

Gertrude's Motive and Hamlet's Resentment

Madina Tuhbatullina

Waldorf University
Iowa Iota Chapter

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Author contact information is available from tlindblom@alphachihonor.org or kvosevich@alphachihonor.org

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Abstract

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* explores themes of betrayal and revenge. Hamlet seeks to avenge his father's death by killing Claudius. While Claudius is the traitor, Hamlet's anger focuses on Gertrude. He is disturbed by Gertrude's remarriage even before he meets the Ghost and learns about Claudius's betrayal. Scholars have presented many reasons for Hamlet's extreme frustration with his mother's new union, such as his Oedipus complex, misogyny and fear of uncontrolled female sexuality, and loss of his right to the throne. This article argues that Hamlet's lost chance at becoming a king immediately after his father's death is an important factor in his resentment toward Gertrude and her marriage to Claudius. While Hamlet thinks that Gertrude remarried out of lust, she clearly has political motives prompting her to marry Claudius and give him the throne. Gertrude is neither a licentious woman nor an innocent victim of Hamlet's obsessive resentment. She is a character with political power and ability to look for her own benefit in her position.

Keywords: Gertrude's remarriage, widowhood in Shakespeare, women's sexuality in Shakespeare, Gertrude's political motives

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* explores what constitutes a betrayal. Claudius's poisoning of Hamlet's father drives the play's plot development, and Hamlet abhors his uncle for the murder of his father. Throughout the play, however, Hamlet focuses his anger on his mother Gertrude. Even before Hamlet meets the ghost of his father and finds out about the crime, he finds Gertrude's speedy decision to marry Claudius agitating. To Hamlet, his mother is already a traitor. Gertrude understands that Hamlet has a reason to be angry about the marriage, but she does not think that she has betrayed anyone through her actions since she seems to be unaware of Claudius' crime.

Gertrude is central to the plot of *Hamlet*, yet she speaks too little to become a fully realized character with motivations and needs. For this reason, readers have theorized about the kind of person and the kind of woman she is. One of the foundational discussions of her character was written by Andrew Cecil Bradley. In *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Bradley compares Gertrude to "a sheep in the sun," who cannot be involved in King Hamlet's murder, but who is also too shallow to care about him or her son or her kingdom (167). She is too weak to resist Claudius' seduction, so Hamlet and the Ghost attempt to rescue her from her own evil (Bradley). Other scholars, like Pragati Das in "Shakespeare's Representation of Women in his Tragedies," agree that Gertrude is not murderous, but simply selfish, shallow, and addicted to pleasure. Therefore, she deserves forgiveness (Das 51). In these interpretations, Gertrude has flaws that clear her from murder but also make her role in the play easily dismissible.

A great number of interpretations of *Hamlet* focus on Hamlet's repressed emotions relating to Gertrude. Sigmund Freud's theory that Hamlet has a repressed sexual desire toward his mother and sees Claudius as his sexual rival gained popularity among scholars in the twentieth century. Freud compared Hamlet to Sophocles' ancient Greek character Oedipus Rex, claiming that Hamlet, in a repressed way, also wanted to kill his father and marry his mother. Since Claudius takes Hamlet's place by fulfilling his desire, Claudius' death would also figuratively represent Hamlet's death (Holland 164). Ernest Jones in *Hamlet and Oedipus* supports the theory that Hamlet saw his father as a sexual rival. Once his father died, Hamlet had to share his mother with Claudius. Yet, Hamlet delays killing Claudius. Jones contends that Hamlet's sexual attraction to his

