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Ophelia as a Key word in Understanding the Role of Obedience, Love and Beautifulness in Shakespeare's Hamlet Play

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ABSTRACT *This paper takes Ophelia as a Key word in Understanding the Role of Obedience, Love and Beautifulness in Shakespeare's Hamlet Play Ophelia is a fictional character in the play Hamlet by William Shakespeare. She is a young noblewoman of Denmark, the daughter of Polonius, sister of Laertes, and potential wife of Prince Hamlet. She is one of the few female characters in the play. In Ophelia's first speaking appearance in the play, she is seen with her brother, Laertes, who is leaving for France. Laertes warns her that Hamlet, the heir to the throne of Denmark, does not have the freedom to marry whomever he wants. Ophelia's father, Polonius, enters while Laertes is leaving, and also forbids Ophelia to pursue Hamlet, whom he fears is not earnest about her. This paper also examins how Ophelia was a key number I n giving the play is universility among others .In Ophelia's next appearance, she tells Polonius that Hamlet rushed into her room with his clothing askew, and with a "hellish" expression on his face, and only stared at her and nodded three times, without speaking to her. Based on what Ophelia told him, Polonius concludes that he was wrong to forbid Ophelia to see Hamlet, and that Hamlet must be mad because of lovesickness for her.*

Introduction

When you speak or write about Ophelia you have to remember that you are going to write about the history , because she reflects general highlight about a certain generation. Since Polonius is now sure that Hamlet is lovesick for Ophelia, he thinks Hamlet will express love for her. Claudius agrees to try the eavesdropping plan later.The plan leads to what is commonly called the "Nunnery Scene". Polonius instructs Ophelia to stand in the lobby of the castle while he and Claudius hide. Hamlet enters the room, in a different world from the others, and recites his "To be, or not to be" soliloquy. Hamlet approaches Ophelia and talks to her. He tells her "Get thee to a nunnery". Hamlet becomes angry, realizes he has gone too far and says "I say we will have no more marriages", and exits. Ophelia is left bewildered and heartbroken, sure that Hamlet is insane. After Hamlet storms out, Ophelia makes her "O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown" soliloquy. *Ophelia* by John Everett Millais (1852) is part of the Tate Gallery collection. His painting influenced the image in Kenneth Branagh's*Hamlet* .The next time Ophelia appears is at the "Mousetrap Play", which Hamlet has arranged in order to try to prove that Claudius killed King Hamlet. Hamlet sits with Ophelia and makes sexually suggestive remarks, also saying that woman's love is brief. Later that night, after the play, Hamlet kills Polonius during a private meeting between Hamlet and his mother, Queen Gertrude. At Ophelia's next appearance, after her father's death, she has gone mad, due to what the other characters interpret as grief for her father. She talks in riddles and rhymes, sings some "mad" and bawdy songs about death and a maiden losing her virginity. After bidding everyone a "good night", she exits. The last time Ophelia appears in the play is after Laertes comes to the castle to challenge Claudius over the death of his father, Polonius. Ophelia sings more songs and hands out flowers, citing their symbolic meanings, although interpretations of the meanings differ. The only herb that Shakespeare gives Ophelia herself is rue; "... there's rue for you, and here's some for me; we may call it herb of grace o' Sundays; O, you must wear your rue with a difference". Rue is well known for its symbolic meaning of regret, but the herb is also highly poisonous and has powerful abortive properties. In Act 4 Scene 7, Queen Gertrude, in her monologue (*There is a willow grows aslant the brook*), reports that Ophelia had climbed into a willow tree, and then a branch broke and dropped Ophelia into the brook, where she drowned. Gertrude says that Ophelia appeared "incapable of her own distress". Gertrude's announcement of Ophelia's death has been praised as one of the most poetic death announcements in literature.Later, a sexton at the graveyard insists Ophelia must have killed herself. Laertes is outraged by what the cleric says, and replies that Ophelia will be an angel in heaven when the cleric "lie[s] howling" in hell. At Ophelia's funeral, Queen Gertrude sprinkles flowers on Ophelia's grave ("Sweets to the sweet"), and says she wished Ophelia could have been Hamlet's wife (contradicting Laertes' warnings to Ophelia in the first act). Laertes then jumps into Ophelia's grave excavation, asking for the burial to wait until he has held her in his arms one last time and proclaims how much he loved her. Hamlet, nearby, then challenges Laertes and claims that he loved Ophelia more than "forty thousand" brothers could. After her funeral scene, Ophelia is no longer mentioned. Mary Catherine Bolton (afterwards Lady Thurlow) (1790-1830) as Ophelia in 1813, opposite John Philip Kemble's Hamlet While it is known that Richard Burbage played Hamlet in Shakespeare's time, there is no evidence of who played Ophelia; since there were no professional actresses on the public stage in Elizabethan England, we may assume that she was played by a boy. The actor appears to have had some musical ability, as Ophelia is given lines from ballads such as *Walsingham* to sing, and, according to the first quarto edition, enters with a lute.

