

Study Questions for “Ophelia” (*Hamlet*)
from Chris Wind’s *Soliloquies: the lady doth indeed protest*

Ophelia

O what a noble mind is here at last uncover'd!
The glass of fashion, the mold of form
Is quite dash'd against the stone;
The shattered pieces lie at my feet.
My thoughts, my feelings,
Once fixed, encased in crystal,
Breathe and blow in the quick'ning wind
Like petals. Once pale, now pulsing,
Rich, and rainbowed, come!
I beseech thee, attend and heed
As I the shards examine.

Laertes, brother, you insult to suggest
Hamlet's love impermanent
For his choice must be queen
As well as wife: Am I not worthy?
Further, you warn caution,
Lest I my 'chaste treasure open':
I am mistress of my self!
And since more than a man, I pay the cost,
Then more, not less, do I take such care.
Lastly, you say 'safety lies in fear':
I have grown weary of being afraid,
Of being made to feel afraid; I yearn
To meet the day and greet the night
Unafraid—as men are wont to do.
And I crave to love with opening arms—
So tell me not to hide my heart
Lest my desire lead him to abandon
Restraint, and madly ravish—would it be so?
(Or do you extend to all of your kind
Knowledge of your self alone?)

Father, your words are as out of tune.
You say I do not understand myself
And see me still an infant babe,
For by foil you would then appear the more mature:
Is contrast your only proof of wisdom and worth?
(Alas, all cowards and chameleons create their colour

From what is without, not what is within.)
And you instruct me to 'set my entreatments at a higher rate'
As if I am some prize! Do you think me a whore,
That my presence must be paid for?
Then you claim *he* may walk with a larger tether
(As if we were but animals!): Why do you grant him
More freedom than I?
Why does Laertes go to Paris (and not I)
When you know his simple mind so well
You sent another to be guardian?
I pray thee, Father, reconsider—
Is it because your own judgement is faulty
That you do not trust mine?
Hamlet is a fine man, soldier, scholar, courtier,
A prince! And I judge him to be sincere.
Is that not enough?
No, indeed, that is nothing, for lastly
You tell me to forsake him—forever!
For no other reason than your own mistrust
Of him, of me, that I'll become with child
(And thereby make you the greater fool—
You think not what it would make of me.)

To you both, I never sought your advice
Why do you 'press it upon me so?
Perhaps you feel your sex gives the right—
No. I'll give the reason: Projection is all.
Brother, your passions run without rule
So you tell your sister to reign hers.
And Father, you are a fool and master both,
Of fine words and deception's smile
So you counsel your daughter to believe none.

And now, Hamlet, no longer my lord

An angel or a saint—allow me to be human:
I bleed, I desire— Is that it?
Desiring, am I thus *impure*, fit only for a 'nunnery'?

Then, sitting near to see the players,
Did you think yourself a member of the troupe
To be playing thus with me?
Your closeness, your words, taunting me—
For desire's restraint or for its absence?
I was as fever'd as you were cold.
But you could not see at all,
So much it pleased you to be the wronged,
Poor little Hamlet, hard done by

His uncle, his mother, his sweetheart.
There was a line, not unnoticed,
'A woman's love is brief':
The brevity of my love is but a measure
Of the weakness of yours.

 Pray, what is the source
Of your sudden loss of faith in me?
You think I betrayed you, used you,
Played pawn of the King and Queen:
But they merely sought to learn
The cause of your madness,
A knowledge I too desired—
(Was it your love for me?)
Why did you doubt me so?
Ah—'your mother, your sweetheart'—
Your mother is unfaithful therefore I must be;
Your mother fickle, therefore I fickle;
Your mother's love brief, mine too.
Hamlet, I am as different from your mother
As I am from you.
Like the child who calls all furry creatures 'dogs'
You think that because we share sex
We share all else as well.
I would as easily say that because my father
Is a cowardly fool, so too are you.
(An opinion not unworthy of consideration, now—
Perhaps it was you who used me—

My bed is empty and I fear I have dreamt
But no—I hear it said you have left for England.
What news is this?
You left no word, no explanation,
And I beat my breast flinging myself down,
Wondering have you played with me yet again?
I love you, I love you not!
Perhaps they tell true and I took to my bed
My father's murderer, and not my love.
He has left, and I am the fool,
No, there must be a reason, I resist—
But then you send a letter to Horatio
And there is none for me.
Tormented, I wander for days, how should I
Your true love know from another one?
Now you seem dead and gone
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine;
But up he rose and donned his clothes
And dugged the chamber door,
Let in the maid, that out a maid
Never departed more.
Young men will do't, if they come to it
By cock, they are to blame.
And will 'a not come again?

