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PRETTY OPHELIA: THE DESTRUCTIVE NATURE OF OBJECTIFICATION THROUGH  
MUSIC AND PROSE

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## ABSTRACT

Shakespeare's Ophelia has long fascinated composers, painters, poets, and scholars alike. She is at first beautiful and pure, but descends into utter madness filled with dark coded phrases that leave plenty of room for mystery and interpretation. In this thesis I investigated the lack of personal identity and tragic circumstances that lead to Ophelia's demise. All who surround her, Hamlet, Polonius, Laertes, and even Shakespeare himself, constantly objectify her. The successive composers who have interpreted Ophelia diminish this objectification by giving her, her own voice. As part of this thesis project, a recital featuring the Brahms' and Strauss Ophelia lieder as well as a performance of the original Shakespeare text was given on November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011. The recital program, program notes, script, and video are included in this thesis.

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Academic Vita

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## CHAPTER 1: OPHELIA IN PROSE

### INTRODUCTION

Ophelia's character is a beautiful, vulnerable, and obedient daughter, sister, and lover in Shakespeare's masterpiece, *Hamlet*. In R.D. Laing's *The Divided Self* he describes Ophelia as without an identity and possessing "no integral selfhood expressed through her actions or utterances."<sup>1</sup> Ophelia is a naïve innocent who places infinite trust in her male caretakers. She is entirely dependant on those around her and thus creates her identity through them. During the course of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* each male figure, Laertes, Hamlet, and Polonius, is systematically taken from the delicate character, Ophelia. This leaves a shell of a woman without a sense of self, resulting in Ophelia's eventual madness and suicide at the end of the play. Many artists have been subsequently captivated by this tale. Ophelia stands as an objectified symbol of the frailty of women, painted by men.

In the section, *Ophelia and the Play*, I provide a brief summary of the plot of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Ophelia's existence inside the play. In, *A Symbol of Purity*, I explain Ophelia's objectivity and examine her relationships with the men in her life. *Ophelia Through the Feminist Gaze*, views Ophelia through a women's perspective. Through the writing of Elaine Showalter I investigate the fascination of Ophelia throughout history and subsequent feminine interpretations of the character.

Much music has been written for Ophelia. This is in part because Shakespeare indicated that Ophelia should sing her lines in her mad scene. Composers may have seen this as an excellent opportunity to finish her unwritten song. I suggest that they also wanted to complete her untold story by giving Ophelia more life through their music. *Ophelia and the French* explores the musical interpretations of the French, while *Ophelia and the Germans*, examines the

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<sup>1</sup> R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (New York: Pantheon, 1969), 212.

German Romantics and their take on Shakespeare's Ophelia.

In Chapter 3, *Ophelia Onstage*, I describe the process of creating my own performance piece that weaves all of my ideas together. I used the piece to highlight the destructive relationships in Ophelia's life with the original Shakespeare text, as well as the Brahms' and Strauss Ophelia Lieder.

Chapter 4 outlines a summary of my project. I also highlight what I learned from the process of studying and portraying Ophelia. I end with a conclusion of my findings and suggestions of how to take the project further.

### **OPHELIA AND THE PLAY**

In his book "Shakespeare's Ideals of Womanhood" George William Gerwig states, "Ophelia is one of those frail delicate souls who are crushed by fate before their lives are fully shaped."<sup>2</sup> Ophelia, however, was not crushed in vain. She is an important element in *Hamlet* as the foreshadowing outcome of the ultimate tragedy that is the end of the play. She also offers a shadow of Hamlet as his parallel but lesser tragedy that allows him to shine as the ultimate protagonist.

First, an overview of *Hamlet* and Ophelia's action in the tragedy is in order. The play is set in Elsinore, the kingdom of Denmark. It opens with a sighting of the ghost of Hamlet's father. Hamlet agrees to go meet the ghost. When they are alone, the ghost tells Hamlet that his own brother, Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, murdered him. Claudius reigns on the throne after his brother's death and also quickly married his late brother's wife, Gertrude, Hamlet's mother. The ghost tells Hamlet that he must avenge his death and kill his uncle, Claudius. Hamlet promises this to the ghost and he promptly disappears.

Ophelia enters as she is bidding farewell to her brother, Laertes. He warns her that she

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<sup>2</sup> George William Gerwig, *Shakespeare's Ideals of Womanhood* (East Aurora: Royal Croft Shops, 1929), 119.

should be wary of her relationship with Hamlet because he assumes that Hamlet does not love her. Their father, Polonius, then enters and gives Ophelia similar cautions against pursuing Lord Hamlet in case she embarrasses him in his position as advisor to King Claudius. Laertes returns to France, beginning the removal of all of the men in Ophelia's life that she knows and loves. Shortly after, Ophelia runs to her father, frightened because Hamlet has entered her room in a "mad" state. Polonius shrugs off her horror, telling Ophelia that it was probably Hamlet's love for her that made him act so strangely. He resolves to tell the king and queen.

Polonius and the King plot to find out why Hamlet is acting so strangely. They decided to utilize Hamlet's affection for Ophelia and convince her to give back her "remembrances" from Hamlet while they secretly listen. This is the moment when Hamlet and Ophelia's relationship is undone. Hamlet reaches out for her trust and Ophelia finds herself torn between giving herself to the man she loves and showing loyalty to her father. Gerwig describes this scene in heartbreaking detail, "And just at that moment when her former simple loyal faith would have responded nobly to his need and furnished the real inspiration of his life, her mind has been poisoned by her foolish meddling father. She hesitates, remembers the promise that has been forced from her, and meets Hamlet's searching gaze with the wavering eyes of doubt instead of with the clear, confident, courageous eyes of trust."<sup>3</sup> Hamlet is enraged by her hesitation and loses trust in all women. He has already lost the trust of Gertrude and now his blossoming love with Ophelia. He commands Ophelia fiercely to "get thee to a nunnery" and thus their love is ended.

Hamlet is then completely steadfast in his path to reveal Claudius' guilt. He has a troupe of actor's stage, *The Murder of Gonzago*. They play out the murder scene that was described to him by his father's ghost. Claudius stands and leaves the audience at this point in the play. For

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 123.

Hamlet, this is proof of Claudius' guilt.

After the play, Hamlet's mother, Gertrude, summons Hamlet to her room to ask why he staged such a drama. Hamlet and Gertrude begin to argue. Polonius is hiding behind a curtain in Queen Gertrude's room. He cries out, believing that Hamlet is going to kill Gertrude. Thinking it is Claudius, Hamlet stabs through the curtain. Unfortunately, it is revealed he has killed Polonius, Ophelia's father. In this moment, the ghost of Hamlet's father appears again and asks him not to harm Gertrude, but to kill Claudius. Hamlet hides Polonius' body under the stairs. Meanwhile, Claudius realizes that Hamlet is trying to kill him and sends him off to England.

Poor Ophelia is now completely alone. She has lost her brother, her lover, and now her father, the three men in her life that she holds dear. This drives her to insanity. She wanders the castle singing songs and spreading wild flowers. Laertes returns, but it is too late. His sister is long gone and his father is dead.

Claudius had tried to have Hamlet killed on his way to England, but the plot failed. He gets news that Hamlet is on his way back to Elsinore. To protect himself he convinces Laertes that he should duel Hamlet to avenge his father's death. They both plan to rig the match with a poisoned tip sword. Claudius adds that he will also poison Hamlet's wine to ensure his death. As they finish their plans, Gertrude enters to announce that Ophelia has drowned.

Hamlet arrives just in time for Ophelia's funeral. Upon discovering that she has died Hamlet professes his love and grief for her, all too late. Laertes tries to attack Hamlet at the grave-site, blaming him for Ophelia's death. Claudius reminds him of the fencing match later that day.

The match begins and after the start Gertrude toasts her son, Hamlet. However, Gertrude took the glass that was meant for Hamlet and is poisoned. Laertes then stabs Hamlet with the



poisoned sword and Hamlet is able get control of the poisoned weapon and stab Laertes. Laertes reconciles with Hamlet and tells him of Claudius' plot. Hamlet stabs Claudius with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink the wine to ensure he dies. Hamlet's trusted friend Horatio tries to kill himself, but Hamlet stops him and asks him to live to tell the tale.

