

The Symbolic Use of Flowers and Herbs in *Hamlet*: through Gertrude's Realization of Her Sin and Ophelia's Madness

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Introduction

It is widely recognized that women in *Hamlet* are described as fragile existences. Compared to other female characters in Shakespeare's plays, such as Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* and Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, Gertrude and Ophelia are considered as weak, obedient, and men's property. In the early modern English society in which the play was written, most men expected women to be obedient to their demands. For example, Hamlet attributes Gertrude's swift change of love from her dead ex-husband to Claudius to "frailty" (1.2.146).⁽¹⁾ The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* defines "frailty" as "[m]oral weakness; instability of mind; liability to err or yield to temptation."⁽²⁾ This word is from Latin "fragilitas" meaning "to break." Hamlet assumes that Gertrude's behavior is due to a lack of ability to overcome frailty. In another example, Shakespeare uses "frailty" in *Othello* as follows: "Isn't frailty that thus errs?" (4.3.103).⁽³⁾ This is Emilia's phrase when she and Desdemona talk about whether they would cheat on their husbands if they could receive the whole world or not. Emilia insists that she would deceive her husband for the whole world because women also have feelings, desires, and moral weakness as well as men although men often accuse women of frailty and dishonesty.

Flowers have often become a metaphor of vulnerability, especially women's physical and mental weakness in Western literature. Ophelia is frequently compared with flowers and herbs as she gives rosemary and pansies to Laertes in Act 4 Scene 5, and makes a garland with crow-flowers, nettles, daisies and long-purples in Act 4 Scene 7. Those flowers and herbs symbolize Ophelia dying fleetingly without appearing on stage. Gertrude also speaks of flowers representing a sign of Ophelia's death and her innocence

in Act 4 Scene 7, but Gertrude's use of floral terms is distinct from Ophelia's. When delivering flowers and herbs and making a garland, she is in her madness, while Gertrude, with her reason, reports Ophelia's death and describes what flowers and herbs there have been and Ophelia has been picking up. Gertrude's sanity after the realization of her sinfully too-early remarriage suggests significant difference from Ophelia, who also uses flowers in a frenzy before she dies in Act 4 Scene 5.

To examine the significance, the symbolism of the flowers and herbs in the discussed scenes should be analyzed. One of the reputable scholars for the imagery studies in Shakespeare's plays is Wolfgang Clemen, a German literary scholar. He examines Shakespeare's use of imagery in *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (1977). However, particular names of flowers are not stated in the index. If we read it closely, nettles and their thorns appear in his book to show that "[t]he disease-imagery links up with the notion of taint and stinging things" in the chapter of *The Winter's Tale* from Leontes' words in Act 1 Scene 2 (197),⁽⁴⁾ but particular flowers are not focused on as one category of the study of imagery. The study of the language of flowers and herbal expressions in the field of imagery studies in Shakespeare's plays should be more thoroughly researched and developed. That is why there is the importance to investigate the way Shakespeare metaphorically utilized flora in his plays and to interpret its meanings as allegorical imagery.

When it comes to Ophelia's frailty, Ophelia's role in *Hamlet* is merely to be used by male authorities as a tool. Polonius and Claudius send Ophelia to Hamlet to confirm whether his madness is due to love-sickness or not. Conversely, Hamlet also utilizes her to hide the real purpose of his madness from other characters except Horatio. This behavior is one cause that leads Ophelia to madness as a result. In addition to Hamlet's fake madness, she discovers that Hamlet kills her father. She experiences a series of traumatic events only to go mad and die. In other words, Ophelia is depicted as a young, beautiful, and innocent woman in the play, resulting in madness and tragic death although her speech in her madness, including the quotations from ballads, provokes much controversy. In general, it seems that Shakespeare generated pathos in Ophelia, that is, Shakespeare used Ophelia as a role of increasing audiences' sympathy.