Discussion

Bronfen [1] elucidates Western culture's fascination with depictions of dead, beautiful women in literature and the visual arts respectively, concluding that because such images are so omnipresent we are scarcely aware of their status as a resolute cultural tradition. Likening portraits of dead women to Poe's famous purloined letter,so numerous as to be invisible to the viewer's eye. Bronfen elaborates the aesthetic association between women and death, quoting Poe's notorious statement, "the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world." Bronfen's study, of course, is part of a general con-

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cern these days with the implications of "representation," and her discussion can also be situated in the larger context of current interarts debates about whether traditions in one aesthetic mode affect and should be studied in conjunction with each other, or whether such approaches end up as a kind of ecphrastic iconology, wherein the verbal invariably becomes the interpreter of the visual. Insofar as Ophelia is arguably Shakespeare's most recognizable female character, with a long and significant history of "purloining" in both verbal and visual media, she would seem to be an excellent focus for discussions of this kind. And indeed she is, albeit ironically so, for just as Bronfen's examples of dead women tend to remain distinct—generically categorizable as literary or visual bodies, either/or—so literary analysis rarely seeks to consider the ever-present visual interpretations and popular imaginings of Ophelia's character, and equally in discussing her representations art historians regularly prefer to concentrate on aspects of formal composition rather than explore her origins within the Shakespeare text. At the same time, in the case of Ophelia, we have an instance of a character whose portrait has been painted with such consistency that she has become something of a visual cliché, whereby the "typical" Ophelia of the plastic arts has so imprinted itself on our imaginations that we tend either to ignore how her death is reported in *Hamlet* or we tend to augment the text to include a drowning scene, which literalizes into a «seen,» appearing in our mind›s eye as we read. My purpose in this essay is to bring together these previously disparate methodologies that split Ophelia›s body up between disciplines. In addressing Shakespeare›s character in this manner, however, I do not seek to establish an unequivocal «body» of work in which we can locate the «true» Ophelia, for my direction here will point out the reverse, that Ophelia is always elusive despite the fact that she is so «present» in artworks. She is an elusive figure because such artworks regularly take as their subject a literary fragment from *Hamlet* reporting Ophelia's death, a fragment in which it is doubly impossible for Ophelia's body to be present. The method I adopt is partially paradoxical, for I wish to unearth the "literary" body of Ophelia present in different visual representations at the same time that I want to utilize these same media to suggest the degree to which they have formed our understanding of the dramatic textual character.In order to position Ophelia's dual representational history more precisely within both art-historical and dramatic-critical frameworks, I start by tracing the history of painted Ophelias as they first appear typically in the 18th century. Prior to the mid-19th century, painted depictions of Shakespeare's Ophelia differ significantly from the image of the drowning, pathos-inspiring figure that typically haunts our imaginations today. When 18th-century illustrators of Shakespeare—e.g., Francis Hayman, Benjamin West, George Romney, and Nicholas Rowe—chose to depict Ophelia at all, they usually placed her in a larger, group context where her presence is not highlighted as a focal point. For example, as John Harvey has discussed with respect to two mid-18th-century plates of Hayman's *Mousetrap* scene, in these works other characters are the primary focus [2]. West›s *Ophelia* (1792) from the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery exhibition features her prominently in the mad scene, but with Laertes shown dismayed by her