This tale presents one tragedy after another. The most stringent tragedy of all is that of Ophelia who is the unlucky byproduct of her surroundings. She is nothing but loyal to all the men in her life, but is used as a political pawn for the gain of others. She had every chance in the world to be the lover of a Prince, but winds up mad and suicidal. Throughout the play everyone she loves is systematically torn away from her. It is no wonder that she comes to the unfortunate fate depicted in the drama. However, it is important to ask, why Ophelia is such an interesting subject. Her tragedy, although monumental, is presented as miniscule in context of the overall tragedy of the play. Are we drawn to her untold story? Does Ophelia remind us of the weakness in our own hearts in such circumstances? Or, is it, that we are aroused by her misfortune?

### **A SYMBOL OF PURITY**

Ophelia is a symbol of innocence and purity, a rare commodity that once tarnished can never be rekindled. She is also fiercely loyal to the point of destruction. Kendra Preston Leonard describes her as having "little sense of self-worth and displays no particular ambitions, and as a result, she is easily manipulated throughout *Hamlet* by men by the men who would use her: as a piece of bait, a lover, an informant. She has few options but to accept their direction and, in being thus treated as an infant, has little mind to do so for herself."<sup>4</sup> The men in Ophelia's life use this perfectly susceptible innocent to their advantage at every turn. Laertes treats her as a child and very possessively forbids her to court Hamlet. Polonius uses her in everyway he can as his political pawn. Hamlet wrenches her heart and brings Ophelia along in his decline into

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<sup>4</sup> Kendra Preston Leonard, *Shakespeare, Madness, and Music* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2009), 35.

madness and distrust. Even Shakespeare himself, objectifies Ophelia through his writing. He gives her 1/10 of the number of lines Hamlet speaks throughout the play. He marginalizes her so that the audience only sees the façade that these men make her out to be. Ophelia is only seen through a male perspective. While the audience gets to know the intimate workings of Hamlet's mind, Ophelia remains a mystery. Ophelia is only shown through her relationships with the men in her life and because of this it is important to examine these relationships closely.

Shakespeare never gives us a moment alone with Ophelia because she is always onstage with another character. This makes her character appear slight and further perpetuates her lack of self and her dependence on others. Sharon Hamilton in her book, *Shakespeare's Daughters*, describes the relationship between Polonius and Ophelia well.

Shakespeare embodies...insights in a pageant of fathers and daughters, happy and unhappy. His view of human nature is not sentimental, but neither is it cynical. Many of his examples are negative- warnings rather than models. Ophelia, the one Shakespearean daughter who acquiesces to her father's demands, ends up tragically "divided from herself and her fair judgment." If Ophelia's docile outlook is not typical of the oppressed daughters in Shakespeare's tragedies, her fatal destiny is. No amount of logical explanation or eloquent pleading arouses the father's sympathies. The young women is rejected, isolated, and eventually destroyed.<sup>5</sup>

Ophelia's obedience and servitude to her father is what begins her decline. Shakespeare shows us that trusting one person, even a father, with all of one's decision-making may result in tragedy. Ophelia is motherless and completely dependent on her father. Unfortunately for her, Polonius is not the steadfast father she needs, but rather a selfish fool who will stop at nothing to advance himself.

Besides her family, Ophelia has one connection to a person who might save her from the abuses of her father, her lover Hamlet. The issue of her relationship with Hamlet is the one that

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<sup>5</sup> Sharon Hamilton, *Shakespeare's Daughters* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2003), 8.

makes her hesitate in her usual compliance with her father. Ophelia is in love with Hamlet and excited by the possibilities of starting a life with him. Unfortunately, her relationship with Hamlet deteriorates quickly as the events of the play unfold. John Dover Wilson refers to Hamlet's attitude towards Ophelia, "the greatest of all the puzzles in the play."<sup>6</sup> He explains in his essay, *Hamlet and Ophelia* that it is not that we are troubled by Hamlet loving Ophelia and then ceasing to do so, but rather his disdain of love after assuming his Mother's infidelity. Hamlet becomes so enraged with his Mother that he distrusts and despises all women, leaving no room for loving Ophelia. Hamlet is unable to face his Mother fully because of cautions from his Father's ghost. Because of this he takes out all of his aggressions against his Mother on poor Ophelia. She, once again, is forgotten as the individual human being that she is, and treated as a symbol. She represents, for Hamlet, the entire gender of women, which he deems to be made of whores. Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia jeopardizes his role in the audience's mind as a noble protagonist. Wilson writes that we are able to forgive most of Hamlet's transgressions "but savagery towards a gentle and inoffensive child, one whom he had loved and whose worst crime towards him is lack of understanding and inability to disobey her father's commands, is a very different matter."<sup>7</sup> Wilson suggests that Hamlet knew the plot that was afoot with Polonius and Claudius and therefore treated Ophelia as such only because he was performing for someone else in a larger battle. Unfortunately again for Ophelia, she is caught in the crossfire. Our only glimpse into the real love that Hamlet and Ophelia may have shared is their letters and Hamlet's reaction at her death. Hamlet emotes honest and heartfelt grief when he sees Ophelia's body. It reignites the audience's trust in their main character as a caring and feeling human. Ophelia functions not, on her own, but as a smaller tragedy to amplify Hamlet's larger tragedy. At the

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<sup>6</sup> John Dover Wilson, "Hamlet and Ophelia," in *Hamlet*, Edited by Cyrus Hoy. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1963), 193.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

end of the play we find her easy to forget. This was perpetuated by later interpretations of *Hamlet*. Many of Ophelia's lines were cut when the play was performed in the Victorian era. Louis Barbato discovered this by studying prompt books from the nineteenth century. The "cuts serve a distinctive purpose for Hamlet's ennobled masculine character as well, noting 'a systematic reduction of the secondary roles so that Hamlet emerges as the sole, individualized hero.'"<sup>8</sup> Modern film adaptations of *Hamlet* have also diminished Ophelia in the effort to uplift Hamlet. Oliver's Ophelia in his 1948 film of *Hamlet* cuts her part down to 803 words. Zeffirelli's 1990 *Hamlet* shortens Ophelia's text to only 456 words. These filmmakers do as much as they can to also symbolize Ophelia, providing her no opportunity to appear as a real and complex character because she has no time to do so.

Every man in her life abuses Ophelia. She strives so diligently to appease those around her and ends up losing her sense of self. Ophelia is used by her father, treated like an infant by her brother, and marginalized in theatrical and cinematic adaptations throughout time. Ophelia allows herself to be played like a card in a game that is much larger than she can imagine.

## **OPHELIA THROUGH THE FEMINIST GAZE**

Ophelia's dependence on male approval may be the very thing that killed her. She was born into a situation that made her completely reliant on the men in her life. She was raised to infinitely respect the power of her Father and hold her brother dear. Ophelia has been created and defined entirely by men. There have been subsequent attempts by females to understand Ophelia's plight from a woman's point of view. Elaine Showalter is the most published feminist on Ophelia. Two feminist play-writes, Bryony Lavery and Jane Prendergast, also wrote about Ophelia with their theatrical adaptations, *Ophelia* and *I, Hamlet*, respectively. These feminists

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<sup>8</sup> Kimberly Rhodes, *Ophelia and Victorian Visual Culture* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 160.

offer new insight into Ophelia and her plight as a woman trapped in perilous circumstances.

Western culture has been fascinated and amazed by female insanity, like Ophelia's, for years. In her book, *The Female Malady*, Elaine Showalter traces the female history of psychiatry in England from 1830 to 1980. Showalter claims that all of the insane female conventions visible in society can be traced back to Shakespeare's Ophelia.

Laertes calls her a "document in madness," and indeed, as Sander Gilman points out, the changing representations of Ophelia over the centuries do chronicle the shifting definitions of female insanity, from the erotomania of the Elizabethans and the hysteria of the nineteenth century to the unconscious incestuous conflicts of the Freudians and the schizophrenic double bind of the Laingians.<sup>9</sup>

Ophelia has remained the model of Feminine insanity. She possesses elements of innocence and purity. This is often shown theatrically with Ophelia dressed in white or light blue to represent the Virgin Mary. However, she also speaks and sings explicit sexual references and wears her hair loose with flowers. The loose hair would indicate "improper sensuality" and Ophelia symbolically 'deflowers' herself by giving her flowers away in the mad scene.

Throughout the ages societies have dealt with Ophelia's juxtaposition of purity and sexuality differently. The Augustans were uncomfortable with Ophelia's sexuality. They were "determined to see her as an innocent victim, someone young, beautiful, harmless, and pious."<sup>10</sup> They censored the part heavily, cut many of her lines, and made Ophelia an even more insignificant role in the play. Contrary to the Augustans, the Romantics celebrated Ophelia's sexuality and potent emotionality. In the Victorian era Ophelia surfaced as one of the most popular images of the day. For a multitude reasons, Ophelia was a compelling figure for many Victorian artists, writers, and doctors seeking to represent the madwoman. The English Pre-

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<sup>9</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture 1830-1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Raphaelites returned again and again to the subject of the drowning Ophelia.

