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Exhuming Ophelia: A Feminist, Costume Design Exploration

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The University of Southern Mississippi

Exhuming Ophelia:
A Feminist, Costume Design Exploration

by

Shelby Marie Gable

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Abstract

Ophelia is a character that has captivated and moved audiences since her first appearance onstage in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* around the year 1600. Unfortunately, she represents a negative and slim representation of femininity that reflects a long-standing trend that has established a specific and limited iconic understanding of her character. As a feminist theatre maker I have undertaken a multi-phase approach to reconstructing Ophelia based on four separate approaches. First, I will examine how it is that Ophelia's representation is harmful in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Second I will show how feminist readers and critics have approached the *Hamlet* Ophelia through a new lens. Third I will analyze how five different adaptations of *Hamlet* approach redefining Ophelia in relation to the original and feminist Ophelias. And finally, I will implement my own creative process as a feminist costume designer in order to create a costume design for each of the separate plays' Ophelia that supports feminist readings as well as the playwrights' intentions.

It is vital to subvert the iconic Ophelia because of the power Shakespeare has over theatre and literature, and how that power has the ability to do real harm. In recreating Ophelia as a feminist I can address and remedy the harm that has been done to her and to women exposed to the limited representations of Ophelia. The case studies culminate with rough sketches, including an appendix of final renderings.

Keywords: Ophelia, Feminism, Costume Design, Shakespeare, Adaptation

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Ophelia in *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* by William Shakespeare is a ubiquitous character. Her tragic story of madness, love, and drowning has been depicted on stages across the world all the way back to her first appearance alongside Hamlet in the early 17th century. Shakespeare himself dominates the Western world; theatre artists are expected to be familiar with *Hamlet*, *Othello* and other members of the canon, and will encounter at least one of these plays in their careers. Unfortunately for modern theatre artists, specifically those designers, actors, and directors who ascribe to modern movements such as feminism, Shakespeare's treatment of female characters like Ophelia needs to be challenged. Within the modern world, Ophelia represents an outdated and harmful representation of femininity that does not reflect modern women. Many playwrights have taken it upon themselves to adapt the original play to address its issues, all approaching Ophelia from alternate routes in order to fix issues in representation. In this study I plan to address Ophelia in relation to Shakespeare and his modern adapters in four separate phases. First, I will address why Ophelia stands out as a problem in the original text of *Hamlet*. Second, I will show how many feminist readers and critics have approached the *Hamlet* Ophelia through new Feminist readings. Third I will analyze how five different adaptations of *Hamlet* approach redefining Ophelia in relation to the original and feminist Ophelias presented in the first two phases. Finally, I will implement my own creative process as a theatre artist and feminist to create a costume design for each of the separate plays' Ophelia. I will apply my skills as a theatre maker in order to explore feminism, costume design, and character specifically relating to and subverting the iconic original Ophelia.

Addressing Baseline Ophelia

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark is a five-act tragedy about a Danish Prince and his quest to prove and then revenge his father's murder at the hands of his uncle, Claudius. After seeing his father as a ghost Hamlet pretends to be mad in order to safely enact an elaborate plan. Among the treachery is Hamlet's young love interest, Ophelia. Her father, Polonius is a royal advisor, while her brother is a young member of the court. It is implied that Ophelia and Hamlet were in love, but in order to further his agenda Hamlet denies her, calling her foul names. Hamlet uses an elaborate play to prove Claudius' guilt, and kills Polonius after discovering him eavesdropping. Hamlet cannot bring himself to kill Claudius in cold blood, however. Amidst the tragedy, Ophelia dies quietly offstage from drowning, leading Hamlet and Laertes, Ophelia's brother, to quarrel at the funeral, leading to a duel. During the duel Claudius poisons the sword and a cup of wine. Gertrude, the Queen of Denmark and Hamlet's mother, drinks from the cup accidentally, Hamlet is stabbed, then stabs Laertes, and then his uncle. The play ends with the entire royal family dead on the stage.

When examined critically, *Hamlet* contains some impressive issues when it comes to the representation of Ophelia. Ophelia plays a very small part in the action and is almost exclusively defined by her relationship to the men in her life: Polonius, Prince Hamlet, and Laertes. She lacks agency or characterization, and her sexuality is controlled or denied. For someone Hamlet claimed to love more than "40,000 brothers," she's never mentioned as the focus in any of his soliloquies and only appears in a quarter of the play's many scenes, and after her funeral she isn't

mentioned. Ophelia is captivating but not integral-- in fact the young girl is less of a character than she is an object. Instead of having her own story or development, she serves two purposes for Shakespeare, first as a "convenient hinge" for Hamlet's scenes and second, to "arouse pity from the audience" (Wagner 94). She is used by the fictional men in her life as well, Hamlet manipulates her to excuse his madness and Polonius to increase his political clout (Wagner 96).

For Sue Ellen Case, noted feminist theatre critic, the main problem with Ophelia, and other Shakespearian women, is that she was not written for an actress, but so that young boys could play her. Any character written for these boy actresses is not a true representation of the female, but instead "woman," a construct based on "anxieties and codes" of the time period. For Case, the portrayal of the fictional "woman" maliciously reflects misogynistic ideals of the Elizabethan period, but for others it reflects the nature of the actors "Woman" was written for. In order to write for the less-experienced boys, or as I will call them, boy actresses, Shakespeare had to create small parts that change in separate blocks of emotions and reactions rather than within monologues (Hill 240). Using Ophelia as his example, Hill shows how she will experience one block of conversation with an older actor who drives the conversation. Ophelia is called to react to each of the men, and only one at a time. Each time Ophelia, or more accurately, the boy actress that plays her, needs only to show "an appropriate single reaction" to the character's words, for instance, Laertes leaves the room when Polonius enters. Even in her madness the male actress doesn't need to act Mad for any sustained period: instead he sings (Hill 240). Because of this Ophelia is not a complex individual with complex emotions that can

reflect and inform real women's lives. While some use the idea of the boy actress to negate the idea that Shakespeare is inherently misogynistic, the similar and inferior social statuses of boys and women, highlighted by Case (22), make it possible that Shakespeare may not have changed anything had real women been the performers when he was writing. Instead when actual women play Ophelia, or other female characters from this period, it is expected that she should be interpreted as a true character exactly as Hamlet and the other characters are. And while not necessarily malicious, when women took over their rightful roles in the late 17th century, "the fiction of the female gender had been securely inscribed on real women" which has led to a harmful trend in representation since that point (Case 27). The problem of this becomes clear when none of Ophelia or Gertrude's lines are distinctly memorable while most people, in theatre or not, can quote "To be or not to be" or any part of one of Hamlet's seven long soliloquies.

Reading a Feminist Ophelia

As a modern audience we are often presented with an Ophelia who does not actually interact or exist as a real human girl. Worse than that, Ophelia's suffering and character are often glossed over because she is a girl. A.C. Bradley is quoted as saying that Ophelia is "an element not of deep tragedy, but of pathetic beauty, which makes analysis of her character seem almost a desecration." (Quoted in Camden, 247) However, if we deny that Ophelia's events are terribly tragic, we lose depth and complexity from her as a character, and further the idea that female pain is inconsequential. Through examining and refashioning how Ophelia can be read

from a modern or even feminist perspective, we can discover ways Shakespeare added complexity to Ophelia's story that can be expanded for a modern design, actress, and audience. This expansion of the character Her madness, sexuality, possible pregnancy, death by drowning, and subsequent funeral, are all areas where critics have read more meaning through new readings of the original text, and that have been focused on in the adaptations I have chosen for the play.