The definition of "frailty" can also apply to Gertrude. Hamlet mentions that

“frailty, thy name is woman” (1.2.146) when he blames Gertrude for her changing love, implying that because women are “frail,” he believes that it is because of women’s moral weakness that Gertrude changes her affection quickly to Claudius. When Hamlet accuses Gertrude directly in Act 3 Scene 4, she keeps stopping him from accusing her anymore. It shows that she is unsure what she should do although she comes to realize what she has done. She finally asks him, “What shall I do?” (3.4.169), indicating that she will follow Hamlet’s instruction, namely, she does not have her own decision. She gradually repents of her too-early remarriage after Hamlet’s direct condemnation in Act 3 Scene 4. She could realize and repent her sin without losing her reason. This is the crucial point differentiating the way of using flowers between Gertrude in her sanity and Ophelia in her madness. To clarify how the fragile imagery of Ophelia relates with the tradition of the allegorical language of flowers, the first chapter will explain the meanings of flowers in Act 4 Scene 5 and 7, and interprets them with the play’s context. The second chapter will focus on how Gertrude realizes her sin by Hamlet’s accusation in Act 3 Scene 4 as the first step of her reform. The third chapter will discuss the significance of the way Gertrude describes symbolic flowers and herbs to explain Ophelia’s death in comparison with the way Ophelia uses flowers.

Chapter 1: The Traditional Use of Flowers and Their Meanings in *Hamlet*

To examine the different use of flowers and herbs between Gertrude and Ophelia, this chapter will examine the meanings of flowers. Flower symbolism gradually began to develop in England during the Elizabethan era although people had traditionally used floral expressions and other plants as a way of metaphorical communication. Flowers often became a symbol of women’s fertility in literature in the early modern era because writers and poets probably applied the symbols of ancient Roman and Greek gods and goddesses. For instance, in Roman mythology, there is the goddess of flowers called Flora. It is said that Juno conceived Mars because Juno touched a magical flower that Flora had. Flora is also described as follows: “Flora, who typified the season of spring, is generally represented as a lovely maiden, garlanded with flowers” (180).⁽⁵⁾ Moreover, slightly before the Elizabethan era, a German scholar and botanist, Joachim Camerarius

(1534-1598) wrote the important collective edition of an emblem book called *Symbolorum et Emblematum Centuria quatuor* in 1590. It includes 100 emblems of plants, flowers, trees, and fruits.⁽⁶⁾ Later, influenced by neighboring European countries such as Italy and France, Elizabeth I supported the creation of a garden in her palace. The garden encouraged people to expand the symbolic use of flowers, and was strongly connected to contemporary literature. In the introduction of *Shakespeare's Plants and Gardens: A Dictionary* by Vivian Thomas, she writes, "The language of plants, a common currency of the rural world, was augmented in Shakespeare's London by 'green desire', a new-found passion for plants and gardens" (1).⁽⁷⁾ Shakespeare was one of the writers who actively applied flowers and herbs in his plays at that time. Although flowers are not particularly featured in the studies of Shakespeare's imagery as mentioned in the introduction, there are many books simply illustrating the way Shakespeare exercised the floral expressions in his plays such as *Shakespeare's Plants and Gardens: A Dictionary* by a specialist in Shakespeare's studies, Vivian Thomas and a freelance lecturer, Nicki Faircloth, which I refer to in the next paragraph. The book exemplifies Shakespeare's use of floral and herbal expressions. The metaphorical usages of flowers and other types of plants were one of the most popular themes in literature since ancient times, and the popularity still remains until today.

The language of flowers often helps understand nonverbal cues. Many floral metaphors appear in Shakespeare's plays. For instance, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Friar Laurence states to Juliet when he gives her a sleeping potion, "The roses in thy lips and cheeks shall fade / To paly ashes" (4.1.101-102).⁽⁸⁾ Roses here represent Juliet's youth, and furthermore, "paly" ashes suggest that her face will be extremely pale as good as a dead person after taking the potion. His metaphorical use of roses increases Juliet's fear of death more effectively. As a different representation of roses from another Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*, Hamlet mentions a rose to blame Gertrude for her infidelity: "takes off the rose / From the fair forehead of an innocent love" (3.4.43-44). The "rose" is a white rose representing purity in contrast to the red iron mark given on prostitutes' foreheads as a punishment. Hamlet indicates that Gertrude forgets fidelity to the late King Hamlet and becomes like a whore. In summary, roses can have multiple symbolism depending on the context, or the types of roses, as Friar Laurence tells in *Romeo and Juliet* that everything that God

creates in this world has always duality in Act 2 Scene 2:

“O, miracle is the powerful grace that lies
In plants, herbs, stones, and their true qualities;
.....
Nor aught so good but, strain'd from that fair use,
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse:
Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied,
And vice sometime's by action dignified. (2.3.15-16,19-22)

Thus, when analyzing the representations of flora in this paper, there is a need to scrutinize the flowers in the dramatic context, and select the most appropriate meaning to the theme of the play from numerous possibilities.

