

📖 Topic Page: [Ophelia \(Fictitious character\)](#)

Definition: **Ophelia** from *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1600) the naïve daughter of POLONIUS who falls in love with HAMLET. She is manipulated into spying for him, but is humiliated by him. When Hamlet kills Polonius she loses her reason and soon after drowns. Her deranged words are some of the most poignant in all literature.

Ophelia: There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray, love, remember: and there is pansies, that's for thoughts.

IV, vi



Image from: [John Everett Millais, Ophelia. Reprinted courtesy... in Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era, 1760-1850](#)

Summary Article: **Ophelia**

From *Dictionary of Shakespeare, Peter Collin Publishing*

A central character in *Hamlet*, Ophelia is Polonius' daughter and Laertes' sister. Ophelia loves Hamlet, but her brother warns her against Hamlet's advances, and her father forbids her to see Hamlet altogether. Ophelia obediently complies with her father's wishes, while Polonius, indifferent to his daughter's feelings, interrogates her about Hamlet's behaviour and uses her as a barometer of Hamlet's mental state. As Hamlet's feigned madness increases, he develops at the same time a real disgust towards women and sex. He cruelly rejects Ophelia, abusing her, and ordering her to go into a nunnery. After her father is killed by Hamlet, Ophelia loses her mind. She sings songs of love and death, interspersed with snatches from bawdy ditties, and lovingly offers around flowers, which hold symbolic meanings for her. A victim of her father's meddling and Hamlet's obsession with revenge, Ophelia's death by drowning is later reported. The character of Ophelia may have been based on a real-life girl, Katherine Hamlet, who was drowned in the river in Stratford-on-Avon when Shakespeare was sixteen years old. There was some doubt as to whether her death was an accident or suicide.

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Ophelia. (2000). In L. McConnell, *Dictionary of Shakespeare, Peter Collin publishing*. London, UK: Peter Collin Publishing. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/ophelia_fictitious_character



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