Our introduction to Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is when Laertes, her brother, counsels her prior to leaving for France. Laertes implies that Prince Hamlet is toying with Ophelia, and that Hamlet's love is "the perfume and suppliance of a minute; no more" (675). According to Laertes, she should not only be wary of Hamlet's advances but "Weigh what loss your honour may sustain,/ if with too credent ear you list his songs;/ or lose your heart; or your chaste treasure open/to his unmaster'd importunity./ Fear it, Ophelia, fear it" (675). Polonius follows up, commanding that she ignore Hamlet's "tenders" of affection, chastising her to "think yourself a baby' that you have ta'en these tenders for true pay, which are not sterling" (676). Ophelia is told by both men to distrust Hamlet's advances and to remain chaste, to which she replies "[Hamlet] hath importuned me with love In honourable fashion" implying to her father that she is chaste, and explicitly telling him that she "Shall obey" Polonius's entreaty to remain that way. When recalling to Polonius Hamlet's visit to her rooms, she explains, "as you command, I did repel his letters and denied/his access to me" (681). In these two scenes, it is in this staged she is portrayed as controlled and framed by her male relatives, and that she is a virgin, terrified by Hamlet's mad advances.

The idea of Ophelia's "purity" is superficial but pervasive; the virginal representation is what pervades images and interpretations. The basis of the purity idea is found in Ophelia's conversation with Polonius where she says Hamlet has only ever been a gentleman, however, what teenage girl wouldn't lie about her sexual encounters to her father? New theories based on conversations and implications in the text propose that Ophelia is not only sexually active with Hamlet, but could be pregnant with his heir. It is that reading that I would like to focus on when processing Ophelia for a modern, feminist audience.

In Act I, Scene III, when describing Ophelia and Hamlet's relationship, Polonius interrogates Ophelia on the fact that "[Hamlet] hath very oft of late given private time to you" (676) Later, when speaking to Hamlet alone, he delivers the infamous nunnery line, implying she's a whore and says "why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?" (689). Some believe Ophelia has actually become a "breeder" and is pregnant with Hamlet's child. In the Mousetrap scene, Hamlet comes to Ophelia with multiple sexual innuendos and explains that to soothe his temper it would "cost you a groaning" (692) Without the idea of purity poisoning our understand of Ophelia, all of these hints point to a sexually active Ophelia familiar with "groaning" in her "private times" with Prince Hamlet. Rue, the herb she keeps for herself during her madness scene, is an abortifacient, or a mild herbal poison used to force the body to reject a fetus (Epstein 1). For some this adds up to Ophelia being pregnant and considering abortion, before deciding she should take her life instead. In taking her life, Ophelia is removed from the play allowing the audience to focus not on her loss of purity or possible pregnancy, but instead the men's stories

and pain. Both Ophelia's death, and its preceding madness are also ways that her story can be expanded.

The reason for Ophelia's madness has been discussed at length. In the Shakespeare text, Claudius blames the madness on grief from her father's death, "O, this is the poison of deep grief; it springs/ All from her father's death" (701). For many that is a great explanation and is accepted, though another theory is only her unrequited love for "mad" Hamlet that drives her insane (Camden 248). It isn't one or the other: Polonius died because of Hamlet's madness, and Hamlet's scheming led to her being insulted and rejected by the man who she thought loved her. Added pregnancy would provide even more reason to why even a young girl would descend into madness. What's more important to me as an artist is how Ophelia's real madness directly reflects, grows, and is exacerbated by Hamlet's false madness. Ophelia's true madness directly stands against Hamlet's, allowing theatre makers to expand on the differences between insane self-destruction and the civil crime (*Madness*, Neely 325). It is important and more interesting that Ophelia be the only one truly driven mad in a world of "actors". The context of Ophelia's "disease" is "sexual frustration, social helplessness, and enforced control over women's bodies" (*Madness*, Neely 325). Unlike the men in the play, Ophelia doesn't get to run to Wittenberg or France, or plot revenge; instead she is trapped.

Feminist theatre makers can activate something empowering through deeper representations of Ophelia's madness as "liberation from silence, obedience, and constraint" (*Madness*, Neely 325). Neely expands that "Ophelia scarcely exists outside of the men's use of her. She is not simply driven to this madness, but freed

for it by her father's death, Laertes' and Hamlet's absence, Claudius's indifference. The madness incorporates and allows expression of the earlier pressures" (*Broken*, Neely 103). It is through madness that Ophelia can discuss How Hamlet has treated her through veiled stories, use flowers to comment upon those constraining her, and mourn for her father.

Ophelia's death is ultimately what sticks with audiences and readers of *Hamlet*. It is emotional and shocking. But it is a gendered and separate death from the other characters, happening offstage. In the text, Gertrude extolls the sad tale of Ophelia being dragged into the depths by the weight of her gown; a peaceful and idyllic death by mad accident. However, immediately following there is discussion about her burial on consecrated ground, "if this had not been/a gentlewoman, she would have been buried out/ o' Christian burial" (705). Further, the Priest explains that her death was "doubtful" and that she would be given no requiem (Shakespeare 707). Widely, this dispute leads the audience to question Gertrude's story and drift towards a conclusion of suicide, even when so vehemently rejected by Laertes who goes so far to say she would become an angel (Shakespeare 707). To a contemporary audience Ophelia's suicide can be viewed as a conversation about suicide that was happening around the time Shakespeare was writing. Elizabethan society was trying to figure out how to define suicide, and how to treat it, eventually landing on two different acts: sane-suicide or *felo-de-se*, and mad-suicide or *non compos mentis*. Ophelia's suicide is a mad one, and can be juxtaposed against Hamlet's sane suicide. Neely explains that during this time, a mad-suicide was innocent and could be buried with rites; while a sane-suicide had his/her property

seized and could not have a Christian burial but was in constant debate (*Madness*, Neely 326). Like Gertrude described, Ophelia's death not on purpose, but still remains a suicide, whereas Hamlet choosing to take his life instead of die slowly from poison, was completely intentional and informed drawing distinct lines of choice and control between these two characters lives. However, this distinction is still not so clear, leading "doubtful" to be the phrase used to describe Ophelia's death. Because she isn't necessarily making a conscious choice, a motive for her suicide lies within the same explanation for her madness. Again, Shakespeare used Ophelia to elicit a reaction from the audience, utilizing her death to create emotional response. But her death cannot only exist to justify man-pain; feminist theatre makers instead need to activate it in a way supported by the text. According to Neely, Death "completes Ophelia's separation from her roles as daughter, sweetheart, subject and from the literal and metaphorical poison which kills the others in the play... breaks [Ophelia's] ties with the corrupt roles and values of Elsinore" ("Broken"104). By allowing her death to be a moment of freedom from those roles rather than to further Hamlet or Laertes's plots, the theatre maker frees her from those roles again.

Ophelia's final moment is when her corpse is brought onstage, though often she isn't even seen in this scene. Laertes and Hamlet fight, and Gertrude's lines and flowers draw parallels between a possible wedding bed with Hamlet, and the messy almost-funeral—a funeral that is in fact, forgotten by the play, unfinished before the next scene of the play begins (Rutter 310-311). Rutter proposes staging of this scene that don't hide Ophelia's corpse but instead allow her to exist onstage as dead: the

jarring imagery of the girl's corpse as it is tossed around during the "maimed rites" and then forgotten by her supposed lover and "loyal" brother and left onstage when others clear for the next scene. Throughout the scene her body is present rather than hidden and "Written on the body is the ugliness of her death" (Rutter 314). In not flinching away from the ugliness and the cruel casualty of the scene, the production doesn't let Ophelia fall into the "pathetic beauty" as ascribed by A.C. Bradley, but rather confronts those watching with the desecration that is occurring when Hamlet, Laertes, and the others use her death as a grandstanding opportunity and her tragedy while Hamlet and Claudius were scheming.

