

Abstracts

Emanuele d'Angelo: *Fatti monachella*. Ophelia and Nineteenth-Century Opera in France and Italy

Any operatic adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* could not help but assign the function of *prima donna* to the hapless Ophelia, a role which also offered a scene of madness destined to become one of opera's main numbers. This is also the case, of course, with the two most important rewritings of the tragedy in this field, namely Arrigo Boito's *scapigliato Hamlet* for Franco Faccio (in two versions: 1865 and 1871) and Michel Carré and Jules Barbier's romantic *Hamlet* for Ambroise Thomas (1868) – two different visions, in which the female protagonist, while retaining to a good extent the character of the English masterpiece, takes on different weight and nuances.

Albert Meier: “Not much can be said about her”. Ophelia's Emancipation and Individuation Process (Thanks to Goethe)

The fact that Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795) has the title character reflect on Ophelia is probably the first (or at least the first momentous) confrontation with the hitherto ‘minor character’ in Shakespeare's tragedy, which was particularly topical at the time. Ophelia's character traits are reflected upon time and again, with the cause of her madness and suicide usually being sought in her unfortunate love for Hamlet. The focus is therefore on the question of the psychological causality behind Ophelia's behaviour. All further considerations initially revolve around the same problematic context, whereby the accentuations or evaluations refer to the moral-aesthetic premises of the interpreters, which in turn are to be located in the field of tension between *Klassik* and *Romantik* (perhaps more correctly: Classicism/Romanticism). It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century and even more so at the beginning of the twentieth century that this primarily psychological-realist analysis was to be replaced by new, primarily poetically-aesthetically motivated interpretations of the Ophelia topos (initially apparently on the basis of John Everett Millais' immensely successful painting).

Eric Nicholson: Ophelia Dances Like a Waltzing Disco-Funk Queen: Mobilizing Elsinore's Trans-gressive Female Performer

Although my paper considers several well-known nineteenth century figurations of Ophelia, it will bypass John Everett Millais's influential painting of her as a flowery water-nymph chanting “snatches of old tunes”, precisely because this iconic image immobilizes the character in a supine, static, and solitary pose, removed from her disruptive on-stage

interaction with the court of Elsinore. Unlike Millais and Arthur Rimbaud, I compare Ophelia not to a floating water-lily but rather to a dynamic, empowered, and sexually charged dancer of waltzes, a sometimes scandalous kinetic art form that reached its apogee in the 1800s, but can be traced back to medieval times, and forward to the popular, erotically suggestive dance moves of the 1970s (and later) disco and funk music scenes. My paper cites Harriet Smithson's 1827 pantomime-inflected performance of the role in Paris, that enchanted Hector Berlioz to the point of obsession and inspired him to compose the second movement "Valse" of his *Symphonie fantastique*, and appraises related depictions of Smithson and Ellen Terry (in 1879) in waltz-like embraces with their respective co-stars Charles Kemble and Henry Irving. I argue that the Q1 version of "Ofelia playing on a Lute, and with her haire downe singing" casts her not only as a transnational late Renaissance *prima donna innamorata* playing a "pazzia" routine, but also supports theatrical interpretations of Ophelia as a mobile, *trans-gressive* (i.e., "trans" + "aggressive"), and Queerly charismatic public performer. I conclude by proposing a live rendition of her mad scene that would feature karaoke "singing" and table dancing, with sampling of ABBA's "Dancing Queen", Sylvester's "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)", and Beyoncé's "Crazy in Love" songs and videos. Ophelia may suffer from cognitive disability, but her condition enables her artistically potent celebrity.

Sandra Pietrini: Pale, Attractive and Silent: Ophelia in the Narrative and Figurative Imaginary of the Nineteenth Century

In the first *Hamlet* adaptations produced by the Italian *grandi attori*, the part of Ophelia was almost always reduced to privilege a focus on the protagonist. The Italian theatre scene, influenced by the success of the melodramatic formulae, brought to paroxysm the tendency to transform the character into a sort of cameo of mute suffering, played by young leading actresses whose performances served to bring out the histrionic mastery of the male protagonist. From a pale virginal victim doomed to a silent and premature death, Ophelia finds partial redemption in the realm of iconography, where sometimes an unexpected sensual connotation of the character surfaces, however reduced to an icon of involuntary, bloodless martyrdom. The perfect symbol of a sublimated and domesticated femininity, Ophelia is granted only a brief moment of verbal deflagration in the madness scene, which for the actresses who play the character in Victorian and American novels of the nineteenth century comes to represent a fatal self-burning at the sacred fire of the theatre. The however succinct descriptions of the character's acting reveal an underlying attitude towards the darker, more passive side of femininity, which is contrasted with the dominant, 'vampire-like' image of the actress: two mirrored pathological models that hint at the discomfort and fear on which the biased male perspective is based.