Flowers and herbs that Ophelia delivers to other characters in Act 4 Scene 5 are rosemary, pansies, rue, daisy, and violet. Ophelia gives rosemary and pansies to Laertes (4.5.176-178) as a response to the Laertes's alert against Hamlet; “remember well/ What I have said to you” (1.3.84-85). Adam Max Cohen states: “Rosemary is a complex mnemonic symbol... [and] could be a token of remembrance between lovers, and it could also be a token of remembrance between the living and the dead... Ophelia is as tormented by her father's death and Hamlet's estrangement” (93).⁽⁹⁾ Considering that rosemary represents a memory, Ophelia seems to beg Laertes and the rest of people around her not to forget her when she states, “Pray, love, remember” (4.5.177). This meaning of rosemary is originated from its role as a medicine for madness. People believed that rosemary has an effect on their minds. Ophelia providing rosemary has double implications that Ophelia hopes everyone to remember her, and she is in a frenzy.

Rue is a symbol of regret and sorrow. Ophelia calls it “herb-grace” (4.5.182-183) as well. Ophelia also suggests her sorrow of losing both her father and Hamlet by giving rue for herself. At the same time, Ophelia does not clearly mention to whom she distributes rue, but possibly among Gertrude, Claudius, or Laertes: “There's rue for you; and here's some for me” (181-182). Given the imagery of rue, Claudius and Gertrude are the right receivers because they are the ones who are asked for repentance. Nevertheless, it is

not obvious that Ophelia notices Claudius' assassination and Gertrude's shift of love through the play within the play in Act 3 Scene 2. That is why there is a controversy over the receiver of rue. However, Shakespeare may let Ophelia give rue to indicate to the audience that Claudius and Gertrude are to repent.

Violets are a symbol of faithfulness and fidelity. It belongs to a family *Violaceae* as well as pansies. Their scent is sweet and they bloom in spring. It is not mentioned clearly in the play who Ophelia would give violets to, but it is more likely to be Laertes because Ophelia and Laertes talk each other indirectly using violets through the play. When offering some violets saying "I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died" (4.5.144-145), she implies to Laertes that she has been faithful to Hamlet, but Hamlet's affection does not last long as Polonius describes it in the following way: "A violet in the youth of primy nature, / Forward not permanent, sweet not lasting" (1.3.7-8). As a response, Laertes wishes violets to flourish from Ophelia's pure body after laying in the ground: "Lay her i'th'earth, / And from her fair and unpolluted flesh / May violets spring," (5.1.228-230) indicating that he believes in Ophelia's purity.

The choice of flowers and herbs described in Act 4 Scene 7 is also metaphoric. Not all of them will be covered, but I will select the most relevant ones: a willow, daisies, and nettles, and illustrate the meanings of flowers and their functions:

There is a willow grows aslant a brook
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream.
There with fantastic garlands did she come
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them. (4, 7, 141-146)

Willows, as its shape shows, are associated with death and weeping. Gertrude's explanation about the situation of Ophelia's death starts with a willow. This emphasizes the fact that Ophelia is drowned, and boosts mourning. It is also associated with infertility because it does not produce any fruits. If this symbolism is applied, the willow represents Ophelia dying as a virgin, although some literary scholars insist on Ophelia's sexuality:

“Young men will do’t, if they come to’t,
By Cock, they are to blame.
Quoth she ‘Before you tumbled me,
You promised me to wed’” (4.5.59-62)