There are so many ways that Ophelia can be examined in a feminist or otherwise activated way. Allowing her to have a full story, and activating the subtext is so much more interesting and less harmful than the Ophelia that has overwhelmingly existed on stages across time and place. The Ophelia that furrows her brow before conceding obedience or a lie is not only more interesting to see but also more interesting as a theatre maker to create. It is more valuable, complete, and interesting when the actress comes at Ophelia's lines with a complex world of thoughts and ideas and deceit, the costume designer who gives Ophelia multiple different pregnancy bellies instead of dressing her in virginal white, or the director who stages so that subtext can come through, that is the activated and feminist production in reference to Ophelia, and it changes everything for the world of the play. Does Hamlet know he's going to be a father? Does he know that his actions and the actions of Polonius and Laertes are driving his love insane? Does he even love her? Elaine Aston explains that in using these feminist understandings one can take

the “role of resistant, feminist performer” (though I would expand to “theatre maker”) in a way that “arms you for a feminist attack” on canonical representations (Aston 100). A feminist attack on Ophelia’s representation specifically is important to me as an artist and a person. I am a twenty-one year old young woman, and before that I was a girl who struggled with suicide and sexuality. The representation of Ophelia as beautifully dead and simply pure are a malignant cultural force that damages anyone who is exposed to it, especially those female audience members. The limited idea of femininity and female roles established by how Ophelia is handled can, however be counteracted and addressed, and as an artist I feel that I am obligated to do so through my medium of theatrical costume design. If this isn’t enough, these choices I’ve presented are so much more interesting and can still be backed up by the text. So I’m not just creating a social conscious form of theatre but one that is more interested than the stale recreations of Ophelia in theatre across the Nation.

Too many theatre makers, throughout history and in the present, have allowed Ophelia to remain fixedly superficial—A.C. Bradley’s “pathetic beauty”—and it has infiltrated imagery and collective ideas about Ophelia: establishing an iconic image of her that is entrenched almost as much as the textual representation of her as virginal and surface. I will document the images of Ophelia that stem from this legacy, before moving into a reconstruction of Ophelia in adaptations.

Ophelia In Images

The “iconic original” I mentioned before is what I am primarily contending with in my reconstructions, and I drew upon representations of Ophelia throughout

art and design. Through an image-based form of research simply called Imagining, I will present the iconic Ophelia. Imaging is a theatre process utilized by all theatre-makers, including costume designers, it is a process allows an artist to represent existing research or inspirations images and how they influence the work as a whole rather than as separate entities.

Spurred on by descriptions in *Hamlet* the original as well as societal understandings, a trend has emerged that establishes the idea of Ophelia that persists in imagery, and are represented in Figure 1.

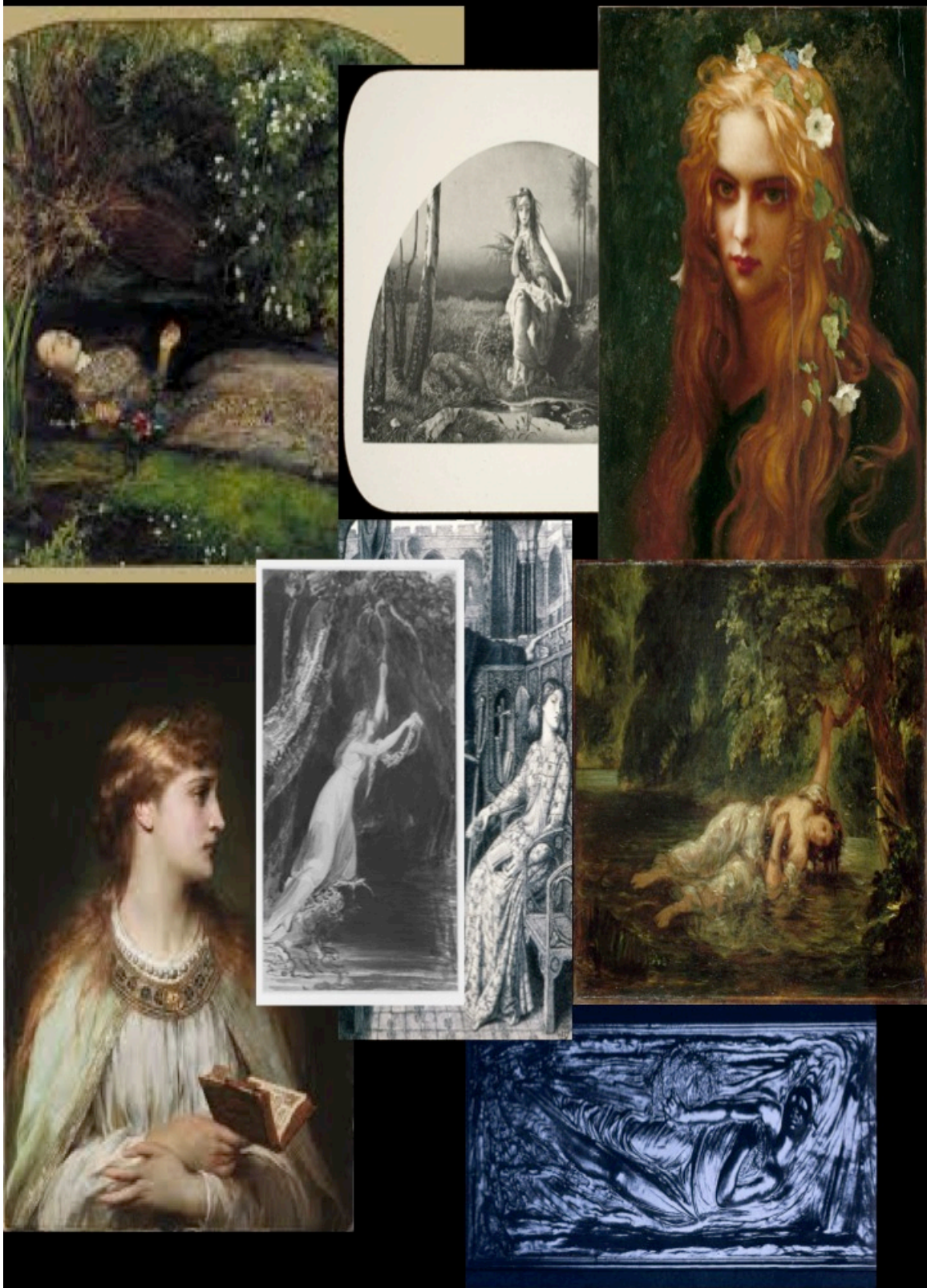


Figure 1. "Baseline Ophelia"

This board contains a representation of images entitled (or containing) *Ophelia* as found in the Artstor online database. For images that were produced over time and by various artists, the images are surprisingly similar: Ophelia in virginal white, hair flowing down, and in most representations, directly associated with flowers and her death by drowning. Ophelia has become more than just a character, but rather “A cult figure that has enkindled the rise of necro-aesthetic as illustrated in numerous paintings of her corpse which depicts her sensualities” (Safaei, Hashim 181). Almost all of these pictures present an Ophelia that has longer hair, which is let down and filled with flowers, as well as a white dress, implying her purity and beauty. Nude breasts and sheer fabrics in some of the images increase sensuality, while others show her as wild and uninterested. Together the image board shows a near consistent idea of Ophelia that is inherently connected to her death or her sexuality.