mother disgusts him and he fears that it will be no longer repressed once Claudius is dead (78, 101-102). Theodore Reik claims that Hamlet, disgusted by his attraction, tries to prove that he does not have Oedipal wishes. He wanted to kill his father but now attempts to avenge his death; he desires his mother but shows aggression toward her (qtd. in Holland 171). Otto Rank also sees Hamlet's sexual desire toward his mother as a cause for feelings of resentment. He interprets Hamlet as a child in an Oedipal stage, who sees his mother as either virginal and sexually unavailable to anyone or as available to men except him. Hamlet's feelings spill onto Ophelia. When she stops accepting Hamlet's courtship, she becomes available to other men. Hamlet hates father figures: King Hamlet, who stood between him and his mother; Claudius, who took away his mother; and Polonius, who took away his lover (qtd. in Holland 166-167). Another take on psychoanalysis is in "Tardy Sons: Hamlet, Freud, and Filial Ambivalence" by Andrew Barnaby, which claims that Hamlet's conflict comes from his inability to distinguish between himself and his father, because he is stuck in a repetition of the past, as opposed to a memory (231).

While many subscribe to Freud's theory, many dispute it. Mark Robson argues in "Oedipal Visuality: Freud, Romanticism, *Hamlet*" that Freud is influenced by German tradition and "his desire for an oedipal forgetting of his own father figures," which leads him to misinterpret *Hamlet* (61). In "Resituating Freud's Hamlet," David J. Gordon writes that Hamlet does not suffer from an Oedipus complex; he suffers from an inner conflict about the chivalric code of honor that requires blood revenge. Hamlet does not find that tradition convincing enough to kill his uncle, so he struggles to find another moral reason. Likewise, Kenneth Muir in "Freud's Hamlet" argues that the Oedipus complex cannot explain everything away (76). Hamlet's superego, outside of any Oedipal emotions, is a bigger factor in his conflict and delay of action because it serves as a cause for self-blame (Muir 77). Even though many scholars think that the Oedipus complex cannot explain everything in Hamlet's actions, Holland concludes after presenting many psychoanalytic views on the play that the Oedipal theory is multiplex, including a variety of factors within itself (171).

Feminist readers of *Hamlet* consider a more social explanation for Hamlet's resentment toward Gertrude and her remarriage. Valerie Traub ("Jewels, Statues,

and Corpses: Containment of Female Erotic Power (*Hamlet, Othello, The Winter's Tale*"), Jacqueline Rose ("Hamlet—the *Mona Lisa* of Literature"), and Janet Adelman ("Man and Wife is One Flesh: Hamlet and the Confrontation with the Maternal Body") agree that Hamlet's revulsion comes from an inability to reconcile with his mother's uncontrolled sexuality. Gertrude, instead of living as if she still belongs to King Hamlet and reassuring her son of her virgin-like innocence, chooses to have her own sexual life. In Hamlet's mind, Gertrude cheats on his father and through that "turns all women into prostitutes and all men into potential cuckolds" (Traub 122). Adelman adds that Hamlet is also disgusted by his mother's sexuality because he comes from her body, which means that he is contaminated by it. Therefore, he needs to control her sexuality, and the Ghost's request for revenge lets him rationalize this need (Adelman 279). Rose critiques several interpretations of the play, saying that they either villainize or idealize Gertrude, subjecting her to a virgin/whore dichotomy. This causes Gertrude to become the source of good and evil in the play, making her ultimately responsible for everyone's actions (Rose 116). Harmonie Loberg in "Queen Gertrude: Monarch, Mother, Murderer" argues that Gertrude, who has often been called sensual in nature, does not show her sensuality anywhere in the play. Loberg sees Gertrude's remarriage and interactions with the men in the play as acts of self-protection and protection of the men from one another (63-64). This interpretation transforms Gertrude from a lustful woman and innocent victim into a capable political leader.

These studies provide a wealth of interpretations of Gertrude and Hamlet, but only a few of them see Gertrude as capable of having an agenda, one that is not based on her desire for men or careless nature. Scholars omit discussions of Gertrude's potential political reasons for remarriage. This essay will argue that Gertrude's decision to remarry is more political than sensual, and Hamlet's awareness of her change in power informs his anger against Gertrude.

