



# Hamlet Essay Kit #3: The Character of Gertrude (Hamlet Essay Kits)

*Brendan Munnelly*

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You have the rest of your life to appreciate Shakespeare's *Hamlet* - but only a few hours to finish that essay!

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- 3 x 1,500-word full sample essays
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Here are some short samples from the three 1,500-word essays about Queen Gertrude:

### 1 - INTRODUCTION

"*Have you eyes?*", Prince Hamlet demands of his mother during their verbal confrontation in Act III-IV. The relationship between the villainous Claudius and King Hamlet's widow is a tragic tale of evil exploiting self-deluding naivety. We can share Prince Hamlet's exasperation with Queen Gertrude and wonder: 'For how long can a good woman blind herself to the evil around her?'

### 2 - THE WEDDING OF CLAUDIUS AND GERTRUDE

As she later admits, what Prince Hamlet calls her "*within a month*" (Act I-II) remarriage was "*o'erhasty*" (Act II-II) – and also insensitive to her son's grief and political ambitions. Yet King Hamlet's death in the palace orchid left Gertrude a woman alone, and the queenly role she had enjoyed for three decades suddenly in jeopardy.

### 3 - CLAUDIUS AND GERTRUDE: LOVE AND POWER

In Act IV-V Gertrude confronts the sword-wielding Laertes when she fears for the king's safety and defends him from any part in Polonius' death ("*But not by him*"). These are not the actions of a merely decorous trophy wife but of a woman who fulfills the king's description of her as the "*imperial jointress to this warlike state*" (Act I-II).

### 4 - GERTRUDE: MOTHER TO PRINCE HAMLET

Queen Gertrude is a person who seeks to smooth over everything without thinking too deeply; her son is an introspective scholar who cannot but think deeply about everything. Prince Hamlet's ranting against "*bloat king*" in the closet scene of Act III-IV produces a rare moment of self-awareness in Gertrude: "*Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul.*"

### 5 - GERTRUDE AND OPHELIA

When confronted in Act IV-V with Ophelia's madness, Gertrude speaks of the "*guilt*" in her "*sick soul*". Perhaps when the traumatized Ophelia offers her an imaginary gift of rue – a plant associated with sadness and regret – Gertrude was already reflecting ruefully on all the calamity and unhappiness has followed from her remarriage when "*the funeral bak'd-meats / Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables*" (Act I-II).

### 6 - CONCLUSION: TRUTH SEEN TO LATE

In a play where so characters set out to deceive one another, Gertrude is someone who deceives only herself. She pays the ultimate price for her tragic self-delusion – but not before she finally confronts the reality of her husband’s truly evil character. In the end, it is Gertrude’s rather than King Hamlet’s death from Claudius’ poison that moves her son to murder the usurping uncle who “*killed my king and whored my mother*” (Act V-II).

>>> With this book you’ll very quickly be expressing your own thoughts about Queen Gertrude, in your own individual way and personal writing style.

*The Character of Gertrude* is from the **Hamlet Essay Kit** series at [www.essaykit.com](http://www.essaykit.com) - simply the most sanity-saving, grade-boosting and deadline-beating way of appreciating the greatness of Shakespeare’s greatest play.

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