The majority of these images are from more classical European sources, so I did a Google search for “Modern Ophelia” to get a better idea of how Ophelia has been represented in the digital age. I’m not sure what I expected, but what I found were pages full of photos of girls taking artistic photos of them drowning in a bathtub; artistically reenacting how Ophelia herself died, drowning, but in a specifically modern and intentional way. While the models weren’t necessarily actually committing suicide, the implication is that these women in some part identify with Ophelia’s death as suicide and choose not to be informed by her story as a tragedy, but instead romanticize and recreate it in the *necro-aesthetic* of sensuality, specifically with images of sheer fabric, bare skin, and lingerie.

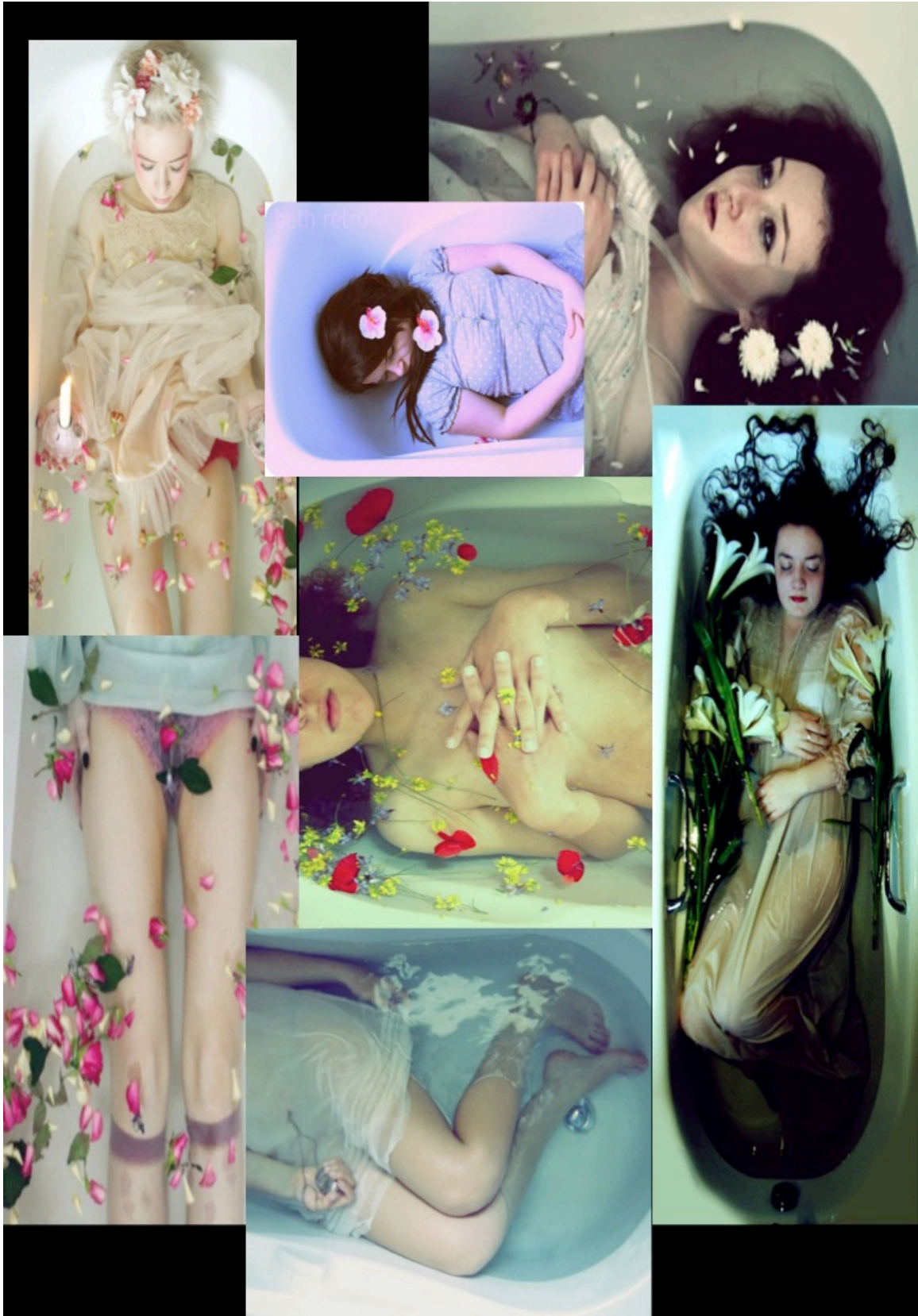


Figure 2. "Modern Ophelia"

That is the legacy of Ophelia as represented in the first image board. Each one of these “Modern Ophelias” are misguided recreations of Millais’s and the other classical artists, and are only exacerbated when theatre artists and English teachers don’t choose to address the tragedy of Ophelia in their handling of her story within *Hamlet* and its adaptations. Somehow Ophelia’s suicide has become something gorgeous and sought after to attain the “Pathetic Beauty.” I even found tutorials on how to be “Drowned Ophelia” for Halloween:

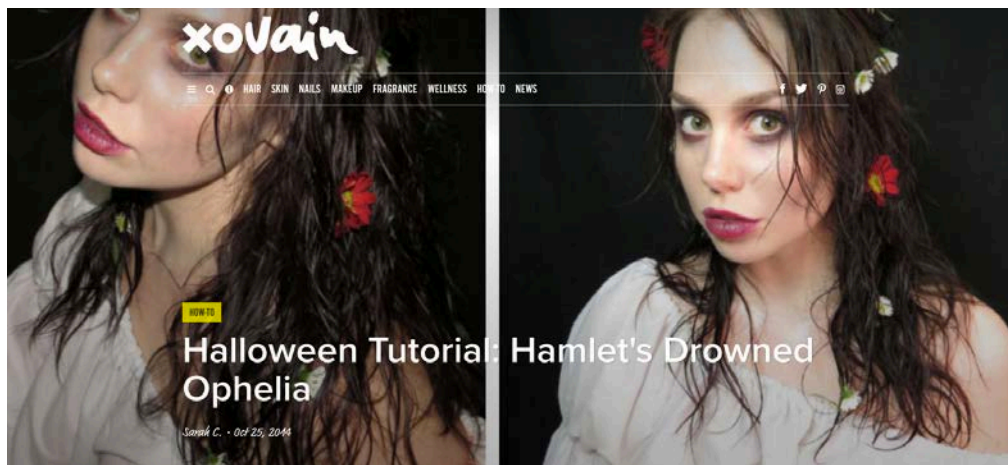


Figure 3. "Drowned Ophelia" Halloween Costume

Ophelia is a flower dress print, or a bedspread, or a flower crown instead of a young girl whose life was a tragedy. As I am proposing modern productions of modern adaptations, it is these “Modern Ophelia” images that I particularly want to relate to and contend with because they are recognizable and problematic.

Methodology

For the next phase I will have five case studies centered on how I as a theatre-maker design for each play in a way that explores feminism, costume design, and connects to and subverts baseline Ophelia and her representation in imagery. I

chose five plays that focused on Ophelia in intriguing ways, and that offer a variety of approaches to the character and the original text. I found plays that acknowledged Ophelia's sexuality and pregnancy, and/or imbue her with agency or criticism. In a subjective process I will utilize theatre imaging and costume design process in order to design Ophelia in each of them.

For the purpose of this study I will be imagining endless, unrealized possibilities not bound by budgets or workforce. In a realized production I would grow and change alongside the director, scenic, light, and sound designers. In a non-realized production I will touch on my opinions of staging in other disciplines and an overall concept for production based on Playwright and plot, before going into a more specific understanding of costume design. First, however, it is important to understand costume research which I will be utilizing to propose costume designs.