Gertrude's remarriage to her former brother-in-law could be a political act. After King Hamlet's death, Denmark was in a warlike state. Fortinbras, a Norwegian prince motivated by the assumed weakness of Denmark since King Hamlet's death, was planning an attack on Denmark, as Claudius announces in Act 1, Scene 2:

Now follows that you know: young Fortinbras,
Holding a weak supposal of our worth

Or thinking by our late dear brother's death
Our state to be disjoint and out of frame.
(Shakespeare 1.2.17-20)

One way to ensure that the kingdom looks strong and prosperous is to announce a royal wedding. Claudius also implies that Gertrude's marriage to him has a political function, calling her "Th'imperial jointress to this warlike state" (1.2.9). They married to show that the former king's death did not break Denmark; rather, the "jointress" and her new union have strengthened it.

Gertrude's actions have a political effect on the line of succession to the throne. Gertrude could have married Claudius to prevent Hamlet from ascending to the throne immediately, while still giving him a chance to be a king after Claudius's death. Both Denmark and England, whose rules of succession Shakespeare probably used as a reference for the fictional Denmark, followed male primogeniture, a system in which the first-born male child inherits the throne. The system "does not exclude females absolutely, but prefers males" (Corcos 1603-1604). Denmark in Shakespeare's time practiced elective monarchy, so the king was chosen from men within the royal family (Stabler 656). In *What Happens in Hamlet*, John Dover Wilson states that Shakespeare had little knowledge of what Denmark was like, so he wrote from the perspective of the British monarchy (38, 27). A. P. Stabler presents arguments against this statement, saying that an election is mentioned in *Hamlet* (659). He concludes, however, that what exact political system Shakespeare had in mind remains a question. Claudius might be a king who was elected over Hamlet because of his marriage to Gertrude, or he might be a usurper who took Hamlet's throne without election. In either case, Hamlet is politically justified to take actions against Claudius (Stabler 660-661).

Gertrude's marriage to Claudius took away Hamlet's chance to rule Denmark, but only temporarily. Claudius says to Hamlet when he tries to console him, "You are the most immediate to our throne" (1.2.313). There is a high chance that Claudius' plan was also to get rid of young Hamlet to have his own future son inherit the kingdom. However, since Gertrude seems to have been unaware of Claudius' poisoning of King Hamlet in this scenario, she thought that Hamlet's right to the throne was secure.

Gertrude could have chosen to marry Claudius because she thought her son unfit to rule the kingdom at the time when Fortinbras was planning an attack.

Touched deeply by his father's death, Hamlet might not have been equipped to stand against Fortinbras in case of war. Since Gertrude already had a son of age, she could not become the queen regnant and delay Hamlet's ascension to the throne by staying unmarried. It is unlikely that Gertrude could marry someone from a different class and gift him the crown since Hamlet was of age, thirty years old (5.1.159-60). Therefore, marrying Claudius was possibly the only way for Gertrude to keep the crown in the same family and give Hamlet a chance to be a king but also delay his ascension to the throne.

This scheme works only with the assumption that Gertrude loves her son. She treats him with care throughout the play and tells him not to drink from a poisoned cup in the end (5.2.312-13). Loberg in "Queen Gertrude: Monarch, Mother, Murderer" points out how Gertrude's own political interests inform her treatment of the men in the play. Gertrude's identity in a patriarchal society depends on her relationships with men. To defend her position as queen, wife, and mother who was recently destabilized by King Hamlet's death, she needs to form and maintain good relationships with Hamlet and Claudius. Therefore, "she spends the entire play guarding her masculine sources of identity" (Loberg 63-64). When she cries out to Hamlet that the drink is poisoned, she does not say that Claudius poisoned the drink. By protecting the men from one another, she protects her own identity (Loberg 63-64).

