

**Worksheet 9 – Ophelia’s soliloquy**

**Review**

**Answer these questions about the previous video lecture to check how much you remember.**

1. What type of argument does John McRae call the 4<sup>th</sup> soliloquy?
  - a) A heated one
  - b) A biased one
  - c) A rhetorical one
  - d) A weak one
  
2. What does the phrase ‘take arms’ suggest about the task that Hamlet is considering?
  - a) That it is one that involves action
  - b) That he will have to go to battle
  - c) That he cannot succeed
  - d) That he doesn’t care if he lives or dies
  
3. What are the 7 elements that John McRae argues that Hamlet works through in his thought experiment.
  - a) The concepts that make up the world and universe.
  - b) The complaints that Hamlet has about life
  - c) The biblical concepts of his faith
  - d) The benefits to life

**Recall**

**Answer these questions after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember.**

4. What word does Ophelia use that has not been used about Hamlet before ?
  - a) Reason
  - b) Noble
  - c) Sovereign
  - d) Scholar
  
5. How does John McRae say that people in Elizabethan England felt about mirrors?
  - a) They were suspicious of them
  - b) They were a fashionable new luxury item
  - c) They were a link to the supernatural and the Devil
  - d) They were a gift from God
  
6. What does John McRae argue is the purpose of Ophelia’s madness?
  - a) To show that women are unstable
  - b) To add interest to the play and especially to Act 4
  - c) To increase sympathy for Ophelia

- d) To act as a counterpoint for Hamlet's pretend madness

**Analysis :**

7. Let's look again at Ophelia's soliloquy that Professor McRae reads at the start of this lecture. (0.20 – 1.25) Act 3 scene 1 L149 – 160.

a) McRae goes through the main images very clearly so make sure that your edition is annotated to show the following linguistic and thematic notes:

- The division between talking about Hamlet and her own emotions
- Link between noble; sovereign and reason.
- The use of two triples: Courtier; soldier; scholar and eye; tongue and sword.
- Use of the mirror as an implement of observation
- Image of music and discord.

John McRae repeats the idea that Ophelia has misinterpreted the truth of what is going on here in Elsinore and how she accepts the surface level of what she sees rather than what she might feel.

b) Look back at her interaction with Hamlet when he appears in her closet (2.1.71-97) and also re-read the rest of this scene where she interacts with him (3.1.89-148)

c) Highlight how much of what Hamlet says and does is directly aimed at Ophelia and how much might be aimed at a wider audience and meant primarily at the ears of Claudius. You could use two different colours or styles of underlining.

d) When you have done, make some notes on your mind map of Hamlet what you have discovered and your own feelings towards him as a character Many find Hamlet a sympathetic character apart from his treatment of Ophelia as John McRae argues.

e) Decide whether you agree with this view or if you can see why Hamlet feels the way he does about the way that Ophelia behaves.

*Extension:*

*Re-read the letter that Hamlet sends to Ophelia (see below) and identify signs or hints that he is trying to communicate something in code to her. Does he know this letter will also be read by others and how does he try to work around that? Is this a code or is he, again, just speaking to Claudius through the means that he has?*

To the celestial and my soul's idol, the most beautified Ophelia

Doubt that the stars are fire

Doubt that the sun doth move

Doubt truth to be a liar

But never doubt I love

O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers. I have not art to reckon my groans, but that I love thee best, O most best, believe it. Adieu. Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this machine is to him.  
Hamlet

*What difference does it make if she understands the code or if she doesn't?*

*How might it affect the way she behaves and acts and could she, in fact, be saved some of her distress?*

## Evaluation

8. John McRae argues that Ophelia's madness is a counter to Hamlet's pretend one. We can be assured that hamlet's madness is not real because of what we see in Ophelia's real distress.

Madness had a particular connection with women in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was believed to have been caused by an imbalance in the four humours that controlled the health of an individual.

- a) Look at the quotations below and highlight which ideas are interesting and can be proved or supported by what we see of Ophelia's madness later in the play in Act 4.

Supposed triggers of madness were physical illness; an imbalance of bodily fluids, melancholy or anger; astrological influences; a lack of faith in God'. 1607

'Mad People, and innocent Children, do speak, forth whatever ariseth in their Phantasies', 1689

Love melancholy caused a 'leane' appearance, with 'eyne hollow' and 'hew pale', combined with a 'solitary disposition' 1621

Madness, like disease, was seen as the result of an imbalance of the four humours: if there was an excess of the choleric humour the person was manic; if too melancholic, the person was depressed. Madness was especially disturbing because, in defiance of the natural order humans became like beasts when they lost their power of reason\*.

- b) Then look at the table below that explores the idea of the four humours in more detail. Does this understanding of the way that people believed about the way a body worked, add to or complicate your understanding of the way that Ophelia can be judged or understood in this play?

Humour	Qualities	Element	Personality
Sanguine	Hot / moist	Air	Optimistic Red-cheeked Corpulent Irresponsible
Choleric	Hot / dry	Fire	Short-tempered Red-haired Thin Ambitious
Phlegmatic	Cold / moist	Water	Sluggish Pallid Corpulent Lazy

Melancholic	Cold / dry	Earth	Introspective Sallow Thin
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- c) Next read the article below from the British Library that looks at the position of Ophelia especially with regard to her position as one of the only women in the play. As John McRae states, Hamlet seems to 'lose it' with the women in his life and so there is some discussion regarding Gertrude as well.
- d) Make sure you make good notes and summarise what is being said as the article is quite lengthy. In addition, be prepared and willing to note down your ideas and attitudes to Ophelia as you read through remembering that you are developing your own ideas of the text and your response to the characters.

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/ophelia-gender-and-madness>

*Extension:*

*The National Theatre gave five different directors the character of Ophelia and the same scenes (those of her madness) and asked them to direct the same actress in ways that made sense to them.*

*The link is below and the whole project makes for interesting watching.*

*Are there directors who create more sympathy and if so, how?*

*Are there directors who bring a strength and anger to her madness or do they all dwell on her vulnerability?*

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL1WKARV4AmThMp0LSLgTVBnvNczVJkUHd>

*In some more recent productions, Ophelia has been directed to be more independent and rebellious in order to engage a more modern and Feminist thinking audience.*

*Look for some different productions that you may have seen in class or search on Youtube for extracts as they do alter the way the audience not only feel about Ophelia but also, in comparison, Hamlet.*

## Glossary

**Blasted** - withered or blighted; laid waste.

**Overthrown** - remove forcibly from power.

**Courtier** - a person who attends a royal court as a companion or adviser to the king or queen

**Fashion** - make into a particular form

**Disharmony** - lack of harmony or agreement.

**Jangled** - make or cause to make a ringing metallic sound, typically a discordant one; set or be set on edge

**Patriarchal** - relating to or denoting a system of society or government controlled by men.

**Corpulent** - (of a person) fat.

**Pallid** - (of a person's face) pale, typically because of poor health; lacking vigour or intensity; insipid.