Lois Potter: Ophelia and Theatrical Cliché in Post-Shakespearean Theatre

When Charles Kemble brought his acting company to Paris in 1827, it was not the melancholy Hamlet but the Ophelia of Harriet Smithson that fascinated French audiences – to the point where she became the muse and then the wife of Hector Berlioz. Shakespeare's contemporaries seem to have been equally captivated when they first met the character, even though Ophelia had been anticipated by the theatrical madwomen of Marlowe, Kyd and Peele. Before the closing of the theatres in 1642, some dramatists had attempted a serious look at female lovesickness, but she had already become, also, an excuse for songs, as was also the case with some male madmen. The hardening of the role into cliché is most obvious in the comic treatment of Sheridan's *Tilburina* (mad in white satin) and in Dickens' description of the Ophelia who played opposite Mr. Wopsle's Hamlet in *Great Expectations* (a novel that also gives a more sobering image of an Ophelia figure in old age: Miss Havisham). How far do dramatists adapt the presentation of theatrical madness in the light of increasing knowledge about mental illness, which includes awareness that the disturbed mind is notoriously difficult to access? Alan Ayckbourn's *Woman in Mind* and the musical *Next to Normal* are among recent plays that use the resources of theatre to approach this problem.

Anne Sophie Refskou: "Her mood will needs be pitied": Compassion and Subversion in the Case of Ophelia and Her Classical Forebears

In this paper, I will discuss the tradition of (simultaneously) sentimentalising and sexualising Ophelia's emotional life – so prominent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – in order to note the very different ways in which Shakespeare's first audiences might have perceived her affective impact in the play. Rather than reading Ophelia's madness solely as a case of repressed sexuality or 'erotomania', I suggest that Shakespeare reintroduces her in the play's penultimate act as a figure with a powerful affective impact on others and with the potential to overturn what the emotion historian William Reddy would call the 'emotional regime' of the court of Elsinore. Ophelia's madness ostensibly encourages political subversion, as we learn in the cryptic description of her effect on those who listen to her distracted speech – a description given by Horatio in F and by an unnamed Gentleman in Q2 – and in Laertes's assertion that her madness is more persuasive in moving his revenge than her sanity would be: 'Hadst thou thy wits and didst persuade revenge / it could not move thus' (Q2, 4.5.163-64).

In providing Ophelia with this effect on others, I suggest that Shakespeare demonstrates his characteristic engagement with classical literature and that early modern audiences too might have associated Ophelia with certain female forebears of classical literature whose madness is both affective – in the sense of provoking compassion in others – and subversively connected with violence and revenge, such as Cassandra, Hecuba and Dido.

Isabelle Schwartz-Gastine: Sarah Bernhardt in Her White Coffin, 1886

The nineteenth century saw the triumph of *Hamlet* on stage as a romantic hero. Although she had been acclaimed from the start of her career in male roles, for her third Shakespeare venture, Sarah Bernhardt chose to play Ophelia in 1886. She had already completed her first transatlantic tour with great success, had bought a theatre in Paris (L'Ambigu), was known as "Divine Sarah". At the acme of her fame, she decided to play the part of the frail young heroine, at the age of 42, a detail that her admirers and contenders did not fail to notice. This part added to her legend as she staged herself at home in her white coffin performing death in an ever-changing way. Exactly at the same time at the Theatre de l'Odéon, another production of *Hamlet* met with incredible success featuring Mounet-Sully in the eponymous part, and prompting the symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé to coin the term "Hamletism".

Why did Sarah Bernhardt decide to play a part which did not meet the grandeur of her other successes, like Theodora, Phaedra, Dona Sol? Why did she choose a heroine with such a small part on stage? Was she attracted to this character because of her ambiguous death, for necrophiliac reasons? However, the tragedy became her success at the turn of the century when she endorsed the part of the eponymous hero, adding to her transvestite hits, enhanced by the publicity provided by the posters of her new "protégé", the young Czech artist Alphonse Mucha, and the animated "film" shown at the 1900 International Exhibition in Paris.