If Gertrude puts her own political needs above Hamlet's, then marrying Claudius would be a decision she makes to keep Hamlet away from the throne for the rest of his life. In "Ophelia and Gertrude: Victimized Women in *Hamlet*," Mesut Güneç claims that Gertrude's duty as a mother is to protect Hamlet's heirship. When she marries Claudius, she plans to have children with him, creating new heirs to the throne and Hamlet's rivals. Gertrude's sexuality then becomes a political threat to Hamlet (Güneç 169). Wilson argues that Shakespeare's audience saw this theme of usurpation clearly, so it did not need to be mentioned often in the play. Therefore, Hamlet's attempts to shame Gertrude for her sexuality were also a political act of trying to retain a good reputation of the royal family (Wilson 48-49). Anthony Burton analyzes what kind of political power Claudius usurped in "Laertes's Rebellion: Further Aspects of Inheritance Law in *Hamlet*." Some believe that in the scene about Ophelia's death, gravediggers allude to the *Hales v. Petit* case, which centers on the issues of suicide and inheritance. *Hales v. Petit* is the basis for

Burton's claim that Gertrude's remarriage gave Hamlet Elsinore and two-thirds of his father's property, which is much less than what Claudius acquired, everything that Gertrude owned while married to King Hamlet. Claudius would possess his new property only while Gertrude was alive unless she bore him an heir. An heir would ensure that Hamlet would never get his inheritance (Burton 66). Gertrude's motivation for removing Hamlet from the line of inheritance could be a desire for the position of queen regnant instead of the potentially less-powerful post as queen mother if her son ascended the throne immediately after her first husband's death.

Besides any possible political implications, the incestuous nature of the marriage is what disgusts and angers Hamlet. Even though Gertrude and Claudius do not share any genetic connections, the argument is made because of a Christian idea that when a man and a woman marry, they become one flesh: "And Adam said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, for she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (*New King James Bible*, Gen. 2.23-24). This type of marriage is considered a sin, according to the following passage from Leviticus: "If a man takes his brother's wife, it is severe defilement and he has disgraced his brother; they shall be childless" (*New American Bible*, Lev. 20.21). Therefore, it is possible to justify Hamlet and the Ghost viewing this marriage as incestuous and unethical. On the other hand, Jason Rosenblatt, in his article "Aspects of the Incest Problem in *Hamlet*," explores a different biblical approach to the definition of incest that can be applied to Hamlet's situation, the levirate marriage:

If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. And it shall be that the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. (*New King James Bible*, Deut. 25.5-6)

This verse presents such marriages as ethical and necessary, but only if the dead brother did not have a son when he was alive. Rosenblatt argues that Gertrude marries Claudius as if she never had a child from his brother, disregarding Hamlet's existence (351). This verse also demonstrates the idea of ownership of a woman's body. If she becomes a part of a certain family,

she functions as a vessel for that family's genetic continuation. Her duty is to produce a son, specifically; once that is accomplished, she has completed her primary duty within her husband's family. If she was unable to bear a son before her husband died, she must fulfill her function by bearing a son from his brother. Gertrude had a son before remarriage, which means that she defies King Hamlet's ownership of her by denying the concept that her sole function as woman and as queen is to continue her royal husband's family line. Remarriage to Claudius also represents the dismissal of her son Hamlet's existence.

This marriage is not representative of the levirate tradition from the Old Testament; it is a widow-inheritance. Claudius inherits his brother's kingdom, his queen, and life as king. Since in highly patriarchal societies women are their husbands' belongings, Claudius becomes a substitute for his dead brother, taking ownership of Gertrude in the eyes of Elizabethan society, even if she manipulates the situation for her own political power. As the new head of the family, he also takes ownership of Hamlet as his son. This feels unjust to Hamlet because his chance to become a king and the head of the family is taken away (Rosenblatt 352). Hamlet is also jealous of Gertrude, because by shedding the dead king's ownership of her, she also sheds Hamlet's ownership of her in his expected role of head of the family. The Ghost and Hamlet lose ownership of Gertrude and, apparently, her love when she marries Claudius:

. . . a Scriptural view of the incest prohibition might posit instead a relationship of concord between father and son, both of whom require from Gertrude the loyalty that would confirm their existence. The union of Gertrude and Claudius confirms instead the death of love, and it constitutes an insult to Hamlet, who might as well never have been born. (Rosenblatt 362)

The "loss" of Gertrude undermines the fact that King Hamlet existed and that his son exists. Gertrude's new union makes them unable to control her.