Ophelia here is likely to lament having to be separated from Hamlet with her virginity being lost. However, the ballad itself sounds very sexual as such words as “Cock,” “tumbled,” and “wed” suggest. Thus, some critics point out that Ophelia voluntarily seduces Hamlet.⁽¹⁰⁾ Another famous use of willows in Shakespeare’s plays is a willow song sung by Desdemona in *Othello*. When Desdemona talks about her unchanging love towards Othello even though he misunderstands her as a dishonest woman, Desdemona remembers a willow song that her mother’s maid was singing while she was dying due to her lover’s deceit. Desdemona compares herself to the maid that she also notices her approaching death in spite of her virginity because of Othello’s extraordinary assumption of her infidelity. As willows in the willow song in *Othello* represent death and infertility, a willow in the scene of Ophelia’s death in *Hamlet* also symbolizes Ophelia’s grievous death and possible infertility.

Daisies represent innocence, which matches Ophelia’s imagery. Ophelia is unable to feel any guilty because she simply gets involved in Hamlet’s revenge and a series of tragic events caused by other characters. She is also simply a tool for male characters, which allows her not to know what is happening among them. All she can do is only pray to God: “O help him, you sweet heavens!” (3.1.135), “O heavenly powers, restore him” (3.1.142) when Hamlet screams at her to go to a nunnery in Act 3 Scene 1. This shows that she can only lament because she does not know what the matter is for him and what she should do. It is also said that a daisy is composed of two parts: the yellow part in the center of the flower, and the petal part. Because two parts seem to get along together well, daisies are also a symbol of true love. Daisies on drowned Ophelia reminds audience/ readers of Hamlet and Ophelia who were supposed to love each other and marry in the future as Gertrude wished during Ophelia’s funeral, “I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet’s wife” (5.1.234).

In addition to those detailed studies of flowers, there is an opinion that these

enumerated flowers are simply associated with Ophelia. G. R. Hibbard, an editor of the Oxford Shakespeare edition of *Hamlet*, explains as follows: “[I]here seems to be general agreement that all are flowers of the early spring and thus suitable for Ophelia to pick and wear” (319). Considering that, nettles here are not the ones that sting. Nettles are usually a metaphor of stinging things such as in *the Winter’s Tale*, and nettles are one of the examples of taint and stinging things as mentioned in the introduction. Dead-nettles do not sting and the color is purple, which matches the image of Ophelia’s youth. These floral descriptions encourage audiences to imagine her beauty and innocence, and induce people’s grief. As I mentioned in this chapter, there are many significant usages of flowers and herbs in *Hamlet* and other Shakespeare’s plays.

Chapter 2: The Way Gertrude Realizes Her Sin

This chapter will discuss how Gertrude becomes aware of her sinfully reckless remarriage with Claudius accused by Hamlet, contrasting with Ophelia. Hamlet strongly tells critical words to both Ophelia in Act 3 Scene 1 and Gertrude in Act 3 Scene 4. Hamlet asks Ophelia, “Ha, ha? Are you honest?” (3.1.104) and “Are you fair?” (3.1.106). Ophelia is simply surprised by Hamlet’s sudden questions, so she can only say, “My lord?” (3.1.105). It shows her innocence and ignorance as daisies in the garland she makes represent as I explained in the first chapter. The way Hamlet berates and each response of Gertrude and Ophelia to his condemnation turn out to be different. As for Ophelia, Hamlet merely shouts at her to ask whether she is honest or not and tells her to go to a nunnery. He seems to have noticed that Claudius and Polonius are listening to their conversation behind their back because he knows Ophelia is pretending to read a book as Hamlet says in the following way:

“I have heard of your paintings too, well enough. God has given you one face, and you make yourself another. You jig, you amble, and you lisp, and nickname God’s creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance” (3.1.143-147).