distributing flowers to the other characters. As William L. Pressly notes with respect to his collection of plates of paintings held by the Folger Library, «depictions of Ophelia did not become popular until the late eighteenth century» [3] . The earliest exception to the presentation of Ophelia in a group context would seem to be Richard Westall›sBoydell Gallery engraving of an apprehensive-looking Ophelia heading with trepidation to the water›s edge. Westall›s engraving rapidly begins to look as though it could be the model for all future works, for as Pressly notes: «the episode most frequently chosen by artists is the moment just before Ophelia plunges to a watery death. Ophelia is typically shown adorned with flowers . . . loose tresses are also typical of Ophelia iconography" . However, rarely is she presented alone until the next century, when "character criticism" is on the rise in literary circles and when, more generally, Shakespeare reigns supreme in Romantic-era imaginations, as Jonathan Bate has noted. It is to the mid-19th century that we must look for a substantial increase in the number of Ophelia-specific depictions: "Ophelia was the single most popular literary subject for artists, with more than fifty portrayals recorded in exhibition catalogues Polonius immediately decides to go to Claudius (the new King of Denmark, and also Hamlet's uncle and stepfather) about the situation. Polonius later suggests to Claudius that they hide behind an arras (a hanging tapestry) to overhear Hamlet speaking to Ophelia when Hamlet thinks the conversation is private. recital. According to J. Philip Brockbank's witty view: "the queen was too preoccupied with composing the felicitous verses she hoped to speak in court to spare time to take a grip on Ophelia's weedy trophies and haul her out" [4]The early modern stage in England had an established set of emblematicconventions for the representation of female madness: dishevelled hair worn down, dressed in white, bedecked with wild flowers, Ophelia's state of mind would have been immediately 'readable' to her first audiences. "Colour was a major source of stage symbolism", Andrew Gurr explains, so the contrast between Hamlet's "nightedcolour" (1.2.68) and "customary suits of solemn black" (1.2.78) and Ophelia's "virginal and vacant white" would have conveyed specific and gendered associations. Her action of offering wild flowers to the court suggests, Showalter argues, a symbolic deflowering, while even the manner of her 'doubtful death', by drowning, carries associations with the feminine (Laertes refers to his tears on hearing the news as "the woman"). Gender structured, too, the early modern understanding of the distinction between Hamlet's madness and Ophelia's: melancholy was understood as a male disease of the intellect, while Ophelia would have been understood as suffering from erotomania, a malady conceived in biological and emotional terms. This discourse of female madness influenced Ophelia's representation on stage from the 1660s, when the appearance of actresses in the English theatres first began to introduce "new meanings and subversive tensions" into the role: "the most celebrated of the actresses who played Ophelia were those whom rumor credited with disappointments in love." Showalter relates a theatrical anecdote that vividly captures this sense of overlap between a performer's identity and the role she plays: Soprano Mignon Nevada as Ophelia in the opera *Hamlet*, circa 1910. Chabrol, Claude, dir. *Ophélia.* Ind. dist., France, 1962. The operatic version simplifies the plot to focus the drama on Hamlet›s predicament and its effects on Ophelia .»The greatest triumph was reserved for Susan Mountfort, a former actress at Lincoln›s Inn Fields who had gone mad after her lover›s betrayal. One night in 1720 she escaped from her keeper, rushed to the theater, and just as the Ophelia of the evening was to enter for her mad scene, «sprang forward in her place ... with wild eyes and wavering motion.» Ophelia›s about-to-be-submerged or partially submerged body begins to seem clichéd, appearing most recently in the visual media in the form of director Kenneth Branagh›s *Hamlet* [4] as a flashback addendum to Gertrude›s report. Gertrude›s recital to the