For most of the play, Claudius and Gertrude do not seem to think that their marriage is incestuous or sinful. Gertrude assumes that it is the hastiness of their marriage, not allowing enough time to grieve for the dead king, that bothers Hamlet. When Claudius tells her that Polonius knows the reason for Hamlet's frustration, Gertrude replies, "I doubt it is no other than the main, / His father's death and our hasty marriage" (2.2.56-57).

Gertrude does not talk about incest before she is directly confronted by Hamlet. Even then, while she confesses that her soul has "black and grieved spots" that she prefers not to see, Gertrude does not say anything specifically about incest (3.4.93). While confessing to the murder of his brother, Claudius

never adverts to the sin of incest. Even during the prayer scene (III.iii), when he frankly acknowledges responsibility for the sins attended upon a brother's murder, he remains silent on the question of incest. His silence may derive, not from shame that prevents him from facing a peculiarly offensive act, but rather from a conviction that in this insistence, at least, his behavior was unexceptionable. (Rosenblatt 350-351)

While Hamlet's madness stems largely from the union he considers incestuous and sinful, Gertrude and Claudius do not seem to think that they have committed such a wrongful act.

King Hamlet's Ghost is also enraged by the marriage, but he still tells Hamlet to seek revenge against his uncle, not his mother:

Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest.
But howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind with, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught; leave her to heaven
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge
To prick and sting her. (1.5.82-97)

The Ghost naturally has more right to desire Gertrude's death, since she married not just his brother, but his killer. However, he focuses the blame on Claudius, the seducer: "Oh, wicked wit and gifts that have the power / So to seduce!—won to his shameful lust / The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen" (1.5.44-46). His decision not to urge Hamlet to kill her may stem from his belief in her goodness, his love for her, or some sort of chivalric code of Elizabethan England that prohibits killing a woman. In either case, the Ghost reminds Hamlet to be gentler with the queen at the same time as he fuels Hamlet's desire for revenge:

Do not forget. This visitation
Is but to wet thy almost blunted purpose.
But look, amazement on thy mother sits.
Oh, step between her and her fighting soul—
Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works.
Speak to her, Hamlet. (3.4.109-14)

The Ghost's hunger for revenge is aimed at Claudius and not Gertrude, even if he shares Hamlet's belief that their marriage was incestuous.

In contrast, the focus of Hamlet's speeches of revenge remains on Gertrude. In Act 3, Scene 3, Hamlet sees Claudius praying and decides not to kill him because his soul could go to heaven during his prayer. He gives himself time to think and make a rationalized decision not to act. In Act 3, Scene 4, Hamlet is accusing Gertrude of betrayal and incest. He is angrier and rasher. He kills Polonius in his madness, thinking he is Claudius. Hamlet's anger rises in his mother's presence. This behavior demonstrates that his revenge is personal, and it is directed at his mother's marriage rather than his father's death. The Oedipus complex can be an explanation to this behavior; Hamlet's jealousy overtakes him. On the other hand, the explanation may lie in Hamlet's surprise at how quickly Gertrude sheds patriarchal expectations of widowhood and claims her own identity and political power.