In the Royal Academy show of 1852, Arthur Hughes's entry shows a tiny waiflike creature- a sort of Tinker-Bell Ophelia- in a filmy white gown, perched on a tree trunk by a stream. The over-all effect is softened, sexless, and hazy, although the straw in her hair resembles a crown of thorns. Hughes's juxtaposition of childlike femininity and Christian martyrdom, however, was overpowered by John Everett Millais's strong painting of Ophelia in the same show. Millais's Ophelia is a sensuous siren as well as a victim.<sup>11</sup>

It is perhaps, this very juxtaposition of innocence and purity, paired with a hidden sexual and devious nature that makes Ophelia such an appealing subject.

Ophelia became increasingly popular in the diagnosis and perception of women in insane asylums. Instead of trying to find out why so many more women than men were going insane in the Victorian era they look towards "sexual frustration (and) continue to see hysterical women as lovelorn Ophelia's (rather than investigating) women's intellectual frustration, lack of mobility, or needs for autonomy and control."<sup>12</sup> This very same lack of control of anything to do with her life was what killed Ophelia.

The doctors in these asylums began to play into the Ophelia similarities. Medical textbooks began to show pictures of female patients that were Ophelia-like maidens. "Asylum superintendents with cameras imposed the conventional Ophelia costume, gesture, props, and expression upon them."<sup>13</sup> They would give the women garlands of flowers and black shawls and photograph them as Ophelia. This odd practice demonstrates the fascination of Ophelia and the draw of Men to the romantic notion of Female insanity.

The two feminists Bryony Lavery and Jane Prendergast were not satisfied with Ophelia's representation as an objectified flat character without a back-story. They created their own

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 92.

theatrical adaptations to further explore the limits of Shakespeare and his characters.

*Ophelia* by Bryony Lavery incorporates female roles of many Shakespeare plays, while staying close to the narrative of *Hamlet*. It began as a feminist project that still celebrates Shakespeare's text while "viewing the characters sympathetically and offering explanations for some of the actions they are given in the original plays."<sup>14</sup> The piece incorporates five major Shakespearean female characters: Katherina, Lady Macbeth, Goneril, Portia, and Lady Capulet. These characters are not suddenly empowered women, but Lavery does give them more background and depth than what Shakespeare afforded them. They are all present in the play to support Ophelia and her family situation. She explains her uncaring father, Polonius and in Lavery's play she adds a story line where Laertes is sexually abusing Ophelia. The ending for Ophelia is uplifting rather than tragic. She holds the style of the play-within-a-play, except has the players tell the story of *Hamlet* through the eyes of Ophelia. Ophelia does not commit suicide, but rather Gertrude attempts to drown her. Ophelia holds her breath and escapes with the traveling players ready to start a new life.

Prendergast's *I, Hamlet* edited Shakespeare's text and staged it to explore gender issues and re-view the character of Ophelia. Prendergast put herself in the role of Hamlet seeking to find out what Hamlet represents for women. To avoid characterizing madness as feminine, a male traded in and out as Hamlet when he was actually perceived as mad throughout the play. This abolishes gender roles completely. The character of Ophelia was also played both as male and female.

By performing both Hamlet and Ophelia, Jane Prendergast drew attention to parallels between the two characters. Thus, Ophelia is often treated as a female foil for Hamlet, but Prendergast's

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<sup>14</sup> Jane De Gay, "Playing (with) Shakespeare: Bryony Lavery's *Ophelia* and Jane Prendergast's *I, Hamlet*," in *Languages of Theatre Shaped by Women*, Edited by Jane de Gay and Lizbeth Goodman. (Bristol: Intellect, 2003), 50.

performance suggested that, rather than being overshadowed by Hamlet, Ophelia can share his heroic status... In earlier scene, where Ophelia is seen talking to Polonius and Hamlet, Prendergast's...movement was restricted...thus emphasizing the restrictions placed upon Ophelia by her family and the court. For her 'mad-scene', she...dances a tarantella and she distributes her flowers. The dynamic energy of this performance resisted the tendency to objectify Ophelia as a passive victim.<sup>15</sup>

Prendergast seeks the same rich life for Ophelia that we find suppressed and missing from the Shakespeare text. Simply by challenging the interpretation of gender roles, Prendergast brings new life and perspective to the character of Ophelia.

Ophelia is most certainly fascinating. She has permeated popular culture, medical history, performance, and gender studies. She is tantalizing to artists because she is suppressed and innocent while simultaneously containing a secret sexualized identity. Ophelia is tragic. Her story is untold. Artists have long wanted to continue to create Ophelia over and over again.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 59.



## CHAPTER 2: OPHELIA IN MUSIC

### OPHELIA AND THE FRENCH

Ophelia was also fascinating to composers. She was meant to be singing in her mad scene so it was a natural progression for composers to write music for this complicated character. In Elaine Showalter's account of Ophelia, she demonstrated that the character was intensely popular in English life. The character of Ophelia was painted numerous times, as well as portrayed in photography by dressing up women with flowers in their hair in asylums. The infiltration of Shakespearian characters into popular culture was not as true in turn-of-the-century France. Translated versions of Shakespeare's plays rose and fell in popularity in France in different time periods. "With strong anti-British sentiment prevailing throughout the period of the Empire until well in the Restoration, Ducis's revised *Hamlet* and Voltaire's derogatory view of Shakespeare continued to dominate the artistic and intellectual climate in France until well after 1820."<sup>16</sup> James M. Vest explains in his book *The French Face of Ophelia...* that this attitude began to change with Madame de Staël. She saw *Hamlet* as:

...essentially a psychological and philosophical play about sensitive dreamers trapped in an insensitive world. Insisting on the pre-eminence of genius over formal style, she ranks Ophelia with Hamlet and Lear as among the most profound of Shakespeare's tragic creations. It is Shakespeare's treatment of madness that strikes her as especially praiseworthy in these characters.<sup>17</sup>

This change in attitude allowed French composers to discover and set Shakespeare's text. Most notably for Ophelia are Hector Berlioz and Ambroise Thomas.

One of Hector Berlioz's most famous works is *Symphonie fantastique*. This French Romantic Composer wrote the piece in 1830 and subtitled the work "Episode in the Life of an

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<sup>16</sup> James M. Vest, *The French Face of Ophelia from Belleforest to Baudelaire* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989), 109.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

Artist,” as Peter Bloom explains:

The “episode’ is plainly linked to Berlioz’s impossible passion for Harriet Smithson, by whom the youthful composer was smitten on 11 September 1827, when he saw her on the stage of the Odeon Theater in the role of Ophelia, opposite the Hamlet of Charles Kemble, in a production by a miscellaneous English company managed by William Abbot, with fine actors from several of the theaters of the English capital.<sup>18</sup>

Berlioz became infatuated with both Miss Smithson and Shakespeare that day. Shakespeare laid the groundwork for three of Berlioz’ major works, *Romeo et Juliette*, *Beatrice et Benedict*, and the *Roi Lear* overture.<sup>19</sup> It is no wonder that as a French Romantic, Berlioz fell in love with Harriet Smithson. Smithson’s portrayal of Ophelia became “an obsession for the century’s artists. In her mad scenes, Smithson wore a long black veil, suggestive of the symbolism of the female sexual mystery that permeates the Gothic novel, and scattered Bedlamish straw in her hair. Her image was widely copied in popular lithographs; French ladies of fashion adopted a “coiffure à la folle”; the young Hector Berlioz was so smitten that he married her; and Delacroix painted her as Ophelia in a series of intensely sexual drawings.”<sup>20</sup> Although Berlioz’s marriage to Harriet Smithson did not last, as they were separated in 1842, he continued to love and set Shakespeare’s text. He returned to Ophelia and her tragedy with the poem *La Mort d’Ophélie* or The Death of Ophelia by Ernest Legouvé. It is based on Gertrude’s speech about Ophelia drowning in Act IV of *Hamlet*. Berlioz originally composed it for voice and piano in 1842 and revised it in 1848 for female choir and orchestra in his collection *Tristia* op. 18. Camille Saint-Saëns’s setting of the same text for solo voice and piano appeared in 1857.<sup>21</sup> Saint-Saëns was not concerned with the feelings of the narrator; rather he wanted to create a musical portrait of

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Bloom, *The Life of Berlioz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998), 43.