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court of the events surrounding Ophelia›s death is the only «evidence» we are given as the explanation for her drowning. As a contemporary reported, «she was in truth *Ophelia herself*, to the amazement of the performers as well as of the audience—nature having made this last effort, her vital powers failed her and she died soon after." During the 18th century, the conventions of Augustan drama encouraged far less intense, more sentimentalized and decorous depictions of Ophelia's madness and sexuality. From MrsLessingham in 1772 to Mary Bolton, playing opposite John Kemble in 1813, the familiar iconography of the role replaced its passionate embodiment. Sarah Siddons played Ophelia's madness with "stately and classical dignity" in 1785.Many great actresses have played Ophelia on stage over the years. In the 19th century she was portrayed by Helen Faucit, Dora Jordan, Frances Abington, and Peg Woffington, who won her first real fame by playing the role. Theatre manager Tate Wilkinson declared that next to Susannah Maria Cibber, Elizabeth Satchell (of the famous Kemble family) was the best Ophelia he ever saw. Ophelia has been portrayed on screen since the days of early silent films. Dorothy Foster played Ophelia opposite Charles Raymond's Hamlet in the 1912 film *Hamlet*. Jean Simmons played Ophelia opposite Laurence Olivier's Oscar-winning Hamlet performance in 1948; Simmons was also nominated for the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress. More recently, Ophelia has been portrayed by Marianne Faithfull (1969), Helena Bonham Carter (1990), Kate Winslet (1996), Julia Stiles (2000) and GuguMbatha-Raw (2009). Themes associated with Ophelia have led to movies such as *Ophelia Learns to Swim* (2000), and *Dying Like Ophelia* (2002). In many theatre and film adaptations she is portrayed barefoot in the mad scenes, including Kozintsev's1964 version, Zeffirelli's1990 film, 1996 and 2000 versions. In the 2012 movie *Savages* by Oliver Stone, one of the main characters is named Ophelia but is called O, played by Blake Lively. Psychologist Mary Pipher named her 1994 book *Reviving Ophelia* for Shakespeare's Ophelia. In her book, Pipher examines the troubled lives of the modern American adolescent girls. Through her extensive clinical work with troubled young women, Pipher takes a closer look at the competing influences that lead adolescent girls in a negative direction. Ovid. *The Metamorphosis* [sic]. Englished, Mythologized, and Represented in Figures. 1621. Trans. George Sandys. Ed. Karl K. Hulley and Stanley T. Vandersall. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1970. [5] For example, Pipher attributes the competing pressure from parents, peers, and the media for girls to reach an unachievable ideal. Girls are expected to meet goals while still holding on to their sanity. These pressures are further complicated when young women undergo physical changes out of their control, like the biological developmental changes in puberty. Shakespeare›s Ophelia was thought to be going through erotomania; however, Ophelia and Pipher›s patients display many of the same characteristics. Pipher believes the Ophelia of Shakespeare›s era was entirely misunderstood, much like her patients. In order to understand the complex mind of an adolescent, one must look at the woman from a holistic perspective in order to gain a greater understanding of her outlook on life. Lisa Klein's 2006 novel, *Ophelia*, uses her as the main protagonist. Although as Michael MacDonald has explained, Renaissance law was confusing and rather arbitrary about what determined whether one was "guilty of one's own murder,"*felo de se,* or innocent by reason of insanity, the conversation of the gravediggers seems to indicate that Ophelia has committed suicide but is nevertheless being given some of the proper rites of a customary burial because she is of high social standing. Perhaps Gertrude is socially motivated to «portray»—hence the aesthetic inventory—Ophelia›s suspicious death as an innocuous fall. Perhaps not. While I will not solve the mystery of Gertrude›s incongruous recital in the space of this essay, the incongruity is the relevant issue writ large. Unless we want to accuse him of extreme carelessness, Shakespeare intends to leave the circumstances of Ophelia›s death—suicide or accident—inconclusive: he gives Gertrude this less than typical messenger performance (her only extended monologue in the play) and then provides for its immediate discrediting by the gravediggers. Whether we «side» with Gertrude›s casting of the event as an accident attended by silvery, envious willows, whether we find surer ground with the gravediggers› opinion that she is a suicide being improperly well-buried, or whether we gloss over the speech›s oddness and the identity of the particular agent of its delivery—all are equally to miss the very point: there is an epistemological gap in the text that cannot be filled in. We cannot explain away the difference between Gertrude's and the gravediggers' perception of what has happened to Ophelia's body. Hayter'sabstract "fragments of human form" connote a relatively anonymous body, but an*Ophelian* body nonetheless because of its placement in the floral, watery context of her death scene. [5] In view of this dominant symbology, and although in some of these paintings there may indeed be some iconographical references to insanity of the type Showalter seeks, any «psychiatric» detail is ultimately secondary to the focus on death. The watery grave is a consistent feature of Ophelia›s landscape, so much so that it is part and parcel of the standard Ophelian iconography. At last count, StephanoCusumano›s quasi-cubist 1970 *Ophelia* .. . is the most recent entry in a still-growing catalogue. This perspective painting takes the progress toward death even one step closer than the Millais: featuring a mannequin-like figure with blocky, nearly androgynous facial planes, Cusumano depicts a body sinking below the water›s surface, surrounded by air bubbles, obscured by and wrapped in weeds. Just as Shakespeare took Ovid›s Philomela as the source for Lavinia›s tragedy, so here the echoic quality of the vocabulary and situation suggests that again a tale by Ovid supplies Shakespeare with the source material for Gertrude›s ventriloquization of Ophelia›s story; the tale of Ophelia›s drowning becomes a mannered, stylized, lyrical [6] Thus, despite the remarkable range of styles of Ophelia paintings reflected by the various schools and movements here—one might compare Millais to Cusumano for the similar placement of the body even if the manner of composition is vastly different—a discernible vocabulary of presentation articulates itself in all such works. To put the painters themselves back into this text-painting relationship, one might describe them as being narrators of the (same) story and as continuing the process of elision that Ophelia has already undergone in the narrative. Reproducing Gertrude›s speech, a painter reproduces it differently, in a different medium: artists make concrete an anatomical body that had no physicality in speech by «rearticulating» it, and this process is in itself a form of repetition, since Ophelia›s painted body mimics the story of Ophelia›s narrative body, altering in medium but not in content—there is no new tale to tell. That is, the painted body depicts its compliance with the textual, narrative body by presenting the same body in a different medium, progressing to death housed within new anatomical trappings. Yet the stability of the «real» body of Ophelia that we see in paintings is illusory precisely because the origin of the painted body *always* lies within the narrative