Hamlet compares Ophelia’s lie to “paintings,” “face,” and “nickname” asserting that

reading a book alone is a mere excuse to hide the real purpose, which is for Claudius and Polonius to eavesdrop on the conversation between Hamlet and Ophelia. That is why Hamlet yells at her stronger to warn them by saying, “Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in’s own house. Farewell” (3.1.133-134). Furthermore, since unfaithful Gertrude gave birth to Hamlet, he assumes that he has a “plague” (3.1.136) producing a promiscuous person. Therefore, Hamlet rejects Ophelia to avoid infecting the “plague.” He also alerts Ophelia not to trace Gertrude’s path, specifically, not to become “a breeder of sinners” (3.1.122-123). It seems that Hamlet simply helps Ophelia escape from all these corruptions firstly triggered off by Gertrude and Claudius. However, nunneries are also associated with brothels.⁽¹¹⁾ Considering that Ophelia’s father is a “fishmonger” (2.2.174), which means a brothel keeper, Hamlet probably indicates to Ophelia that she should go to a brothel due to infection from Gertrude’s infidelity.

In regard to Gertrude, she suspects that the main cause of Hamlet’s madness is the late King Hamlet’s death and remarriage with Claudius: “I doubt it is no other but the main—/His father’s death and our o’erhasty marriage” (2.2.56-57). At this point, she does not certainly realize that her quick remarriage is such an immoral sin as Hamlet rages at her. Claudius believes that, instead of continuing to mourn, marrying Gertrude and becoming a king are necessary for the country because the state is under attack:

Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
That we with wisest sorrow think on him
Together with remembrance of ourselves.
Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen,
Th’ imperial jointress to this warlike state (1.2.5-9)

Gertrude is probably persuaded that this remarriage is the best way for the country, people, and even her family. However, Hamlet accuses Gertrude of her hasty change of love and tries to make her repent in Act 3 Scene 4:

“Look upon this picture, and on this,

The counterfeit presentment of two brothers.
 See what a grace was seated on this brow—

 A combination and a form indeed
 Where every god did seem to set his seal
 To give the world assurance of a man.
 This was your husband. Look you now what follows.
 Here is your husband, like a mildew'd ear
 Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?
 Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
 And batten on this moor? Ha? Have you eyes? (3.4.54-56, 61-68)

Hamlet shows Gertrude two portraits of the late King Hamlet and Claudius to visually convince her that inconsiderate remarriage with Claudius is dishonest with her noble ex-husband. This visual accusation directly effects on her conscience, and leads her to the realization of her unfaithful remarriage. Hence, she tries to stop him, saying “O Hamlet, speak no more” (3.4.80). She persists in screaming “no more” psychologically meaning that she knows what Hamlet is blaming for. Gertrude also states, “Thou turn’st mine eyes into my very soul, / And there I see such black and grained spots / As will not leave their tinct” (81-83), which suggests that Gertrude realizes her remarriage is a sin and that it polluted her soul. She does not completely reform herself soon after this accusation because her soul remains sick (4.5.17). However, she does not fall into madness even after shocking occurrences such as the blame by Hamlet and Ophelia’s death. Gertrude also witnesses Polonius’ bloody death with her own eyes. Her son, Hamlet stabs him through the arras in front of Gertrude. His cruel murder frightens Gertrude, but she does not faint or fall into madness although Ophelia has already become insane by hearing the news of her father’s death. She does not lose her mind because she comprehends Hamlet’s words: “O, throw away the worser part of it, / And live the purer with the other half” (3.4.153-154). If she could remove the unfaithful part of her heart, she would be able to reform herself and make herself free from her sin. She only reaches to the extent of understanding Hamlet’s criticism, but she takes one step for the reform of herself

with “her fighting soul” (3.4.105).

In addition, Hamlet confesses to Gertrude that he feigns madness when he says, “It is not madness / That I have uttered” (3.4.137-138), and “Make you to ravel all this matter out, / That I essentially am not in madness, / But mad in craft. ’Twere good you let him know” (175-177). From this moment, Gertrude begins to notice Hamlet’s seriousness about his reproach against her. She promises that she will not tell anybody about his pretended madness (186-188). She pretends not to know it in front of Claudius, so she lies to him about Polonius’ death: “To draw apart the body he hath killed; / O’er whom--- his very madness” (4.1.23-24). Another scene where Gertrude tries to hide Hamlet’s fake madness is: “For love of God, forbear him” (5.1.263). This Gertrude’s remark happens when Claudius feels sure about Hamlet’s madness after his confession about his love towards the late Ophelia. Gertrude follows Hamlet’s instruction not to inform other people about his fake madness because she notices how shameful Gertrude, a mother of Hamlet, is criticized for infidelity by her own son. There is a slight change in Gertrude’s wording when Hamlet and Laertes start fencing in Act 5 Scene 2, compared with the previous scenes. As explained in the introduction, Gertrude talks like “I shall obey you” (3.1.38), and “What shall I do?” (3.4.169), showing no will of her own. In contrast, notwithstanding Claudius stops Gertrude drinking a cup of wine which is supposed to be Hamlet’s, Gertrude starts to drink it, saying, “I will, my lord, I pray you pardon me” (5.2.243). It coincidentally leads Hamlet to avoid drinking poisoned wine.

