Her death is tragic and "muddy," creating the impression that Ophelia was insane and casting a dark cloud over her suicide. The scene focuses less on Ophelia's death and more on how her death will influence the plot already unfolding. Just a few lines after revealing Ophelia's demise, Gertrude, Laertes, and Claudius exit the scene.

block structure is  
used consistently

Ophelia's death in *Hamlet* is shared off stage, narrated by Queen Gertrude. Millais's painting depicts, in vivid color, the moment that Ophelia first falls into the river. Vivid colors and textures emphasize the beauty of nature. Trees surround the river; the flowers that she had been gathering float around her. Ophelia's eyes are open, her arms outstretched, and her palms facing toward the heavens. Her face is serene. Her dress billows out in delicate waves, depicting her as a creature of the river, a "mermaid" (Shakespeare). The flowers near her become important symbols, representing Ophelia's purity and innocence. These symbols, combined with Ophelia's gentle and otherworldly appearance, portray Ophelia as both a martyr and saint. While the text presents Ophelia's tragic death in a few short lines, quickly moving on to the expanding tragedy of Hamlet's actions, the painting allows readers to linger and reflect on the meaning of Ophelia's demise. Her death scene here comes to reflect the unifying themes between both works: the unforeseen consequences of rage and ambition, the mystery of death, and the destruction of innocence.

concrete examples  
prove claims

Throughout the play, Ophelia had stood as a quiet symbol of innocence and beauty adrift within the tragedy and suspicion of the court. She represented hope and an opportunity for a future for Hamlet. However, powerless to stop the violent march of revenge, her choice to end her life becomes an important plot element while also symbolizing the loss of innocence and the consequences of rage, ambition, and revenge. In fact, this moment is the only moment in the play where Ophelia practices and claims her own agency. While the play describes the scene, focusing on the grief of Gertrude and the senselessness of her loss, Millais's painting reveals the beauty, tragedy, and serenity of her final choice (and her only choice), enabling readers to reflect on the larger themes and deeper meanings of this classic moment. United in their themes and message, the play highlights this moment as a critical turning point in the plot while the painting encourages readers to rest, reflect, and appreciate the tragic beauty of Ophelia's demise from her perspective.

transitional phrases  
build connections  
and illustrate  
comparisons

### Works Cited

Folger Shakespeare Library. *The Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Danmark* from Folger Digital Texts. Ed. Barbara Mowat and Paul Westine. Folger Shakespeare Library, 12 April, 2017. Folgerdigitaltext.org