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body, and the *narrative* body›s description by Gertrude, we must remember, has no «authority,» no referent, no originator, pointing instead back to the epistemological gap in the text. This gap is also increasingly elided as we become used to seeing Ophelia depicted in this particular manner, so that painted Ophelias have come to influence our perceptions of the literary Ophelia as much as the literary has inaugurated painted Ophelias. In view of the great number of artists who paint this scene over and over again—with some like Hughes (see Roberts & Evans), Delacroix, and Waterhouse painting different approaches to Ophelia repetitively themselves—it would appear that the fascination lies in the extent to which Ophelia's image is already commonly a painterly subject but also because the scene remains unfamiliar, insofar as it stages the extra-dramatic moment of *Hamlet,* the moment where the text breaks down. Not accidentally, the «hole» or non-signifying place in the text of *Hamlet* is also the feminine body›s locus. As elaborated by Elisabeth Bronfen, the portrait of a dead woman reflects the instability of the feminine body and its symbolic connection to death more generally. Bronfen establishes her argument within Lacanian frameworks, locating the feminine body as both a sign of death and of the constant deferral of death; she theorizes that the dead feminine body is always being represented, apotropaically, as an intact, beautiful body: «The beauty of Woman and the beauty of the image both give the illusion of intactness and unity, cover the insupportable signs of lack, deficiency, transiency and promise their spectators the impossible—an obliteration of death›s unique castrative threat to the subject» . According to this psychoanalytic model, in their being associated with «lacking» a phallus (and thus the ability to control «signification» or meaning), women are also uniquely connected to death, for death›s awesome and threatening power is that it evacuates all meaning. Thus the struggle to make meaning, to make things signify, is always a battle against lack, or «nonmeaning,» or death. In this sense, the potential breakdown of signification that is threatened by a dead body gendered female becomes doubly threatening to the masculine subject, and this is why the *death of a woman* must therefore be constructed as the *death of a beautiful woman*—i.e., in order to foreclose upon the reality of death's leveling power, in order to reject the power of death to destroy a masculine identity that is grounded upon possession of the phallus. The dead and beautiful woman for Bronfen, therefore, indicates an excess of meaning—the dead feminine body is always being invested with a plethora of signification so as to ward off its radical instability, its potential to dissolve into non-meaning and in turn, to divest the masculine subject of his identity. To return to Ophelia and to *Hamlet,* since we cannot literally see Ophelia›s body because it is only a figure evoked in Gertrude›s speech in Shakespeare›s text, we are left in turn with a body that does not signify, does not have an ultimate referent in narrative. According to Bronfen's model, it seems little coincidence that the death scene specifically is the scene constantly rearticulated by artists, who regularly present Ophelia in the scene contained in but denied visually by the text. For if Ophelia is not always being "dredged up" to begin her progress to death over and over again, the gap in the text might begin to evolve precisely as the site of instability where referentiality collapses, the site of the threatening correspondence of woman and death where meaning dissolves. Ophelia needs to be contained by a beautiful death and the stage of decomposition must only go so far. This may explain why there seem to be no paintings of a truly, unmistakably dead Ophelia, perhaps the closest approximation to this state being Millais's glassily blank or Stella's closed-eye, peaceful figure. If paintings of Ophelia rearticulate the site where referentiality potentially collapses, paradoxically these representations also insure the ultimate referentiality of *Hamlet,* and by extension, of Shakespeare. Here it is helpful to return for a moment to the role of the textual frame in Hughes›s *Ophelia.* The painting itself cannot refer to Ophelia with any concrete certainty, since the figure it depicts can only refer back to Gertrude›s *speech* which is the only place that we can find her. Gertrude›s speech, however, is of course part of Shakespeare›s text proper, part of *Hamlet,* so that while paintings of Ophelia almost always take as their subject the place in the text *Hamlet* where the referentiality of Ophelia breaks down, nevertheless *Hamlet* still always serves as the final referent for Ophelia, gaps or no gaps. Lacan›s oft-mentioned pronouncement that Ophelia is «linked forever, for centuries, to the figure of Hamlet» [6] is accurate, but as these artworks suggest, her link to the character Hamlet is less important than her more resolute link to the larger work, the play *Hamlet.* Insofar as *Hamlet* is, of course, in turn a play by Shakespeare, the additional twist here is that, ironically, the representations of Ophelia might turn out to be even less about her history than they might chronicle the continuing significance of Shakespeare for many cultures—European, American, and Japanese traditions at the very least. For over a century, it is precisely the dead, beautiful, painterly Ophelia that gets articulated over and over again in the «high» art tradition, coincident with the fairly regular ascendancy of Shakespeare as a figure of vast (multi) cultural importance. As an extension of «high» culture production, moreover, Ophelia has also become a «low» or popular culture figure of sorts: her drowning is alluded to in the titles of psychology books (see Pipher), and her more-or-less placid body floats by our eyes periodically in media as varied as recently-televised episodes of the *X-Files,* resolutely reproducing and repeating visually the circumstances of Gertrude's narrative. In fact, the ever-popular depiction by Millais is frequently featured in postcard and calendar reproductions. Indeed, Portal Publications' 1995 calendar, *The Pre-Raphaelites,* includes not one, but two Ophelia paintings: Millais›s becomes the pinup for «Miss May,» while J. W. Waterhouse›s *Ophelia*becomes "Miss November." In the space of one twelve-month calendar, these depictions of the about-to-drown Ophelia point to the consistent popularity with consumers of this theme of Ophelia's death. Another example can be found in a 1996 Folger Library project entitled "Shakespeare's Heroines," a boxed set of notecards depicting esteemed female characters (including a 19th-century painting by Marcus Stone, featuring a dreamy, distracted Ophelia). What is so interesting about The Folger's marketing initiative and a patron's ability to purchase the Folger cards in a museum shop is the suggestion that "art-shop" products like the "Shakespeare's Heroines" notecards are more appealing to the targeted public than the experience of any real artwork that might be housed in the museum itself; revealingly, the patron of the Cleveland Museum of Art cannot buy a souvenir postcard of Stone's *Ophelia* because there is no concrete viewing experience possible in Cleveland of the work, located elsewhere in England, for which the notecards should be a reminder. As this example makes clear, Ophelia—perhaps along with other less frequently invoked Shakespearean heroines—is a thoroughly marketable product, a Shakespeare-brand product. The impetus that leads patrons of art shops to purchase such items seems to be linked most concretely to efforts to commercialize the Bard, for it is to be on shaky