Research as a costume designer differs quite a bit from traditional literary analysis, and while individual artists might vary slightly, it is overall a stable process that proceeds in predictable steps. In *The Costume Designer's Handbook* Liz Covey and Rosemary Ingham created an entire textbook based around a process of costume design with each step allowed it's own complete chapter:

1. The Playscript (5-31)
2. The Production (32-48)
3. Costume Research (49-68)
4. Preliminary Sketching and Color Layout (69-87)
5. Final Sketches (88-124)

More steps that specifically apply to production of designs follow, however we are not realizing this production and will stop with final sketches. This has been my textbook throughout my costume design classwork, and was my professors as

well in previous editions. Because of this it greatly informs my process and works as a rough, though not always exactly followed, outline for that process.

In Chapter 1, they subdivide the process of script exploration into two parts: First, the initial read through based on your “scattered facts and nonsense” and artistic impulses; and second, the more “systematic effort to discover new facts to add to those you already possess” (49). Social, cultural, political, art and clothing history are all required to be understood by a designer across any possible period or location, starting with silhouette (Covey Ingham 50).

Chapter 3, “The Production” is based around paperwork used to track costumes and changes, as well as how to work within a realized production with a director and other designers. Because this is a non-realize production I will be deciding period and style as mentioned on Page 36, as well as ignoring budgetary and labor concerns expanded on pages 42-43. Primarily, my process of defining period and style of the entire production and my costume design is to establish a representation of the place and period, combined together to form a “world board,” which represents the world of the play as combined into one collage. Using the World Board a group of “world fabrics” is often then assembled to complement and represent the colors, textures, and patterns of the world created by the design team. Theme research of a more abstract nature can be considered first or in tandem with the world, specifically when working with a group of designers to create a unified production.

After addressing the script and the specific production, it is typically time to begin research or imaging. Costume research can be a hectic process, depending on

the production. Chapter 3 of *The Costume Designer's Handbook* explains innumerable resources for research and imaging ranging from initial Library research, online sources, newspapers and periodicals, and museums and how in detail to use them correctly for period productions. (Covey Ingham 49-68) Three divisions of research needed for a complete research process are “verbal, visual, and actual” (Campbell 286). *Verbal* is the descriptions of costumes found in historical texts and the play script. *Visual* is art and photos that clue you into the color and textures of the play, while *Actual* are real extant garments worn in the period. From these images the designer “decides how to use the facts to best express the intents for the play [they] are designing” (Campbell 287).

Covey, Ingham, and my professors inform my process. Generally I start by entering search terms based on the themes, setting, or time period into Google Images to immerse myself into an idea the period. Usually this is just a brief step, fifteen minutes at most. Then, I proceed into the more legitimate online sources, such as metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online (The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Online searchable collection) and collections.vam.ac.uk (Victoria And Albert Museum's Online collection) who both have large collections of costume (*Actual*) research, as well as paintings, or www.moma.org/explore/collection (Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art's online collection) which has extensive extant costumes photographed from multiple angles as well as cataloged furniture and paintings of the period. Once I have a feel for what I'm missing or need a better of understanding in, I'll move the library, primarily the USM Cook Library. I start with the costume book section and pull out whatever seems relevant, as well as

collections on artists or art movements in the period, and if the play's setting is more recent, I visit the photography sections. Books, and online databases provide the *verbal* aspect as well as *visual*. Once I have these images stored on my computer I assemble them into PowerPoint, creating my image board for the "World" as well as one board for each character and/or look. Sometimes if I'm drawn to a particular artist or series of art I will include a more abstract board to focus on the colors, movements, textures I want my drawings to embody which then goes hand in hand with the fabric board.

Each item of research that goes onto an image board should be appropriate for the play and applicable to the character; avoiding non-period and inappropriate research allows my design to be accurate and applicable. That is not to say that some of my research doesn't look strange—I draw from a variety of places, some less clear than others, but the rendering and rationale accompanying each image board will help clear up any confusion.

Using the image boards and fabric worlds I will create one rendering for each Ophelia, or two if a costume change emphasizes a point. In order to create one final rendering, I will create several rough sketches: First, thumbnails of multiple options for one costume, and then, after a review, I will draw rough sketches that are slightly larger and with more detail. These encompass the levels of "Rough sketches" in Chapter 4 of the *Costume Designer's Handbook*. These sketches allow the designer to work out what the costumes will look like, and to combine fragments of thoughts or overall ideas into more specific notions of the design (Covey Ingham 69).

After that sketch is approved I will move into a final black and white sketch which I will copy and use to create a color sketch based on pulled fabrics from the USM swatch stock this represents “The Final Sketches” as presented in Chapter Five.

Covey/Ingham explain that

“There are few rectangles of paper or board anywhere else in the world that must communicate as much information, aesthetic as well as practical, as a costume sketch... it conveys, among other things, line, shape, proportion and color, history, script, and character analysis.”

-Costume Designer’s Handbook, Covey/Ingham 88

These costume sketches should be “clear, direct, and beautiful” in order to complete their goals and inform the viewer as well as the directors, technicians and other individuals who will have to read them for the content. This section also includes examples of rendering techniques and medium. I utilize mixed media through the use of markers, watercolor, gouache, colored pencils, graphite, and more depending on what is needed for each rendering as they can often elicit different feelings.

These might not be all of the steps in the process, but as an outline of the process they are appropriate. I will present the sketches and research boards together with a rationale of choices, drawing attention to specific research if needed, and an explanation of the feminist theories I have sought to implement with the intent of answering questions about costume design, subversion, and Ophelia within each adaptation in separate ways.

Case Studies

Overwhelmingly, Shakespeare is not often challenged in productions, leading contemporary playwrights to respond to “Cultural anxieties” about Shakespeare with their own adaptations that allow for resistance and criticism (Aston 99) While these plays might not necessarily have intended to address Ophelia and feminism specifically, they do address the contemporary anxieties and problems about her in a way I can amplify as a feminist theatre maker. Five plays, *Fortinbras* by Lee Blessing, *In Juliet's Garden* by Judith Elliot McDonald, *Dead Man's Fingers* by Don Nigro, *Hamlet II* by Sam Bobrick, and *Living Dead in Denmark* by Qui Nguyen are selected for their treatment of Ophelia and *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* in interesting ways. Each case study will present my process for reading each play, as well as a walkthrough of the rough sketching process. An appendix will contain final renderings.

***Fortinbras* by Lee Blessing**

Fortinbras by Lee Blessing is a full-length comedy that begins where *Hamlet* ends. It was commissioned and originally performed by La Jolla Playhouse in 1991, and has since inspired laughs on other stages. Blessing, known primarily for plays on contemporary characters and scenes, takes a step outside his comfort zone in order to make fun of *Hamlet* (Johnson 13). In fact, Blessing is quoted as saying, “No play that’s ever been written, needs more help”(Adams, para. 8). Beyond that, Blessing uses the action of the play in order to comment on the politics of untethered armies and political lies that he saw in America during the Gulf War. *Fortinbras* and Blessing’s other plays have been performed on Broadway and West

End stages, as well as received various industry awards (Johnson 13). A successful run of *Fortinbras* at Signature theatre company ran in 1992 for three weeks leading up to the 1992 election and according to Martha Tuck Rozitt, “Talked back at the American political process almost as much as it talked back to Shakespeare” (Rozitt 13).

In the play, Fortinbras Prince of Norway, fully rewrites the narrative as to how the royal family died in order to serve his own political gain, only to have his entire purpose stunted by the Elsinore’s many ghosts— all of the characters who lost their lives in the original play. Hamlet’s ghost shows up in the middle of the castle in a television, while Ophelia dominates Fortinbras using her newly untethered sexuality.

