

Images of Ophelia and Flower motifs in Victorian Painting: Ophelia's Madness in Waterhouse's Paintings

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In this paper I considered the images of Ophelia in Victorian paintings from the viewpoint of motifs of flowers and analyzed three particular paintings by John William Waterhouse. It is obvious that there is the strong connection between Ophelia and flowers in the text of *Hamlet* and Victorian paintings. There are three types of images of Ophelia in Victorian paintings: pretty Ophelia, doomed Ophelia, and mad Ophelia. In the images of pretty Ophelia, flower motifs decorate her and emphasize her elegance. In the images of doomed Ophelia, flowers suggest her sinister fate. In the images of mad Ophelia, she lacks rational words and the flowers represent her feelings and voices.

Waterhouse adopted original representations of flower motifs in his three paintings of Ophelia in order to show her madness. In *Ophelia* in 1889, Waterhouse alluded to her sexuality and madness by the depiction of disturbing locks and white clothes, and the wild flowers in her hand embody her madness and deviation from the rational world. In 1894 Waterhouse painted another Ophelia, he expressed her doom by water-lily motifs on the dark river. In this case flowers bring her destruction. Waterhouse's last image of Ophelia in 1910 evidently shows Ophelia's madness. Ophelia is part of flowers and becomes an inhabitant of a mad world; two girls witness her madness and death. Thus, the flower motifs in images of Ophelia bring us new visions and interpretations.