<sup>19</sup> Hugh MacDonald, “Berlioz, Hector,” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/51424> (accessed February 20, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Showalter, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Johnson, *Shakespeare's Kingdom* (London: Hyperion, 1988).

Ophelia's tragic death. He uses "swirling quintuplets in the accompaniment which aptly summon up the image of the 'weeping brook.'"<sup>22</sup> (See Figure 1)

Figure 1: La mort d'Ophélie (The Death of Ophelia)

Text by: Ernest Legouvé

Translation by: Graham Johnson and Richard Stokes

Auprès d'un torrent Ophélie  
cueillait, tout en suivant le bord,  
dans sa douce et tendre folie,  
des pervenches, des boutons d'or,  
des iris aux couleurs d'opale,  
et de ces fleurs d'un rose pâle  
qu'on appelle des doigts de mort.

Puis, élevant sur ses mains blanches  
les rians trésors du matin,  
elle les suspendait aux branches,  
aux branches d'un saule voisin.  
Mais trop faible le rameau plie,  
se brise, et la pauvre Ophélie  
tombe, sa guirlande à la main.

Quelques instants sa robe enflée  
la tint encor sur le courant et,  
comme une voile gonflée,  
elle flottait toujours chantant,  
chantant quelque vieille ballade,  
chantant ainsi qu'une naïade  
née au milieu de ce torrent.

Mais cette étrange mélodie  
passa, rapide comme un son.  
Par les flots la robe alourdie  
bientôt dans l'abîme profond  
entraîna la pauvre insensée,  
laissant à peine commencée  
sa mélodieuse chanson.

Beside a brook, Ophelia  
gathered along the water's bank  
in her sweet and gentle madness,  
periwinkles, buttercups,  
opal-tinted irises,  
and those pale purples  
Called dead men's fingers.

Then, raising up in her white hands  
the morning's laughing trophies,  
she hung them on the branches,  
the branches of a nearby willow.  
But the bough, too fragile, bends,  
breaks, and poor Ophelia  
falls, the garland in her hand.

Her dress, spread wide,  
bore her on the water awhile,  
and like an outstretched sail  
she floated, still singing,  
singing some old ballad,  
singing like a naiad  
born amidst the stream.

But this strange melody died,  
fleeting as a snatch of sound.  
Her garment, heavy with water,  
soon into the depths  
dragged the poor distracted girl,  
leaving her melodious song  
hardly yet begun.

Ambroise Thomas was another French composer with an affinity for Shakespeare. After setting *A Midsummer's Night Dream* and becoming fairly well known with his work with Opéra-Comique he decided to delve into a more serious medium with his opera, *Hamlet*, premiered in

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

1868. Although Thomas' *Hamlet* received mixed reviews because of drastic differences from Shakespeare's original plot, he exalted Ophelia. "Act 4 ignores Shakespeare's own songs, which Thomas' librettists considered unsuited, but substitutes an extended Ballade for Ophelia in which her madness and suicide are portrayed by increasing coloratura excursions. A wordless choral version of this, sung by the Danish peasants, concludes the act as she floats away on the river."<sup>23</sup> This extended mad scene is all for Ophelia. It is a coveted, virtuosic coloratura role that highlights the character and her tragedy almost as much as Hamlet's. Their love is also underlined in Thomas's opera. He gives Hamlet and Ophelia a love duet that is recalled throughout the opera to remind the audience of their love. Although Thomas strays from the original plot more so than some would like, he provides an exciting and new interpretation of Ophelia and her circumstances.

The French Romantic composers latched onto Ophelia's sexually charged, tragic existence and set her to fantastic music. These artists found an untold story worthy telling in song.

## **OPHELIA AND THE GERMANS**

Stephen Johnson writes "the discovery of Shakespeare was probably the single most important catalyst in the development of German romanticism...the character of Ophelia proved especially fascinating to the German romantics. This is hardly surprising, for she possesses many of the qualifications of what C. G. Jung called the *anima*: the symbolic personification of the feminine element of a man's unconscious. For all the dark intensity of Ophelia's mad ramblings, there remains a kind of ethereal purity, which gives her the significance of symbol rather than

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Langham Smith, "Ambroise Thomas," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/27856> (accessed March 14, 2012).

personality.”<sup>24</sup> This attraction to Ophelia as a symbol remains a unifying force for all who set her text to music. As Johnson notes, this was especially true for the German romantics. Composers such as Schumann, Brahms, and Strauss incorporated Ophelia’s essence and fate in their writing. Her tragedy longed to be encased in song and these men eagerly rose to the challenge.

Robert Schumann’s interpretation of Ophelia views her tragedy through Queen Gertrude’s account of her death. Schumann’s *Herzeleid* with poem by Titus Ulrich “is taken from a collection of six songs composed during the years 1851-2. (See Figure 2) To modern ears *Herzeleid* may sound eerily prophetic, for in 1854 Schumann attempted to drown himself in the River Rhine. This brief song tells in simple but haunting terms of the death of Ophelia, the words being a short paraphrase of Queen Gertrude’s famous speech, ‘There is a willow grows aslant a brook.’”<sup>25</sup> Although the text is not taken directly from Shakespeare’s play, it is so vividly descriptive of Ophelia’s character, her plight, and her hopelessness against all of the forces pulling her in every direction.

Figure 2: *Herzeleid* (Heartbreak) op. 107 no. 1

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Text by Titus Ulrich

Die Weiden lassen matt die Zweige hangen,  
Und traurig ziehn die Wasser hin:  
Sie schaute starr hinab mit bleichen Wangen,  
Die unglückselge Träumerin.

The willows feebly dropped their branches,  
And sadly the waters flowed on.  
She gazed vacantly down with pale cheeks,  
The luckless dreamer.

Und ihr entfiel ein Strauss von Immortellen,  
Er war so schwer von Tränen ja,  
Und leise warnend lispelten die Wellen:  
Ophelia, Ophelia!

And she dropped a bunch of everlasting flowers  
That was so heavy with tears,  
And the waves whispered a gentle warning:  
Ophelia, Ophelia!

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<sup>24</sup> Johnson.

<sup>25</sup> Johnson.

Schumann chose to set this text in a haunting way with a gently wafting piano that is evocative of the flowing water mentioned in Ulrich's poem. Ulrich adds another perspective and layer to Ophelia as he describes her as "Die unglückselge Träumerin" or "the luckless dreamer" with a vacant look. He makes it clear that she has been robbed of everything she hoped for and has become heavy and yet empty as she washes away. Every interpretation of Ophelia proves to be profound and pathetic while filled with deep sorrow. Schumann was not the only German Romantic who sought to portray Ophelia's deep sorrow in music. His close friend and mentee, Johannes Brahms, also has an important relationship to the musical development of Hamlet's Ophelia.

Johannes Brahms wrote five lieder for Ophelia. They are the only group of songs composed by Brahms that are "known beyond a doubt to have been composed for performance by a single singer on a single occasion."<sup>26</sup> The songs were composed for Olga Precheisen in 1873. Olga was engaged to Brahms' friend Josef Lewinsky, "then an actor at the famous Burgtheater in Vienna. These songs were first sung in Prague in a performance featuring Lewinsky as Hamlet and Precheisen as Ophelia."<sup>27</sup> The production of Hamlet was a German translation by Ludwig Tieck and August Wilhelm Schlegel. The lieder were composed for Act IV, scene v; Ophelia's mad scene. Each of the songs is separated by spoken dialogue and therefore Brahms composed them to be performed a cappella. He wrote a piano part, but only for the purpose of learning the songs. Shakespeare indicated that Ophelia should sing some of her lines during her mad scene. Subsequently, Brahms composed her lyrical banter for her. Giving her the music the character always longed for. Inge Van Rij delves into the musical significance of Brahms setting and how it ties into the story:

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<sup>26</sup> Inge Van Rij, *Brahms's Song Collections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2006), 162.

<sup>27</sup> Beaumont Glass, *Brahms' Complete Song Texts* (Mt. Morris: Leyerle, 1999).