Emanuel Stelzer: Ophelia and the History of Medicine

Ophelia's character has been diagnosed and pathologized almost since the time of its creation but, starting from the late eighteenth century and especially in the nineteenth century, the relation between the representations of Ophelia and psychiatric theory operated on "a two-way transaction" (1985, 80), as Elaine Showalter has brilliantly observed in her landmark study on Ophelia and hysteria. In the European continent and the US, Ophelia was variously diagnosed as a nymphomaniac, a hysterical woman, suffering from acute *amentia*, *dementia praecox*, simple mental confusion, erotic and suicidal mania, and so forth. Ophelia becomes the projection of cultural and social values on female sexuality and personhood, both socially acceptable and transgressive. At the same time, many critics attacked these attempts at pathologising Ophelia. In this paper, I provide an overview of such medical views and I investigate some of the repercussions they had in different fields.

Laura Tosi: Ophelias for Victorian Girls

In my paper I shall discuss the female destination of Shakespeare's plays, and *Hamlet* in particular, and the way abridgements, adaptations, and appropriations have mediated the cultural relationship that girls or young women established with the Bard in the nineteenth century. As has been established for some time (with critical studies such as Gary Taylor's

Reinventing Shakespeare (1989) and the anthology *Women Reading Shakespeare* (1997), edited by Thompson and Roberts), popular dissemination of Shakespeare's plays was never an all-male phenomenon. In the Victorian and Edwardian ages, not unlike what happens nowadays with retellings which revise and update gender roles, heroines acted as sites of projection for different constructions of femininity. Gail Marshall, in *Shakespeare and Victorian Women* (2009) has perceptively analysed the way Victorians firmly believed in the relevance of Shakespeare's cultural inheritance to women especially – as if the difference and the distance between Shakespeare and the Victorians were easily overcome, and the Bard, properly mediated, could inspire Victorian girls on how best to be “feminine”. The characterization of Ophelia in a number of Victorian and Edwardian retellings, such as Mary Macleod's retelling of *Hamlet* (1902) and Mary Hoffman's version (1911), generally parallels nineteenth-century critical interpretations of the character as generally weak and incapable of taking her destiny into her own hands. In contrast, Mary Cowden Clark's “The Rose of Elsinore”, in the collection of novella prequels *The Girlhood of Shakespeare Heroines* (1850-2), by focussing on the formative years of Ophelia and validating her perceptions and experiences, inevitably changes the reader's perception of this character's contributions to the original play. This novella is quite unique in providing a mother figure and a generally positive Polonius (who ‘became dotingly fond of his little girl’, Clarke 2009: 220), although underestimation of the absence of a competent guide in her early formative years will have serious consequences.

Deanne Williams: Ophelia, Sewing in Her Closet

Ophelia is “so affrighted” when Hamlet bursts in on her, she recalls, “as I was sewing in my closet” (2.1.74); scenes of her madness and drowning, later in the play, surround Ophelia with flowers, from the “pansies: that's for thoughts” (4.5.170) and the violets that “withered all when my father died” (177) to the “crowflowers, nettles, daisies and long purples” (4.7.167) that she makes into garlands before she drowns. Scholarly discussion of Ophelia's flowers is ample, but little attention has been paid to her sewing. This paper considers Ophelia's sewing, an activity that she enjoys in the sequestered privacy of what the Folio text calls her “chamber”, within the wider context of early modern girls' needlework. In dialogue with Roszika Parker's classic 1984 study, *The Subversive Stitch*, and in conversation with more recent work by Susan Frye and Anne Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, who draw attention to the connections between needlework and women's authorship and political agency, I explore the special relationship between early modern girlhood and needlework. An essential part of a girls' education as well as a popular pastime, girls' needlework also provides some new contexts for understanding Ophelia's association with flowers.

Floral motifs are ubiquitous in early modern embroidery. Historical examples include the heartease, or wild pansy, that the teenaged Princess Elizabeth Tudor stitched on the book cover of a translation that she made for her stepmother, Katherine Parr, in 1544. And on the Shakespearean stage, Emilia in *Two Noble Kinsmen* makes plans to embroider a daffodil on a skirt, at the very moment when Palamon and Arcite fall in love with her. Whether it reflects

an aesthetic impulse for adornment, or the expression of an emotional bond through gift exchange, it is easy to imagine Ophelia sewing embroidered versions of the pansies, violets, daisies and other flowers later identified with her madness and death.