The play is set “Immediately following the events of *Hamlet*” in “The Castle at Elsinore, Denmark” (Blessing 5). Ophelia, now dead, embraces her sexuality and uses it to control the men in her life. She has the power to mute Hamlet with a remote control, and directly addresses her treatment while alive, saying things like, “Yeh yeh, Ophelia spoke. Who cares, no one did when I was alive, right pop?” (Blessing 24). In the play she has full control over every conversation with Fortinbras, and later with Hamlet, which is far different from the power structures in the original play. She can literally mute the television Hamlet is trapped in (43), and forces him to admit that she is right about his behavior and why he failed. She also convinces Gertrude, Claudius and Hamlet to all admit that they were so much worse than her in the original (50, 61). In the end, she struggles to allow herself to be forgotten, while the others readily consent to the destruction of their memories,

saying: “Will you stop talking like that!!? Maybe those of you who had lives will disappear, since you don’t need afterlives. But... people like me---“ (*She can’t finish*) (66). In the end she accepts what happened, and that she will never have the second chance. As far as personal and costume descriptions, Ophelia is described by Claudius that she “is a damned soul” and called a “Succubae” by Gertrude. (Blessing 26, 28) Physically, she self-describes that “[Death has] been hell on my looks” (25) and when Fortinbras is told he’ll become obsessed with her, incredulously asks “have you really looked at Ophelia lately?” (28).

These descriptions and her function in the play led me to want to explore the feminist idea that women can reclaim their sexuality from societies that aim to control female sexuality. Radical feminists understand that the “oppression of women was a sexual, erotic oppression” because of this women must reclaim their bodies from patriarchal colonization (Case 66). Bra-burnings, critiquing the idea that women’s bodies are “beautiful objects,” and expanding sexual rights are all places where radical feminists have worked to reclaim women’s bodies and sexualities for themselves (Case 67). Many of these protests were spectacles where women decorated their bodies with lights and clothing attached at the breasts and crotch while denigrating symbols of “Domestic oppression” like aprons, or appeared naked. (Aston 5,9) In the play Ophelia says that ghosts “know what they did wrong in life. It’s all they can think about. That, and a second chance—which never comes” (25) The idea that Ophelia has been thinking over her sexual objectification in the last life, and has decided in the afterlife to reclaim her sexuality and sex itself, is extremely interesting. She describes her newfound sexuality and control: “It’s

terrific. Did you know most women don't reach their sexual peak until after they're dead?" (26). Utilizing her sexuality as power is interesting as well, considering the descriptions that paint her as unattractive or at the least not-well looking. Bodily she does not have the beauty that can be objectified or commoditized by the men in the play, but still has power over them, leading Gertrude to call her "Succubae:" demon in appearance and yet sexually powerful over men.

Working with the anachronistic style of plopping a television set in medieval Elsinore, along the "Baseline Ophelia" previously defined, I established a world board (Figure 4). While I initially was inspired towards a nonspecific medieval setting, after analyzing variety for this study overall, and the play itself as "Fixing" Shakespeare, I decided to focus in an Elizabethan period for the *Hamlet* production that precedes *Fortinbras*, and thus the production itself. In this board I chose images of major leaders at the period, specifically Queen Elizabeth and Shakespeare himself, as well as period fashion and location sketches. Directly juxtaposed against these period images are the anachronistic TV remote and the unsettling images of a television set filled with an eye, as Hamlet is often described in the play.

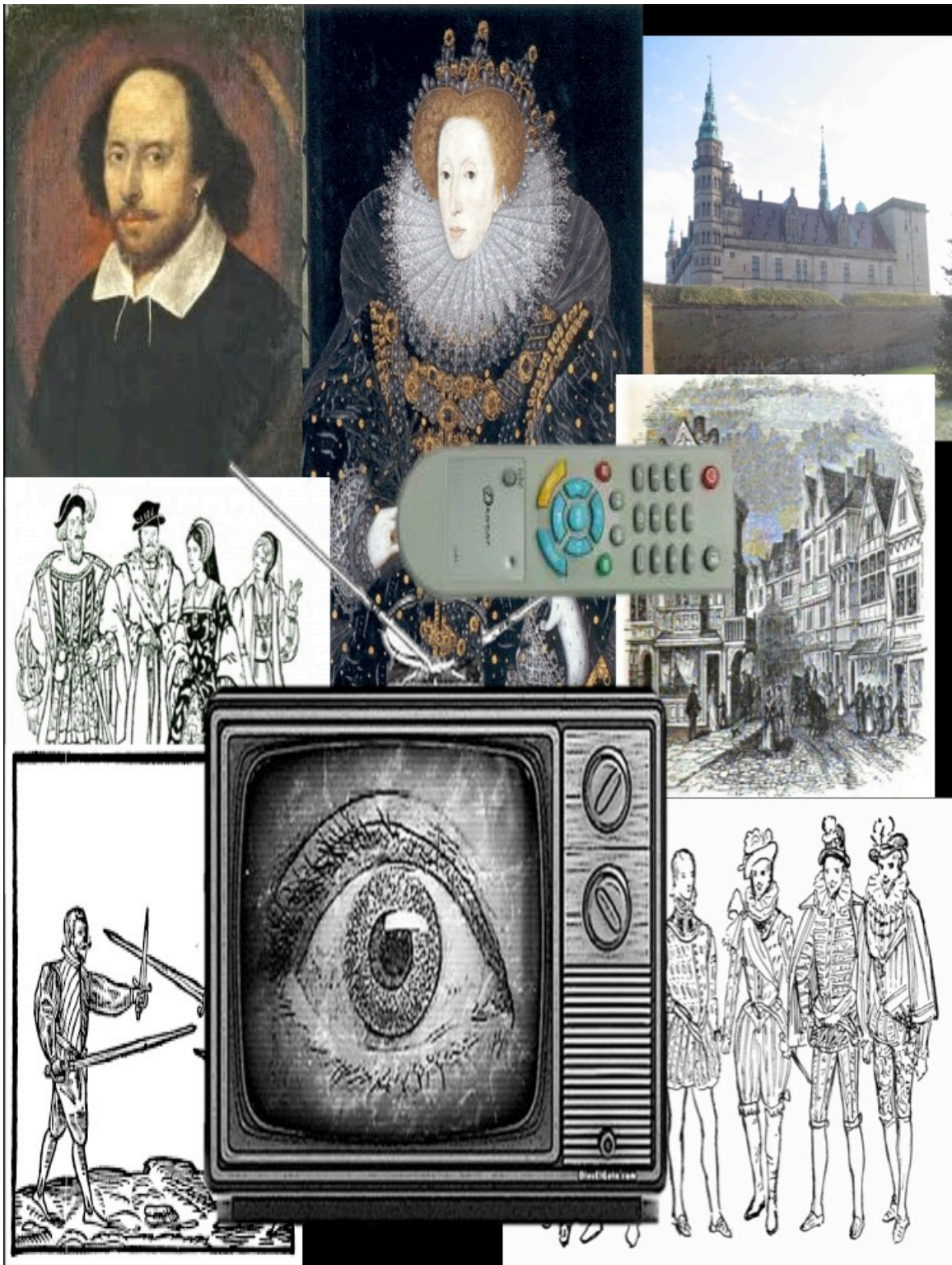


Figure 4. "Fortinbras" World Image Board

In my proposed production of the play, each ghost character would be a fusion of traditional Elizabethan clothing with more modern styling that would be recognizable to a present day audience, in contrast, living characters would be firmly within the period of *Hamlet*. For instance, Hamlet's black antic clothing could translate into a 2000s emo kid, who would stand onstage next to a Fortinbras in period Elizabethan tights. Because of the living characters' reactions to the ghosts, in that they're often treated as almost realistic, it doesn't make sense to overwhelmingly portray them as otherworldly. A cohesive and limited color scheme amongst the ghosts could set them firmly apart for the audience, perhaps every ghost being in shades of one color while the rest of the world is fully realized.