When it comes to a sense of sin, Claudius, who is to blame and repent for the assassination of the late King Hamlet and remarriage with Gertrude, does not regret even though he recognizes his brother’s murder is guilty after the play within the play in Act 3 Scene 2:

“O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven.
It hath the primal eldest course upon’t—
A brother’s murder. Pray can I not.
Though inclination be as sharp as will,
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent” (3.3.36-40)

He hesitates to admit his immoral sin because of the fear for the Last Judgement. Nevertheless, he thinks the murder is his real purpose to obtain the crown, Gertrude, and authority, therefore he stops begging God for forgiveness, and justifies himself: “Try what repentance can. /What can it not? /Yet what can it when one cannot repent?” (3.3.65-66). This is why Hamlet has been pretending to be insane to revenge himself on Claudius. However, Claudius continues to think that Hamlet’s behavior is “mere madness” (5.1.274). Killing Hamlet with a cup of poisonous wine during a bout with Laertes in Act 5 Scene 2 was a Claudius’ strategy. Claudius dies without repenting his murder and greed for throne that “envenomed” him (5.2.271, 275). Laertes also notices at last that all these bloody deaths are due to Claudius because Claudius would not stop insisting that Hamlet’s madness is the threat of Claudius’ political power. Laertes states to Hamlet before he dies: “Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet. /Mine and my father’s death come not upon thee, /Nor thine on me!” (5.2.282-284). It tells that Laertes does not ignore or deny his and Hamlet’s revengeful minds, but accepts them to make themselves both free from their sins. Gertrude realizes her sin of unnatural remarriage with Claudius, and Laertes and Hamlet admit their revengeful minds although they all die without reaching the stage of repenting them and reforming themselves.

In short, Gertrude is able to become aware of her hasty remarriage because of Hamlet’s accusation which uses two portraits of late King Hamlet and Claudius and straightforward words in Act 3 Scene 4. Hamlet’s visual convincement along with words effectively leads to Gertrude’s sense of sin. Though Gertrude’s soul fights with evil attached by the influence of Claudius, she understands Hamlet’s criticism and begins to repent her sin, which is the stage where Ophelia and Claudius fail to achieve.

Chapter 3: Differences of the Way Gertrude and Ophelia Use Flowers and Herbs

Gertrude explains Ophelia’s death describing flowers and herbs, and Ophelia uses flowers to express her hidden feelings as mentioned in the first chapter. This chapter will deal with how Gertrude and Ophelia’s use of flowers and herbs is different. Focusing on their mental conditions when they use flora, Ophelia already falls into madness, which allows her to behave dementedly. In the scene where Ophelia appears on stage

for the first time after she falls into madness in Act 4 Scene 5, audiences and readers can learn her insanity from her tangled hair hanging down. After this, she merely distributes flowers and sings songs, distracting other characters' remarks. In contrast, Gertrude is not mentally ill even after Hamlet's accusation and Ophelia's accidental death because she already becomes aware of her infidelity. She is able to speak sanely and act with presence of mind.

In the Elizabethan era, people believed insanity was a mental disease possessed by the devil. Because devils occupy one's mind, their statements are untrustworthy. For example, Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* is misled by surrounding people such as Sir Toby, Maria, and the fool Feste that Lady Olivia is fond of him. He becomes vain after he is completely convinced of Olivia's affection. They mock Malvolio with saying that he is influenced by the devil, for instance, "Which way is he, in the name of sanctity? If all the devils of hell be drawn in little, and Legion himself possessed him, yet I'll speak to him" (3.4.81-83),⁽¹²⁾ "Lo, how hollow the fiend speaks within him" (3.4.88), "How do you, Malvolio? How is't with you? What, man, defy the devil! Consider, he's an enemy to mankind" (3.4.93-95), and so on.