In the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, widows followed strict rules of mourning ("Widows and Widowers"). Gertrude lost a part of her identity when her husband died. After such a dire loss, she is expected to feel immense grief. Hamlet is disappointed by the lack of it, proclaiming "O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason / Would have mourned longer—married with my uncle" (1.2.150-51). While Gertrude receives negative judgement for not being more sorrowful, Hamlet receives it for mourning too much. His sorrow is called "unmanly grief" by Claudius (1.2.94). Characters in the play have a gendered vision of grief. These gender expectations give Gertrude two options of a widow identity: "that of the virtuous and dependent widow and that of the powerful, independent, and licentious widow" ("Widows and Widowers"). Gertrude did not become more powerful, independent, or licentious, but because she did not show the expected mourning and did not allow for more time to mourn, she automatically became the licentious widow in Hamlet's eyes. In Shakespeare's day, royal widows also practiced virtuous widowhood:

Queen regents in particular wore opulent mourning clothes that explicitly reminded their subjects that their authority was derived from their connection to the deceased king. Obedience to the mourning queen depended on her connection to this past as much as on her role as mother of the next king. Mary, queen of Scots, arrived in Scotland as a widow and drew the entire Scottish court into mourning with her—a fine emblem of the unity of the court behind her. ("Widows and Widowers")

Aristocratic widows practiced mourning through isolation in their houses for a year and wore lament clothes for two years (Günenç 168). Flirtation, acts of sexuality, and remarriage were taboo during mourning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Widowers, in contrast, spent less time in mourning, because their identity was not tied to their dead wives ("Widows and Widowers"). Therefore, Gertrude's hasty remarriage was unusual not only to Hamlet, but also to the people of her kingdom, who believed that a queen-widow's power came from her ties to her dead husband. Hamlet felt ashamed of his mother because she failed his gendered expectations of a virtuous widow.

His disappointment also shows his view of female sexuality. An unmarried or a widowed woman who acts on her sexuality is the lowest form of existence for Hamlet. He swears at his indecisiveness, comparing himself to a prostitute:

Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must like a whore unpack my heart with words
And fall a-cursing like a very drab. (2.2.501-05)

To Hamlet, a woman who has sex with different men is the most humiliating creature. Claudius poisoned his own brother, and Hamlet himself became a murderer, yet these actions do not bring as much shame as Gertrude's remarriage. Hamlet sees Gertrude's marriage as a product of her lust:

Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him
As if in increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on. And yet, within a month—
Let me not think on't—Frailty, thy name is woman.
(1.2. 143-46)

Hamlet expresses the anxiety characteristic of patriarchal culture, fear of a woman who has been exposed to sexual pleasure but does not have a husband to control her desire:

The widow here is in complete control of her sexuality and manipulates the people around her through deception and sexual power play. By the late eighteenth century, libertinism portrayed a widow's sexuality as dangerous not because of her unbridled and voracious appetite but because of the control it could hold over men and the havoc created by a widow whose sexuality was not channeled through male ownership. ("Widows and Widowers")

A woman's sexual freedom is a threat to patriarchy; therefore, her desires must be controlled. Shaming

women's sexuality helps maintain that social order. Since Hamlet used to "own" his mother through his father, when he realizes she has escaped such ownership, he resorts to shaming her: "O shame, where is thy blush?" (3.4.53-88). He also prompts her to abstain from having sex with Claudius:

Refrain tonight,
And that shall lend a kind of easiness

To the next abstinence, the next more easy. (3.4.166-68)

Hamlet feels that he has a right to command her actions because of the highly patriarchal environment that the play is set in. The theory of Hamlet's Oedipus complex, with the variety of interpretations within it, can explain such behavior as jealousy. However, considering the number of social rules Gertrude broke, Hamlet must be enraged by the shame she brought onto the family. Wilson points out that Shakespeare's audience clearly read Hamlet's attempt at controlling Gertrude as a political act of protecting what's left of the family's reputation (48-49). Hamlet also prescribes to the patriarchal values, so his mother's uncontrolled sexuality is both a cause for his shame and his loss of the throne.