The second song employs the major/relative minor flexibility of Ophelia's folk idiom: it opens in D major (and thus provides a strong tonal link to the previous song, in G) but concludes in B minor. When the third song opens in G major we complete a harmonic descent through each degree of the tonic triad of this key (from g in the first song, to D and b in the second, and on to G in the third.) A single stepwise descent also flows seamlessly through the fundamental lines of these first three songs and continues into the opening of the fourth song.<sup>28</sup>

Of the fifth and final song Rij writes, "the new tonal stability...is matched by an orderly descent in the melodic line from d'' to d' in a strongly cadential phrase, which echoes the finality of the words: 'er kommt ja nimmer, nimmer, nimmer zurück' (he ne'er, he ne'er will come again)."<sup>29</sup> This unusual tonal continuity for a Brahms' song cycle attests to his commitment to musically portraying the character as faithfully as possible to the dramatic action. His tonalities remain relatively close in relationship when separated by a few lines of text and the keys differ greatly when Ophelia returns to the scene after having been offstage. Brahms finds the perfect balance of haunting melodies, suggesting Ophelia is disturbed, along with logical tonal relationships that indicate there may be truth in the shocking rhetoric she presents.

Richard Strauss also strikes the important balance between lunacy and logic in his own Ophelia lieder. He needed to use tonality that would translate to the modern ear, but he shifts wildly in tempo and mood throughout these three songs. Strauss' skill at writing for a mad mind may have stemmed from his mother's own mental illness, as suggested by Susan Youens. She goes on to say "female psychosis was a subject Strauss would address over and over again."<sup>30</sup> This is evident in his sexually mad characters Salome and Elektra. Perhaps it was "inevitable that he would join forces with the many painters, poets, and musicians at the turn of the century who

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<sup>28</sup> Rij, 163.

<sup>29</sup> Rij, 165.

<sup>30</sup> Susan Youens, "Actually, I Like My Songs Best: Strauss's lieder," In *The Cambridge Companion to Richard Strauss*, Edited by Charles Youmans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2010), 170-171.

were also fascinated by Ophelia.”<sup>31</sup> Strauss was drawn to Ophelia and her fragility, madness, and brutal honesty through her entire life visible life throughout the play. Like Brahms, Strauss set a German translation of Shakespeare text. However, the translation that Strauss used was from a different duo. Strauss set the German translation by Karl Joseph Simrock and Ludwig Seeger. Also like Brahms, Strauss pulled his text solely from Act IV scene v. Unlike the Brahms lieder, which were inserted within the performance of the play; the Strauss lieder were intended to be performed in a concert venue. The piano plays as much of a character in these three lieder as does Ophelia. The first lied begins with an aggregate of pitches with syncopation across the measure line. This pattern sets up the uneasy, mad tonality littered with tri-tones. The listener only hears something recognizably triadic on the final word “Liebesschauern” when the line ascends without dissonance for a striking two and a half measures. At the end of the postlude in the piano, the music returns to the original opening aggregate of pitches. “There is method to this madness, rigorous method in fact: every note is derived from the figures at the beginning, but its logic is not that of a sane world, centered on tonic-dominant polarities or any other fulcrum of functional tonality.”<sup>32</sup> In the second lied, “Guten Morgen, ist Sankt Valentinstag” (“Good Morning, ‘tis Saint Valentines Day”) Strauss also uses insane sounding systems of tonality that seem to create their own logic in a twisted world. This lied is jarring and angular in a quick 3/8. The anacrusis to the first measure returns through out the piece and seems to be the only grounding force in this whirlwind of spitting madness. The text and music whiz by as we witness Ophelia in a frantic state of madness. The third lied, “Sie trugen ihn auf der Bahre bloß” (“They bore him naked on the bier”), provides a striking contrast to the second, with a slow tempo and gently rolling eighth notes akin to the water that will soon devour her. The music floats, radiantly

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 173.



at times, especially on the text “Fahr wohl, fahr wohl, meine Taube! (“Farewell, farewell my dove!”) when she soars gently above the staff. This moment is remarkably similar to the climax of the first lied with the ascent above the staff in this blossoming moment. A wild waltz section, that reminds us of Ophelia’s madness, quickly interrupts this exposed and honest moment.

Strauss created a new musical interpretation of Ophelia and her tragedy. He develops his own idea of the character; that her madness was filled with logic that simply could not be understood by others. Strauss created Ophelia’s own musical language in which she could sing her final song.

The German Romantics were drawn to Ophelia for many obvious reasons. She was beautiful, tortured, and tragic. Each composer who set Ophelia did so to give her the music that she deserved. Whether they wanted to underline the sorrow of her tragedy, musically engage her text, or give her a unique language they all were drawn to her existence. By composing her music and adding depth to her tale these composers assure that her story will live on.

### CHAPTER 3: OPHELIA ONSTAGE

#### PERFORMANCE PLANNING

As part of my honors thesis I wanted to include a performance project that highlighted the relationships and circumstances that led to Ophelia's demise. I also wanted to include music in the performance that reflected Ophelia's voice, text, and circumstance. To do this, I created a script assembled from Shakespeare's original text. Next, I decided on the music I wanted to perform in the piece and where this fit into the script. Finally, I recruited a cast to accompany my own portrayal of Ophelia and we rehearsed and performed the piece in Esber Recital Hall on November 15, 2011. The performance script, program, and program notes may be found in the appendices of this thesis. The performance allowed me to present my findings on Ophelia, while infusing my own ideas and musings about the character and her tragic plight.

I began working on the script by rereading all of Hamlet. I read with an eye on Ophelia and her character's journey throughout the play. I wanted to convey her journey truly, with Shakespeare's original text. However, I arranged the scenes and eventually the songs, to emphasize the main findings of my research. My performance sought to underline the point that Ophelia was objectified and used by all the men around her, which eventually led to her demise. I isolated every scene from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* that included Ophelia. Then I had to decide which moments to use to justify the dramatic urgency of the piece. I chose these moments based on clear evidence in the text of Ophelia's situation of being verbally battered or used by the characters around her. The selected scenes are as follows:

Act I, scene iii where Ophelia is introduced and her relationships to her Father and Brother are established.

Act II, scene i where Ophelia recounts to her Father, Hamlet's forceful entrance to her

chamber.

Act III, scene i, which includes the iconic “to be or not to be” speech and the splintering of Hamlet and Ophelia’s relationship with the “get thee to a nunnery” rant.

Act IV, scene v, Ophelia’s mad scene.

Every scene in which Ophelia appears is represented. The exception is Act III scene ii when Hamlet brings the players to the castle to reveal Claudius’ guilt. In this scene Hamlet asks to put his head in Ophelia’s lap and shows himself to be quite “mad” around her. I chose not to include this scene because I thought it would be more emotionally and dramatically immediate to propel straight from Hamlet’s “get thee to a nunnery” rant into Ophelia’s mad scene.

After choosing the scenes I decided to shorten them to expedite the essence of the scene. This process was relatively simple, and mostly involved trimming long monologues into shorter, more consumable lines. The largest interpretive adjustment I made to the Shakespeare text was splitting the “To be or not to be” speech between Hamlet and Ophelia. My reasoning for this was two-fold. First, I wanted to reveal an intimate and emotionally raw connection between Hamlet and Ophelia. This type of intimacy between the two is alluded to at multiple points in the play, but is never expressly shown to the audience. Second, I wanted it to be clear that Hamlet might have presented Ophelia with the idea of suicide for the first time. Shakespeare writes that Ophelia is hidden onstage during “To be or not to be.” Therefore she could have very well received the idea of her eventual suicide from Hamlet and his uttering of this illustrious speech.

The next phase of preparing the piece was choosing the music. I had to consider music that was suitable for my vocal color and ability. The most prominent composers who have set Ophelia are Thomas, Brahms, and Strauss. Thomas’ wild and lengthy mad scene for Ophelia is extremely challenging technically. It is heavily decorated with extreme coloratura and takes

stamina to make it through a drawn out, dramatized death. My vocal ability did not allow me to access this piece, so I left it out of the performance. On the other end of the spectrum, the Brahms' Ophelia Lieder were extremely accessible. Brahms wrote the lieder for an actress not a singer and therefore they are very speech-like with a limited range and meant to be performed a cappella. The Strauss Ophelia Lieder were a bit more challenging, especially with collaboration with the piano. I put the first and third Strauss Ophelia Lieder into the program because they were both within my vocal ability. The second of the Strauss Lieder may have been attainable, but the intervals are very angular and jumpy which ultimately led me to leave this piece out of the program.

After choosing the music I had to decide how the music and text should interact. Both the Brahms and Strauss Ophelia Lieder were based solely on the text from Ophelia's mad scene. However, rather than crowding all of music into the end of the piece to accompany the mad scene, I wanted to spread it throughout the performance. This was aesthetically more satisfying and it provided a preview of what was to become of Ophelia. I used the first and second Brahms' lieder to start the piece and then used the rest of the remaining three to delineate each scene. After Ophelia's speech "O what a noble mind is here o'erthrown" she is propelled into madness with the first Strauss Lied. This moment is particularly meaningful because it is the first time the piano is used in the performance. The piano becomes another character that signals the madness of Ophelia's mind.