In addition, a number of insane people were taken to a mental asylum called Bedlam in England in the Elizabethan era. Doctors at that time had less knowledge about mental illness, so they simply separated patients from the society and tied their arms and legs to the corners of the bed with chains in the hospital. In *Hamlet*, Claudius decides to send Hamlet to England due to his madness: "I like him not; nor stands it safe with us/To let his madness range" (3.3.1-2). His decision is likely to be based on the way people thought about insanity during Shakespeare's time in England. Furthermore, Polonius calls Hamlet "the devil himself" (3.1.49-50) when he forces Ophelia to read a devotional book to deceive Hamlet's eyes, in order for Ophelia not to look strange wandering alone at the gallery. Both Claudius and Polonius believe that Hamlet's madness is caused by the possession of the devil. Polonius also refers to his theory of madness as follows:

Fell into a sadness, then into a fast,
Thence to a watch, thence into a weakness,
Thence into a lightness, and, by this declension,

Into the madness wherein now he raves,
And all we wail for. (2.2.146-150)

Polonius talks about Hamlet here, but his analysis is wrong because Hamlet's madness is counterfeit. With that being said, his theory can apply to Ophelia's true madness. Although the process of how Ophelia falls into madness is not described in the play, her "weakness" as a woman makes her trace the process of insanity that Polonius mentions.

Ophelia's madness seems to allow her to express her thoughts although Ophelia has been obedient to Claudius, Polonius, and Laertes with her voice unraised. For example, when Polonius and Laertes doubt Hamlet's love towards Ophelia in Act 1 Scene 3, and warn Ophelia to stay away from him for a while, she merely accepts their request. Furthermore, when his father asks Ophelia to read a book and approach Hamlet in Act 3 Scene 1 to confirm the cause of Hamlet's madness, she obeys him again. However, she begins to distribute flowers and sing songs in a frenzy in Act 4 Scene 5, where she seems to have broken a long silence and gotten her own voice, but her remarks are unreliable because of her insanity. Moreover, she borrows the language of flowers to imply her sorrow and lamentation. She puts all her messages into flowers and songs, rather than tells them with her own words directly. She can only imply her concealed messages due to her frailty and madness.

Contrarily, Gertrude is rarely compared with flowers even though she mentions flowers in Act 4 Scene 7. Those flowers and herbs which she names are associated with women's weakness and fragility, but Gertrude realizes her son's words that she remarried Claudius quickly without knowing his plot of assassination due to her frailty. That is why flowers in the play do not represent Gertrude's weakness as a woman. From this respect, Gertrude is not as frail as Ophelia and is able to avoid falling into madness. This means that Gertrude's words after her realization of her sin require no implications. She states only facts of Ophelia's death in Act 4 Scene 7, where Gertrude reports the situation of Ophelia's drowning. A willow, crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long-purples surely represent Ophelia's tragic death, innocence, and beauty, but it does not mean that Gertrude implies her hidden feelings in these flowers.

Conclusion

Ophelia's metaphoric use of flowers in Act 4 Scene 5 is to suggest her obedient nature and her grief for Polonius' death and Hamlet's madness, but Gertrude's reference to flowers and herbs in Act 4 Scene 7 is for a report of Ophelia's death. The reason why she can only imply her messages using the flowers is because she is in madness. People in madness tend to speak words with many connotations, which brings distrust to their speech mainly because people in the Elizabethan era believed madness came from devils. Ophelia obliquely tells people not to forget her by distributing rosemary. She also wants to show her obedience to Laertes by distributing daisies, which means that she honestly follows his requests such as being more careful about Hamlet, denying Hamlet's access to her and so on. She also uses rue to express implicitly her grief at the death of her father, and violets to suggest her faithfulness. Ophelia only makes a nuanced communication through flowers because her mind is in madness.