I wander'd thus a while, alas,
They thought me a poor virgin,
Loosed by insanity, mourning for my father;
But they did not know in whose bed
You lie the night before—
For that sanity makes, out of silly songs.

I hear it told a suicide:
A heart twice broken by grief
Over a father's death and a love lost.
Alas, it seems men like to believe
They are the center of the universe
For all members of my sex.
But some of us are made
Of stuff more strong and independent.
My life was affected by you, 'tis true,

But not extinguished because of you.
And so, there arises a new thought:
Despair over a young unmarried pregnancy.
While more flattering than the former,
This, alas, is also untrue—
Hamlet was thirty and I was no Juliet;
And, with a simple sheath, a douche of zinc—

The truth, let it be known,
Is not suicide at all.
To your disadvantage it is
That clowns, idiots, and other asses
Are believed before a woman's word.

Go, heed the Queen
And not the clown: It was an accident.
As I was perched in a tree sorting my mind,
I fell into the water, my dress billowed out,
And heavy as it quickly became,
it weighted me down.

Who would realize but another woman?
Forsooth indeed 'twas the damned dress!
Against the farthingale, several petticoats,
And my kirtle, velvet and voluminous,

I had but little chance.
Struggling with tens of tiny buttons and ties,
I could not get it off in time.

No, I could not free myself soon enough—
For I was the more deceived
To obey, to submit, to accept.
To wear my thoughts like garments
Fitting to the fashions of time and place
But that hinder and hide the self.
'Tis sad we seldom know what we are
And less what we may be.

But I do know now what I think:
Again, projection is all.
Hamlet, you tried to cast off your desire,
That constant source of frustration—
But alas you could not, and so instead
You sought to strip me of mine.

In your diversion with revenge and hatred,
You realized your love for me was brief—
And so you accused me and mine of brevity.
In your heart, loving your mother instead,
You were the unfaithful one—
And so called me fickle.
Incapable of strong belief and trust,
Doubting, vacillating, questioning all—
You take the mirror for glass and see me instead.
Guilty of dissembling and deceiving
With a mockery of madness and *The Mousetrap*—
You call upon my face-painting with disgust.
And last, you punish me for acting
With simple allegiance and obedience
To my duty toward my father—
Yet you have done the very same,
Pursuing to a far ghastlier end
The duty to yours.

Laertes, Polonius, Hamlet—
Everything you are that displeases you,
Everything that you cannot look at in yourself,
You have projected upon me, you see in me.
Well I have cast that glass in splinters upon the floor!
I am more and different than what you want to see.
The mold is broken, no more to be filled
With your frustrated dreams and fearful dreads.

(Soft, I have garlands still of flowers sweet—
No fennel, nor columbine,
The violets have withered,
And the daisies have been plucked.
There is some rue for all,
And for Hamlet, here's rosemary:
I did love you once.
And here is pansies, that's for thoughts.
And for myself,
I have seen what I have seen, to see what I see
A single dogrose, rubied and free.)

1. What would Shakespeare's Laertes say to Ophelia's comments to him?
2. What would Shakespeare's Polonius say to Ophelia's comments to him?
3. What does Ophelia mean when she says "Projection is all"?
4. Which lines indicate that Ophelia accuses Hamlet of being self-absorbed? Do you think her accusation is justified? Explain.
5. What is dogrose a symbol of, and why is it an appropriate choice by the author?

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Study Questions are also available for "Juliet", "Desdemona", "Lady MacBeth", "Portia", "Kate", and "Miranda".