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ground to claim that consumers are necessarily familiar with either the paintings› specific literary context or even the text of *Hamlet* generally when they purchase a calendar with Ophelia gracing its interior. The Ophelia of the commercial and plastic arts seems to be in the odd position of saying less about «attitudes towards women and madness» even when paintings such as Stone›s *Ophelia* take madness as their explicit subject—and more about the success of «Shakespeare» as an adaptable commodity category, the success of the Shakespeare-products clearinghouse, so to speak. In this important sense, even Shakespeare›s status as perhaps *the* literary marker of cultural importance, as a figure of immense cultural capital, appears to be losing ground rapidly to the market for «Shakespeare» products, regardless of whatever such products do (or do not) have to do with Shakespeare›s texts. Depictions of Ophelia then, would seem to direct us unequivocally to Shakespeare›s text, but do they? Instead, we appear to be faced with a free-floating reference to «Shakespeare» only most generally, a literally «free-floating» Ophelia severed from specific contexts.

Conclusion

As opposed to her portrayal in the play, Ophelia uses madness as a cover, much like Hamlet does. Hamlet secretly marries her, though she is unaware of his own ruse of insanity. She eventually fakes her own death to escape the Danish court and preserve her life and that of her unborn baby, leaving to a convent in France. While there, she studies herbal remedies and takes on a task of being a medical worker for the sisters. In the novel *let me tell you* (2008), by Paul Griffiths, Ophelia tells her story in her own words, in the literal sense that she can use only the words she is given in the play. She speaks of her childhood, of her parents and brother, of Hamlet, and of events leading up to the point at which the play begins.

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