Gertrude has been aware that Hamlet's insanity is caused by his father's death and Claudius and her too-early remarriage: "I doubt it is no other but the main- / His father's death and our o'erhasty marriage" (2.2.56-57). At this time, however, she does not know the late King Hamlet was assassinated by Claudius who is her current husband. Furthermore, she does not understand how this hasty remarriage is dishonest to her ex-husband and her son, Hamlet. With that said, she gradually comes to realize that her judgement is a mistake after the direct condemnation from Hamlet. In short, awareness of her sin helps Gertrude keep her sanity even though she is a frail woman as well as Ophelia. In Act 4 Scene 7, she states such flowers as a willow, crow-flowers, nettles, and long-purples with her sanity preserved. It means that she does not use flowers to imply her desires or thoughts, but describes the truth about the situation of Ophelia's death.

While Ophelia offers flowers and herbs to tell her real intentions indirectly, Gertrude uses flowers to report Ophelia's death by drowning straightforwardly. This difference is based on their mental circumstances. Ophelia is in madness while she gives flowers to other characters, and Gertrude keeps sane when she talks about Ophelia's death using symbolic flowers. Ophelia's true madness is rooted in her moral weakness and obedience resulting in grievous death. Gertrude's sanity is attributed to her realization

of her sin. Although she dies without obtaining an opportunity to repent and reform herself completely, she is able to recognize that her too-early remarriage is unthoughtful and dishonest. The rash remarriage is not only a problem for Gertrude. Claudius is the very subject of repentance and reform because of the murder of his own brother. Nonetheless, he gives up confessing his sin and begins to justify himself. For this reason, Gertrude is the closest person to repentance. Both Ophelia and Gertrude seem to be frail women, but Gertrude finds her way out of frailty. She denies Hamlet's hypothesis: "frailty, thy name is woman" (1.2.146) by her awareness of her sin. That is why there is a significance that Gertrude describing Ophelia's death using symbolic flowers because this shows the contrast between mad Ophelia and sane Gertrude most clearly.

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Notes

- (1) The quotations from *Hamlet* are taken from William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by G. R. Hibbard, Oxford Shakespeare, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- (2) "frailty, n.2.a." *OED Online*, Oxford English Press, September 2019, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/74137?>. Accessed October 24, 2019.
- (3) The quotations from *Othello* are taken from William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. by Takashi Sasayama, Taishukan Shakespeare, (Tokyo: Taishukan, 1989).
- (4) Wolfgang Clemen, *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (Harvard University Press, 1951): 197.

- (5) As for ancient mythology, see E.M. Berens, *A Handbook Of Mythology: The Myths and Legends of Ancient Greece and Rome (1886)*, a paperback version published by Kessinger Publishing, 2010.
- (6) Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum Et Emblematum Centuriae Quatuor*, published by Mogvntiae, sumpt. L. Bovrgeat, typ. C. Kuchleri, Duke University Libraries, rpt. in 1668.
- (7) For detailed explanation of flowers, see Vivian Thomas, Nicki Faircloth, *Shakespeare's Plants and Gardens: A Dictionary*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016.
- (8) The quotations from *Romeo and Juliet* are taken from William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. by Soji Iwasaki, Taishukan Shakespeare (Taishukan, 2008).
- (9) For detailed discussion, see Adam Max Cohen. "Hamlet as Emblem: The Ars Memoria and the Culture of the Play." *Early Modern Cultural Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2003, p. 93. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/27793757. Accessed December 17, 2019.
- (10) Further discussions of Ophelia's sexuality, see Caralyn Bialo, "Popular Performance, the Broadside Ballad, and Ophelia's Madness." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2013, pp. 293–309, www.jstor.org/stable/24510000. Accessed 17 Nov. 2020.
- (11) For the nun-as-prostitute explanation, see, Tracy Fessenden, "The Convent, the Brothel, and the Protestant Woman's Sphere." *Signs*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2000, pp. 451–478. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3175562. Accessed 17 Nov. 2020.
- (12) The quotations from *Twelfth Night* are taken from William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, ed. by Keir Elam, Arden 3rd series (London: Bloomsbury, 2008).

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