The last part of the performance decision was where to situate the last of the Strauss Ophelia lieder. I had to consider whether I wanted to end the piece with music or text. What was the last impression I wanted to leave with the audience? I tried both ways in rehearsal with the cast and it quickly became clear that ending with the original text was the best way to close the

piece. I staged this moment with Ophelia skipping wildly through the audience, just as she entered, bidding “goodnight” to her audience. In her case, goodnight was goodbye to earth forever. It is my hope that Ophelia found peace and self worth when she descended into the water and chose not to be. The final script is included in Appendix A.

### **REHEARSING FOR THE PERFORMANCE**

After I had a script, I chose a cast to accompany my Ophelia. I needed actors to play Laertes, Polonius, Hamlet, and Gertrude. I have many friends in the Penn State School of Theatre, so I started there for my casting needs. Fortunately everyone I asked was able to commit to performing. I asked Andy Lucien to be my Hamlet. Andy is a third year Acting MFA student at Penn State. Chazie Bly and Christen Buckley played Laertes and Gertrude, respectively. Chazie and Christen are both working towards a BA degree in Theatre. Finally, I needed a Polonius. I wanted this role to be played by someone slightly older that could play Polonius as a curmudgeon. For this role, I asked David Hood. David is a Choral Conducting graduate student in the School of Music. He was perfect for the role and noted that he had some previous theatre experience.

After my cast was assembled I sent them scripts and we started planning a rehearsal schedule. Many of my cast members were involved with different shows so we had to hold our rehearsals at 9:00 PM at night. We had six rehearsals before the performance and usually had them in room 113 Music Building I or Esber Recital Hall on the Penn State campus. The first rehearsal was on Tuesday, October 25. This rehearsal was just a general overview of the project and a read through of the script. The next four rehearsals were held on November 1, November 3, November 8, and November 10. These rehearsals were used to stage the piece and practice transitions. I usually ran these rehearsals, but Dr. Ted Christopher, my thesis advisor, came in a

few times to give advice and guidance. Monday, November 14 was our dress rehearsal which involved all cast members, my accompanist, and Dr. Christopher. We were also in costume and had the few props we were using. We rehearsed in the recital hall with the lights and chairs set exactly how they would be for the next evening.

In preparation for the performance I had to create a program and program notes. The program template was provided and printed by the Penn State School of Music and can be found in Appendix B. The program notes feature a short paragraph about the project and translations of each of the lieder for the audience. The program notes are included in Appendix C.

The performance was a great success. I had chairs set out for the audience on the stage to make the performance more intimate. So many people attended that we had to add chairs before we could begin. I was pleased with the turn out as well as the enthusiastic audience reaction. The video of the performance is included in Appendix D.

## **CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, & CONCLUSION**

### **SUMMARY**

My thesis focused on Shakespeare's Ophelia and the causation of her demise. In the first chapter I investigated Ophelia's role in *Hamlet*. Ophelia is never seen onstage alone and so everything that we know about her is in relation to another character. Therefore, it is in these relationships that the most telling evidence of her decline is found. Those around her mistreated her, such as Laertes, Polonius, and Hamlet. They each had their own agenda and never saw Ophelia for who she was, only what she could give them. They objectified Ophelia and found her to be a symbol of purity that could be used for their own will. I also reviewed subsequent views of Ophelia through a feminist gaze. Elaine Showalter writes about Ophelia's popular image as the unfortunate maiden that draws men to her. Bryony Lavery and Jane Prendergast also wrote about Ophelia from a feminist perspective in their play adaptations and continuations of the character.

I also explored the interest in Ophelia shown by musicians. Shakespeare indicated that Ophelia should sing in her mad scene. Composers have embraced this fact and crafted beautiful music for and about Ophelia. I focused on the French composers with Berlioz and Thomas as well as the Germans with Schuman, Brahms, and Strauss. The musical perspective of each composer is unique and valid.

Finally, I created a performance piece that combined Shakespeare's text with music written for Ophelia. I assembled a script that included parts of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and interpolated music by Brahms and Strauss. I played the part of Ophelia and recruited a cast to join me as Laertes, Polonius, Hamlet, and Gertrude. I rehearsed and performed the piece for a live audience in Esber Recital Hall on November 15, 2011.

## DISCUSSION

This project was an exciting, rewarding, and delightfully informative undertaking. I learned more about Ophelia, as well as the importance of having ownership over your own identity. My research was an exciting journey through Ophelia's literary and musical life. The performance component was a great experience for me both in the construction and practice. The most interesting parts of my research were discovering the work of Elaine Showalter, considering the idea of the origin of identity, and thinking about how to take the project further in the future.

I found the writing of Elaine Showalter fascinating because of her observations of the English public's obsession with hysterical women. She wrote that the frequent diagnosis of women with insanity perpetuated the problem and never sought to identify the cause. Perhaps these women could have been cured if their lives served a purpose of their own, rather than constantly serving others. Their situations were much like the character of Ophelia. Showalter's mention of digging for the root of issue reminded me of the work of Betty Friedan and her investigation of housewives and their happiness in *The Feminine Mystique*.<sup>33</sup> I may in the future look into comparing their work in examining what it takes for a woman to feel happy and whole.

The idea of identity was interesting to explore. I found that as I moved through this project I identified more questions than answers. Ophelia had no ownership of her own identity. Ophelia let the men around her define who she was and what she could be. This lack of personal identity caused me to examine my own life. How much do I create my own sense of self? Am I defined by the relationships I have with the people around me? Personal identity is a balancing act created by internal and external factors. Shakespeare warns us with Ophelia's story that we must not tilt too far on one side of the scale.

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<sup>33</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).



In reflecting on my thesis project I would make a few alterations were I to conduct a similar project in the future. The performance was a great success, but a rather short presentation. Including music written for Gertrude about Ophelia's death, such as Schumann's *Herzeleid* or Saint-Saën's *La mort d'Ophélie*, would have enhanced the performance. It also would have been interesting to add another of Shakespeare's "daughters" to provide a contrast to Ophelia. Perhaps adding another woman from Shakespeare's tales to give a different perspective on relationships and identity.

## CONCLUSION

Ophelia is a tragic character who has no ownership over her sense of self. She is entirely dependent on the men in her life. Perhaps this dependence, combined with her coquettish innocence and hidden sexual desires is what makes her such a frequently studied subject. She has graced stages, canvases, voices, and hearts alike. Although many have tried to embellish, interpret, and contribute to this character, her inception is the most important element of her existence. Shakespeare plainly shows that a person removed from him or herself, completely subservient to others cannot survive. I investigated the identity of Ophelia through her role as a female who allowed others to use her. I then examined music written for, about, and because of Ophelia. Many composers set her in various styles and continued to comment on her tragedy through their music. My performance demonstrated the moments in the play where Ophelia is verbally battered, suggesting that this led to her demise. Ophelia stood objectified and like all beautiful things, was crushed from use and abuse. Her fate should serve as a warning for all of us.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**PERFORMANCE SCRIPT**

Thesis Script  
Ophelia and the Origin of Identity  
Leah Mueller  
11/3/11

Characters:  
(In order of appearance)

Ophelia- Female (Innocent, naïve, eager to please, impressionable)  
Laertes- Male (Ophelia's brother, kind, loving)  
Polonius- Male (Ophelia's father, conniving, self-interested)  
Hamlet- Male (Melancholy, character of contradictions)  
Queen Gertrude- Female (Hamlet's mother, loves Hamlet but has many influences)

*Ophelia enters from the back of the house with flowers and herbs, scattering them over the floor and showing them to the audience while singing.*

***I. Wie erkenn' ich dein Treulieb***

***II. Sein Leichenhemd weiss wie Schnee zu she'n***  
***Johannes Brahms***

Laertes: My necessities are embarked. Farewell.  
And, sister, as the winds give benefit  
And convoy is assistant, do not sleep,  
But let me hear from you.

Ophelia: Do you doubt that?

Laertes: For Hamlet and the trifling of his favour,  
Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,  
A violet in the youth of primy nature,  
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,  
The perfume and suppliance of a minute.  
No more.

Ophelia: No more but so?