Figure 5. "Fortinbras" Ophelia Character Board

For the character specific board, I drew from images of lingerie, traditional medieval clothing, demons, and ghosts in order to render a costume design for the *Fortinbras* Ophelia. I found images of female protesters aiming to reclaim sexuality through little clothing or lingerie, as well as period images in order to see how they related.

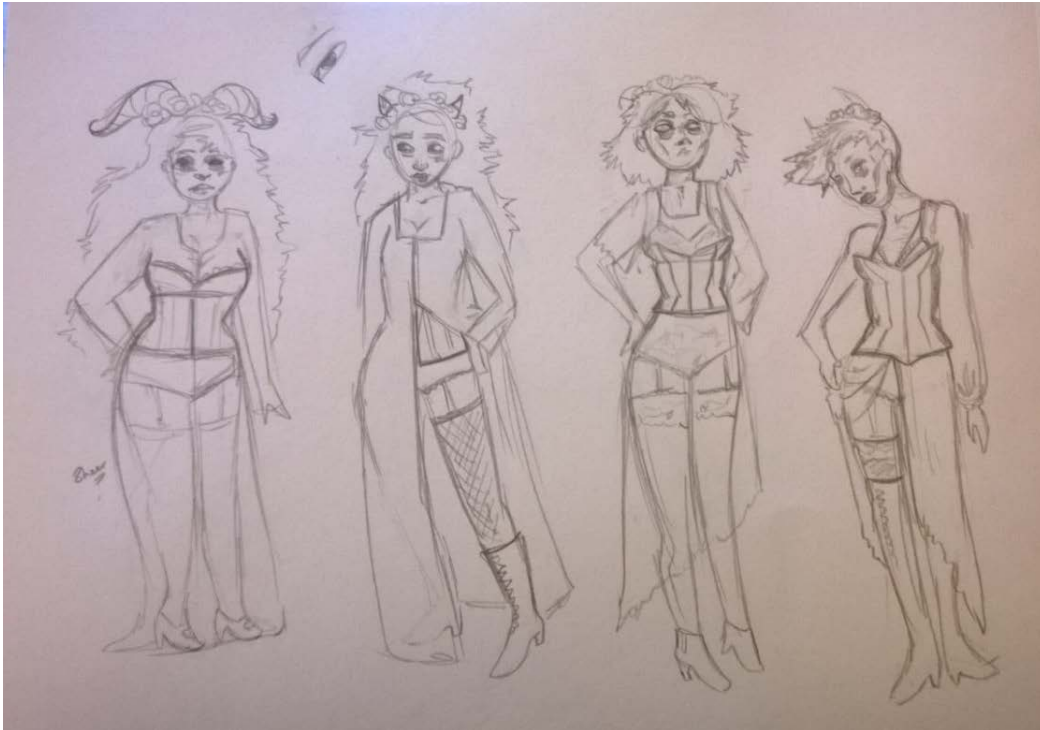


Figure 6. "Fortinbras" Ophelia Thumbnails

Then I moved into rough sketches, this time drawing four quick images based around the image boards. I started with the idea of a sheer dress that would look like a period dress but reveal scanty undergarments underneath, and played around with torn away/ sheer outfits that could transform in the play. I played with horns, hair lengths, and I really liked the discovery of Ophelia's hair, usually so long in imagery, being cut. Another discovery was that of a very bony Ophelia to reflect the idea that she cannot necessarily readily be sexualized. After this step I think I want

to play around with more emphasis of sexual areas, and possible no bra in relation to the radical feminist protests, it also makes me want to revisit a more period inspired look, as the sketches are rather non-specific. At this point I was still not sure whether to include horns, and want to revisit rough/thumb nail sketches completely.



Figure 7. "Fortinbras" Ophelia Rough Sketches

I am much happier with these images. Being more specific adds a lot of interesting elements and shapes. For the final sketch I would like to have more playful elements in pattern and color, because it feels too heavy or dark for the comedic tone. Though with other costumes and the full production that idea could be altered.

***In Juliet's Garden* by Judith Elliot McDonald**

In Juliet's Garden is a one-act comedy by playwright Judith Elliot McDonald. McDonald is an American theatre maker who has recently moved into playwriting, specifically on the idea of feminism and Shakespeare (“Judith Elliot McDonald” *Samuelfrench.com*). Originally performed by the Waterfront Players Repertory Company in 2000, the play has been through many iterations until in 2006 it was finalized and again produced by the Waterfront players (McDonald). In the play, Juliet Capulet invites four of Shakespeare’s famous female characters, including Ophelia, to her garden to discuss their grievances with Shakespeare’s work and how they are written. The six women challenge Shakespeare’s canon as it affects them, and propose fixes to their respective storylines. Shakespeare who was invited, instead sends his envoy a made-up character called Jacqueline De Boys.

Able to speak freely about her circumstances, Ophelia addresses her recurring death: “it’s a whole different story when you have to die every show” and explains how she would have preferred to have a different end (14). Together with Desdemona and Juliet she sings:

“To say that we’re puppets of men’s ideas
an argument can be found
but how can we argue for what we believe when we’re
stabbed/smothered/and drowned” (15)

She further wishes that “Hamlet could just for a moment reveal his true feelings to me—instead of driving me absolutely *insane* with confusion” (16) De Buys immediately responds that it is all of the sadness that makes it a tragedy (16), and the play ends with Nurse (an amalgamation of Juliet’s Nurse, the Widow from *Taming of the Shrew*, and Mistress Quickly) explaining to the women that regardless

of their personal struggles as characters they have to recognize the affects they have had on a modern audience. Ophelia expresses that “Shakespeare’s women—all of us-- break stereotypes of women’s influence in a man’s world” and Desdemona expands “Every new generation needs to be reminded how far women have come since the self-destructive patriarchy of the sixteenth century” (24). The play closes on the women eating cucumber soup feeling “a little less exhausted” about their circumstances (25).

The play specifically addresses how women’s voices have been robbed by Shakespeare’s plays, with one Shakespearian actress reacting to the frustration of playing Kate in *Taming of the Shrew*, “I’m dying to put up a fight but look at the text—it aint there!” (Aston 95). Ophelia and the other murdered heroines cannot “argue for what they believe.” In this play the women are allowed to talk about what they want. Another important part of the play is that while Ophelia is described as a “Basket-case” she is also portrayed as *young*. She twirls around in her clothes and sings, as well as pouts. Youth is rarely a portrayal that is represented of Ophelia; instead, she is most often aged up from the likely mid-teens to a fully sexually and mentally adult woman without any of the colorings of adolescence. However, in *In Juliet’s Garden* the other character treat her as younger, calling her “dear” and “poor sweet girl” (11). The oversexualization of young girls is a large problem, and the idea that Ophelia in this play is allowed to be a teenager; even a “Crazy” one is very interesting to me. Often by sexualizing and analyzing Ophelia man people forget that Ophelia is a teenager during the events of *Hamlet*. She isn’t allowed her girlhood or

humanity, so to see her act like a young girl, who twirls and dresses in outrageous anti-authoritarian costumes, is refreshing.