Gertrude and Ophelia, the only two female characters in *Hamlet*, are both judged by their relationships to the men in the play and their sexuality. Even after her father's death, Ophelia sings about a sexual relationship in her madness,

Quoth she, 'Before you tumbled me
You promised me to wed.'

He answers:

'so would I ha' done by yonder sun
An thou hadst not come to my bed.' (4.2.59-66)

Ophelia, who does not show any signs of promiscuity during the play, ends up singing a sexual song once she loses her mind. As a woman, she does not serve any role besides being the embodiment of virginity and, later, of promiscuity that results from her madness. Elaine Showalter writes in "Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism" that "Ophelia might confirm the impossibility of representing the feminine in patriarchal discourse as other than madness, incoherence, fluidity, or silence" (2). From a patriarchal perspective, there is nothing more to be said about a woman without making her sinful and improper, and that is also what Ophelia becomes: "In French theoretical criticism, the feminine or 'Woman' is that which escapes representation in patriarchal language and symbolism; it remains on the side of negativity,

absence, and lack. In comparison to Hamlet, Ophelia is certainly a creature of lack" (Showalter 2). Ophelia lacks an identity because it conventionally comes from a father or a husband. Once her father dies at the hand of her past suitor, she is already dead. Her death also makes her a faultless woman, because building her own identity would threaten the patriarchy, as it does in the case of Gertrude.

Ophelia and Gertrude go through similar situations: Gertrude marries the killer of her husband after he has killed, while Ophelia has a courtship with a man who later kills her father. While Ophelia conforms to the expected weight of grief, Gertrude does not. Gertrude's first sin, before considering adultery, incest, or political manipulation, is having an identity of her own.

Hamlet sees women only in terms of their sexuality. He projects the paranoid fear of being cuckolded onto Ophelia, because Gertrude's remarriage makes him think that every man is cuckolded (Traub 122). Therefore, he uses shame to try to assert his control over Ophelia and Gertrude. He urges Gertrude to abstain in the closet scene and shames Ophelia by telling her to go to the nunnery (Traub 122). Hamlet's perception that women do not exist beyond the virgin/whore dichotomy makes Gertrude's remarriage an act of lust. However, Loberg observes that Gertrude and Claudius "never appear to share romantic or passionate affection with each other, only discussing Hamlet's behavior and governmental concerns" (63). She concludes that instead of sexual appetite, Gertrude's motivation for remarriage is to "secure her roles as monarch, mother, and wife" (63). Gertrude does not have much power outside of her relation to men, so the only way to gain or maintain that power is by convincing Claudius and Hamlet that she is loyal to each of them and by protecting them from one another, smoothing over any conflicts between them (Loberg 64). This interpretation escapes past characterizations of Gertrude that, according to Loberg, exchange one stereotype for another, making Gertrude either a lustful, careless woman or a submissive mother and wife (61).

Gertrude can look for her own benefits in the political change in Denmark after King Hamlet's death. Whether her actions are condemnable or worthy of celebration is not as important as whether she has an identity and an agenda of her own. By marrying Claudius too soon, she broke the social norms of Elizabethan widowhood; by dismissing Hamlet as her first husband's son, she

committed incest according to the Christian tradition; by continuing her sexual life, she became an adulteress in Hamlet's eyes. She stepped outside of patriarchal rules and, therefore, became dangerous. Gertrude could have married Claudius to delay Hamlet's ascension to the throne until Claudius's death or to remove Hamlet from the throne forever to pass it on to her future heir. Either motive guarantees her position as queen regnant for a longer period. Whatever Gertrude's intentions might be, she has political interest in marrying Claudius. Hamlet understands that she robbed him of a chance to be a king temporarily and potentially permanently, and it adds to the other strong factors of his resentment toward her. However, he fails to understand that usurpation of the throne by Claudius could have been Gertrude's conscious political intention, and not a result of her uncontrollable sexual appetite.

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