Laertes: Think it no more.  
For nature, crescent, does not grow alone  
In thews and bulk, but, as this temple waxes,  
The inward service of the mind and soul  
Grows wide withal. Perhaps he loves you now,

And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch  
 The virtue of his will: but you must fear  
 Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister,  
 And keep you in the rear of your affection,  
 Out of the shot and danger of desire.

Ophelia: I shall the effect of this good lesson keep  
 As watchman to my heart. But, good my brother,  
 Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,  
 Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven  
 Whiles, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,  
 Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,  
 And recks not his own rede.

Laertes: O, fear me not.  
 I stay too long: but here my father comes.  
 A double blessing is a double grace.  
 Occasion smiles upon a second leave.  
*(Exit Laertes, Enter Polonius)*

Polonius: What is't, Ophelia, he hath said to you?

Ophelia: So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.  
 He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders  
 Of his affection to me.

Polonius: Affection! Pooh, you speak like a green girl,  
 Unsifted in such perilous circumstance.  
 Do you believe his "tenders," as you call them?

Ophelia: I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

Polonius: Marry, I'll teach you: think yourself a baby  
 That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay,  
 Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly,  
 Or--not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,  
 Running it thus--you'll tender me a fool.

Ophelia: My lord, he hath importuned me with love  
 In honourable fashion.

Polonius: Ay, "fashion" you may call it. Go to, go to.

Ophelia: I shall obey, my lord.

**III. Auf Morgen ist Sankt Valentins Tag- Johannes Brahms**

Ophelia: My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,  
 Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced;  
 No hat upon his head; his stockings fouled,  
 Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle;  
 Pale as his shirt; his knees knocking each other;  
 And with a look so piteous in purport  
 As if he had been loosed out of hell  
 To speak of horrors- he comes before me.

Polonius: Mad for thy love?

Ophelia: My lord, I do not know.  
 But truly, I do fear it.

Polonius: Ophelia, walk you here-  
 Read on this book, That show of such an exercise may color  
 Your loneliness- We are oft to blame in this,  
 'Tis too much proved, that with devotion's visage  
 And pious action we do sugar o'er  
 The devil himself

**IV. Sie trugen ihn auf der Bahre bloss (Johannes Brahms)  
 V. Und kommt er nicht mehr zurück? (Johannes Brahms)**

Hamlet: To be, or not to be: that is the question—  
 Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
 The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
 Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
 And by opposing end them? To die—

Ophelia: to sleep--

Hamlet: No more;

Ophelia: and by a sleep to say we end  
 The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks  
 That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation  
 Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;

Hamlet: To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,

Ophelia: For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, →

- Hamlet: Must give us pause: there's the respect  
That makes calamity of so long life;  
--Soft you now!  
The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons  
Be all my sins remember'd.
- Ophelia: Good my lord,  
How does your honour for this many a day?
- Hamlet: I humbly thank you. Well, well, well.
- Ophelia: My lord, I have remembrances of yours,  
That I have longed long to re-deliver;  
I pray you, now receive them.
- Hamlet: No, not I. I never gave you aught.
- Ophelia: My honored lord, you know right well you did,  
And with them, words of so sweet breath composed  
As made the things more rich. Their perfume lost,  
Take these again, for to the noble mind  
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.  
There, my lord.
- Hamlet: Ha, ha, are you honest?
- Ophelia: My lord?
- Hamlet: Are you fair?
- Ophelia: What means your lordship?
- Hamlet: That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should  
admit no discourse to your beauty.
- Ophelia: Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce than  
with honesty?
- Hamlet: Ay, truly, for the power of beauty will sooner transform  
honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty  
can translate beauty into his likeness. This was sometime a  
paradox, but now the time gives it proof. I did love you once.
- Ophelia: Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

- Hamlet: You should not have believed me; for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it I loved you not.
- Ophelia: I was the more deceived.
- Hamlet: Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. We are arrant knaves, all. Believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. Where's your father?
- Ophelia: At home, my lord.
- Hamlet: Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool no where but in's own house. Farewell.
- Ophelia: O, help him, you sweet heavens!
- Hamlet: If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry. Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery, go. Farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool, for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go, and quickly too. Farewell. *(exit)*
- Ophelia: O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!-  
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,  
That sucked the honey of his music vows,  
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason  
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;  
That unmatched form and feature of blown youth  
Blasted with ecstasy. O, woe is me,  
To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

***I. Wie erkenn ich mein Treulieb vor andern nun (Richard Strauss)***

- Ophelia: Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?
- Gertrude: How now, Ophelia?
- Ophelia: (Sings) How should I your true love know  
From another one?  
By his cockle hat and staff,  
And his sandal shoon.
- Gertrude: Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?



- Ophelia: Say you? Nay, pray you, mark.  
 (Sings) He is dead and gone, lady,  
 He is dead and gone,  
 At his head a grass-green turf,  
 At his heels a stone.  
 Oh, ho!
- Gertrude: Nay, but, Ophelia,--
- Ophelia: Pray you, mark.  
 (Sings) White his shroud as the mountain snow,--  
 Larded with sweet flowers  
 Which bewept to the grave did not go  
 With true-love showers.
- Gertrude: How do you, pretty lady?
- Ophelia: Well, God 'ild you! They say the owl was a baker's  
 daughter. Lord, we know what we are, but know not what  
 we may be. God be at your table!
- Gertrude: Conceit upon her father.
- Ophelia: Pray you, let's have no words of this; but when they ask you  
 what it means, say you this:  
 (Sings) To-morrow is Saint Valentine's day,  
 All in the morning betime,  
 And I a maid at your window,  
 To be your Valentine.  
 Then up he rose, and donn'd his clothes,  
 And dupp'd the chamber-door.  
 Let in the maid that out a maid  
 Never departed more.
- Gertrude: Pretty Ophelia!
- Ophelia: Indeed, la, without an oath, I'll make an end on't: (Sings)  
 By Gis and by Saint Charity,  
 Alack, and fie for shame!  
 Young men will do't, if they come to't;  
 By cock, they are to blame.  
 Quoth she, "Before you tumbled me,  
 You promised me to wed."  
 He answers,  
 "So would I ha' done, by yonder sun,

An thou hadst not come to my bed.”

*(Laertes enters)*

Laertes: How now? What noise is that?  
*(Sees Ophelia)*

Ophelia: (sings) They bore him barefaced on the bier,  
Hey, non nonny, nonny, hey, nonny,  
And in his grave rained many a tear.  
Fare you well, my dove.

Laertes: Hadst thou thy wits, and didst persuade revenge,  
It could not move thus.

Ophelia: You must sing A-down a-down- And you, Call him a-  
Down-a- Oh, how the wheel becomes it! It is the false  
Steward that stole his master’s daughter.

Laertes: This nothing’s more than matter.

Ophelia: There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance. Pray you, love,  
Remember. And there is pansies, that’s for thoughts.

Laertes: A document in madness. Thoughts and remembrance fitted.

Ophelia: There’s fennel for you, and columbines.—There’s rue for  
You, and here’s some for me. We may call it “herb of grace”  
o’ Sundays.—Oh, you must wear your rue with a  
difference. — There’s a daisy. I would give you some violets,  
but they withered all when my father died. They say he  
made a good end (sing) For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy—

Laertes: Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself,  
She turns to favor and to prettiness.

### ***III. Sie trugen ihn auf der Bahre bloss (Richard Strauss)***

Ophelia: (sings) And will he not come again?  
And will he not come again?  
No, no, he is dead,  
Go to thy deathbed.  
He never will come again.

He beard was as white as snow,  
All flaxen was his poll.  
He is gone, he is gone,

And we cast away moan,  
God ha' mercy on his soul.—  
And of all Christian souls, I pray God. God be wi' ye.

Come, my coach! Good night, ladies.  
Good night, sweet ladies. Good night, good night.

**APPENDIX B**  
**RECITAL PROGRAM**

PENN STATE  
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE

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School of Music  
Presents  
A Senior Recital

**Leah Mueller, soprano**

with

**Ying Zhao, piano**

Leah Mueller is a student of Ted Christopher.  
This recital is in partial fulfillment of a Schreyer Honors College Thesis.

Tuesday, November 15, 2011  
5:00 p.m.  
Esber Recital Hall, Music Building I

## Program

### 5 Ophelia Lieder

- I. Wie erkenn' ich dein Treulieb
- II. Sein Leichenhemd weiss wie Schnee
- III. Auf morgen ist Sankt Valentins Tag
- IV. Sie trugen ihn auf der Bahre bloß
- V. Und kommt er nicht mehr zurück?

Johannes Brahms  
(1833-1897)

### Drei Lieder der Ophelia, op. 67

- I. Wie erkenn ich mein Treulieb vor andern nun
- III. Sie trugen ihn auf der Bahre bloß

Richard Strauss

## Cast

Ophelia	Leah Mueller
Laertes	Charles Bly
Polonius	David Hood
Hamlet	Andy Lucien
Gertrude	Christen Buckley

## APPENDIX C

### RECITAL PROGRAM NOTES

I believe that Shakespeare's Ophelia has been objectified throughout her existence as a character. This performance seeks to exemplify her objectification through the definitions applied to her by her father, brother, and lover. Johannes Brahms and Richard Strauss continue to define Ophelia as they apply their own music to her voice. Through each of these variables we observe Ophelia needing approbation but never achieving self-actualization. I propose that this lack of ownership of her own identity may be the root of Ophelia's demise.

#### **Johannes Brahms:**

#### **5 Ophelia Lieder, WoOposth.22**

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

German translation by Ludwig Tieck and August Wilhelm Schlegel

English translation by Beaumont Glass

#### **Wie erkenn' ich dein Treulieb**

Wie erkenn' ich dein Treulieb  
vor den andern nun?  
An dem Muschelhut und Stab  
und den Sandelschuh'n.  
Er ist lange tot und hin,  
tot und hin, Fräulein!  
Ihm zu Häupten ein Rasen grün,  
ihm zu Fuß ein Stein.

How recognize I your true love  
Before the others now?  
By the shell-hat and staff  
and the sandal shoes.  
He is long since dead and gone,  
dead and gone young lady!  
For him at head a turf green,  
for him at foot a stone.

#### **Sein Leichenhemd weiß wie Schnee**

Sein Leichenhemd weiß wie Schnee zu sehn,  
Geziert mit Blumensegen,  
Das still betränt zum Grab muß gehn  
Von Liebesregen.

His shroud white as snow to see,  
Adorned with flower blessings  
that unbewept to the grave had to go  
by love-rain.

#### **Auf morgen ist Sankt Valentins Tag**

Auf morgen ist Sankt Valentins Tag,  
Wohl an der Zeit noch früh,  
Und ich 'ne Maid am Fensterschlag  
Will sein eur Valentin.  
Er war bereit, tät an sein Kleid,  
Tät auf die Kammertür,  
Ließ ein die Maid, die als 'ne Maid  
Ging nimmermehr herfür.

To-morrow is Saint Valentine's day,  
Well in the time still early,  
And I a maid at the window-sash  
Want to be your Valentine.  
He was ready, put on his dress,  
Opened up the chamber-door;  
Let in the maid, who as a maid  
Went nevermore out.

**Sie trugen ihn auf der Bahre bloß**

Sie trugen ihn auf der Bahre bloß  
 leider, ach leider!  
 Und manche Trän' fiel in Grabes Schooß,  
 'nunter, hin unter!  
 Und ruft ihr ihn 'nunter.  
 Denn trautlieb Fränzel ist all meine Lust.

They carried him on the bier uncovered  
 Unfortunately, ah unfortunately!  
 And many a tear fell into grave's womb,  
 A down, him a down!  
 And call you him a-down  
 For dear charming Francie is all my joy

**Und kommt er nicht mehr zurück?**

Und kommt er nicht mehr zurück?  
 Und kommt er nicht mehr zurück?  
 Er ist Tot, o weh!  
 In dein Todesbett geh,  
 Er kommt ja nimmer, nimmer nimmer zurück.

And comes he not more back?  
 And comes he not more back?  
 He is dead, O woe!  
 Into your dead-bed go,  
 he comes after all never, never, never back.

Sein Bart war so weiß wie Schnee,  
 Sein Haupt dem Flachse gleich:  
 Er ist hin, er ist hin,  
 Und kein Leid bringt Gewinn:  
 Gott helf' ihm ins Himmelreich!

His beard was as white as snow,  
 his head to the flax similar:  
 He is gone, is gone,  
 and no sorrow brings profit;  
 God help him into the heavenly kingdom!

**Richard Strauss:****Drei Lieder der Ophelia**

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)  
 German Translation by Karl Joseph Simrock  
 English Translation by Beaumont Glass

**Erstes Lied der Ophelia**

Wie erkenn' ich mein Treulieb  
 Vor der andern nun?  
 An dem Muschelhut und Stab  
 Und den Sandalschuh'n.

Er ist tot und lange hin,  
 Tot und hin, Fräulein!  
 Ihm zu Häupten grünes Gras,  
 Ihm zu Fuß ein Stein.  
 O ho!

Auf seinem Bahrtuch, weiß wie Schnee,  
 Viel liebe Blumen trauern.  
 Sie gehn zu Grabe naß,  
 O weh! Vor Liebesschauern.

**First Song of Ophelia**

How recognize I my true love know  
 before others now?  
 By the shell hat and staff  
 and the sandal shoes.

He is dead and long since gone,  
 Dead and gone, young lady!  
 For him at head green grass,  
 For him at foot a stone.  
 O ho!

On his pall, white as snow,  
 Many dear flowers mourn.  
 They go to grave wet,  
 O woe! By love showers.

### Drittes Lied der Ophelia

Sie trugen ihn auf der Bahre bloß,  
 Leider, ach leider, den Liebsten!  
 Manche Träne fiel in des Grabes Schoß-  
 Fahr wohl, fahr wohl, meine Taube!

Mein junger frischer Hansel ist's, der mir gefällt  
 und kommt er nimmermehr?  
 Er ist tot, o weh!  
 In dein Totbett geh,  
 Er kommt dir minnermehr.

Sein Bart war weiß wie Schnee,  
 Sein Haupt wie Flachs dazu.  
 Er ist hin, er ist hin,  
 Kein Trauern bringt Gewinn:  
 Mit seiner Seele Ruh  
 Und mit allen Christenseelen!  
 Darum bet ich! Gott sei mit euch!

### Third Song of Ophelia

They carried him on the bier uncovered  
 Unfortunately, nony, nony, hey nony  
 And in his grave rained many a tear-  
 Fare you well, my dove!

For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy.  
 And will a' not come again?  
 No, no, he is dead;  
 Go to they deathbed;  
 He never will come again.

His beard was white as snow,  
 His head like flax besides.  
 He is gone, he is gone,  
 No mourning brings profit:  
 With his soul rest  
 And with all Christian souls!  
 Therefore pray I! God be with you!



**APPENDIX D**  
**VIDEO OF PERFORMANCE PROJECT\***

\*Video is on file at the Schreyer Honors College

## Academic Vita of Leah Mueller

Leah Mueller  
128 Rock Hill Road  
Centre Hall, PA 16828  
USA  
lwm5069@psu.edu

- Education:** Bachelor of Music Education in Music Education,  
The Pennsylvania State University, Spring 2012  
Honors in Music  
Thesis title: *Pretty Ophelia: The Destructive Nature of Objectification  
Through Music and Prose*  
Thesis supervisor: Dr. Ted Christopher
- Work Experience:** English Language Tutor 2011
- Volunteer with CIU#10 Development Center for Adults. Majority of tutoring with Adult ESL Learners.
- Willa Taylor Choral Internship 2011
- Independently selected repertoire, auditioned, rehearsed, and conducted the women's chamber ensemble *Discantus*, a registered course at Penn State.
- The Pennsylvania State University 2008-2010  
Wage Assistant for *Fred Waring's America*, Special Collections Library
- Served as the assistant to the coordinator of the Collection.
  - Helped to organize and maintain music and archival recordings library and researched and filled patron requests.
- Teaching Experience:** Student Teaching Experience, Central Dauphin and Palmyra School Districts, PA 2012
- Palmyra Middle School
- Planned and executed lessons for 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade general music.
  - Rehearsed and conducted 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade choir.
  - Taught small group choral lessons.
- Mountain View Elementary School
- Planned and implemented instruction for K-5 general music classes.
  - Rehearsed and conducted 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade chorus.
  - Rehearsed and conducted 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade bell choir.
- Awards:** Phi Kappa Phi Academic Honors Society  
Golden Key Honors Society  
Phi Kappa Lambda Music Honors Society  
Karen Weston Memorial Trustee Scholarship  
Class of 1922 Memorial Scholarship  
Dean's List
- Professional Activities:** President, Penn State Chapter of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA)
- Secretary, Penn State Chapter of Students of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (SNATS)
- Secretary and Soprano Section Leader of Penn State Concert Choir
- Secretary, Penn State Essence of Joy, A curricular choir that performs music of the African and African American Traditions