The play is set in “A garden of the Capulet Estate, Verona, Anytime” (McDonald). The garden setting reminded me of the earlier women’s rights activists who staged Victorian garden and salon plays to boost female voices and art outside of the patriarchal mainstream. These types of personal theatre, like that of Natalie Barney, provided theatre in a “private, domestic” and allowed women to express art and opinions outside of social patriarchal and heteronormative society (Case 53). Because of this my proposed production would be set in a Victorian garden, with Juliet and Nurse typifying the Victorian salon look as its hosts. The world board, (Figure 8) includes Victorian Era paintings and pictures, as well as gardens built during the period. The play is also written with a looming element of the theatricality, and directly refers to the individuals as both people and characters on the stage, so I included a curtain similar to a theatre’s front drape, in order to address that.



Figure 8. "In Juliet's Garden" World Image Board

Ophelia is listed in the cast list as “Ophelia- (*Hamlet*) a basket case” (McDonald). The women talk about their production history and impact as characters, and directly refer to their theatrical costumes across stages. Portia dresses in a pantsuit, while Jacqueline De Boys is dressed in modern Hollywood glamour. Ophelia herself wears costume items from different shows at different theater locations:

“I told you—I’m not playing this weekend, so I dressed myself. Tyrone Guthrie (*Notes blouse*), Utah Shakespeare Festival (*notes skirt*) Wilmington Drama League (*Hat*) and... (*Raises skirt to show big black heavy work boots*) ... Reed College”

-Ophelia, *In Juliet’s Garden* Pg. 10

In the back notes, here the author describes costume:

“A total mess. Bizarre mix of Shakespearean and contemporary clothing with hat and bodice, badly mismatched. Must have big, heavy black combat boots”

-McDonald, *In Juliet’s Garden*. Pg. 27

For the Ophelia character board (Figure 9) I examined the many ways Ophelia has been portrayed across *Hamlet’s* production history. I located images from *Hamlet* productions for the specific locations mentioned in the text, as well as other costume designs in both production photos and sketches. It is particularly interesting the question of what would Ophelia herself choose among all of the costumes she has been represented in over decades. She chooses for instance, large black combat boots and rejects a “nice yellow number?” (10). I also chose to explore images of a younger looking Ophelia, as opposed to those found in more adult-looking Ophelia productions.



Figure 9. "In Juliet's Garden" Ophelia Character Board



Figure 10. "In Juliet's Garden" Ophelia Thumbnail

With this first thumbnail sketch (Figure 10), I combined a modern pleated skirt as picture in the research, combat boots, and a contrasting period bodice and hat.

After this I chose to explore different hats and slightly different shapes in the rough sketch.



Figure 11. "In Juliet's Garden" Ophelia Rough Sketch

The rough sketch (Figure 11), shows more hat options. In a final rendering, I will add modern teenage accessories, like bracelets or necklaces which could help allow the bottom half, which is more modern, to communicate more appropriately with the top half. The addition of color will also help set the items apart as rebellious, young, and mismatched to support my statements.

***Dead Men's Fingers* by Don Nigro**

Dead Men's Fingers is a monologue written by Don Nigro as part of "The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines" which is a set of five monologues meant to be performed in sequence with Ophelia's occurring at the beginning (McGhee 123). Nigro, writer of 26 plays and winner of multiple awards, says that he creates worlds

in his plays in order to discover elements of the “So-called” real world, and that while he wants to accomplish something, feels that he “Ought to subvert both other people’s and my own preconceptions of what is right and wrong” (Constantinidas 156, 150). He certainly subverts Shakespeare within *Dead Men’s Fingers*, where Ophelia talks at length about her life primarily through her connection to the stories of the fool, Yorick. She explains her sexuality, pregnancy, and death with sad reality, and poetry.

Ophelia talks of a story Yorick told before his death, about a man who doesn’t understand the language of the land he is in, and who tries to mime a chicken’s behavior in order to acquire eggs to eat. The locals, misunderstanding him, throw him into an asylum (67-68). She explains that she never felt that she was speaking the same language as the other characters of the play, and that their passion was foreign to her own thought, like the foreign man’s story. Thought in fact, was “much more deep and efficient than that poor spoiled delinquent Hamlet” (70). Her “downfall” was that thought, but also her “Desire to be thought of as good, to be kind to those around me” (70). She also discusses Laertes’s physical sexual attraction to her, as well as her sexual encounters with Hamlet after he returned to Elsinore after his father’s death. Sex in her description was innate and natural to her, while Hamlet was “Desperate” (74) she directly points at the “Nunnery scene” being directly related to that sexual act and Hamlet’s guilt over it, and his anger of the fact she was not guilty. It was that anger, which led her to never reveal she was pregnant with his child, and has “nothing left but madness” after that (74). The monologue closes with her explaining how in drowning, she saw everything: her part in the “myriad of

interconnected playlets in the vast dramatic epic cycle which is God's mega-drama" and how her death is "remembrance, a kind of quiet theatre" that she and her dead child live within. Ultimately she pitied "foolish" Hamlet's understanding of the world and in doing so, she levels a critique at the world Hamlet represents (75).

Dead Men's Fingers activates the play's subtext, in possibly feminist ways to few Ophelia into text. Pregnant and sexually active, as well as freed by madness and her suicide she represents the Ophelia that I proposed. The idea that Ophelia is the intelligent and logical one is so extremely empowering and rarely seen, as well. Alongside the interesting contents, my interest with the play was sparked by the only stage direction which indicates that Ophelia appears "*Looking like the Millais painting*" (Nigro 67). In a play that so exemplifies these more interesting and agency-inducing readings of *Hamlet's* subtext, it surprised me that the author would choose to have Ophelia placed in that context. John Everett Millais's famous *Ophelia* (which was mentioned briefly above) is tied to the character more than any other image, and typifies the *sensual necro-aesthetic*.



Figure 12. "Ophelia" John Everett Millias 1852

In the image above, Ophelia is peaceful, beautiful, and almost praying. Again we see Ophelia's death as "Pathetically beautiful" as opposed to tragic or graphic. It is this image that frequently informs understanding of Ophelia, and I find it interesting that the author has selected it to describe his vision of her. No further costume notes or mentions are given in the play.

For a production of *Dead Men's Fingers*, I'm interested in subverting the Millais and relating to a trend moving against how women are portrayed so beautifully in death. In a staged production on a bare stage, the costumed Ophelia would directly contend with the Millais Ophelia: perhaps destroying a print of it onstage or having it projected in opposition to the truth of dead Ophelia. From a feminist perspective, the trend of women being shown in media as beautiful death is malignant. Especially considering women are most lovingly painted or filmed dead, it tells audiences that dead is something they should aspire to be in order to attain beauty. Because of this, the dead Ophelia proposed by Rutter served as an

inspiration point; as they have claimed that Ophelia should appear in a way that “Written on the body is the ugliness of her death. The skin is mottled blue, like a fresh bruise, and has the look of wax. The jaw has been pulled shut with a linen band. The eyes cannot be closed. The shroud does not conceal the abdominal distension that comes with death by drowning. Ophelia looks pregnant” (Rutter 314).

The image board for the *Dead Men’s Fingers* (Figure 13) directly juxtaposes the Millias painting and one of the “modern Ophelias” (in Figure 2) with the reality of bloated drowning deaths. Once these two separate ideas are put into one board the differences are striking and disturbing. One is the beautiful Ophelia that pervades the imagery and the other is the harsh truth of what she would have looked like after her death.



Figure 13. "Dead Men's Fingers" Ophelia Character Board

From the board I did a thumbnail sketch (Figure 14) that attempted to put these ideas together. Her bloated body and face as well as disinterested pose were

an attempt, but it was poorly realized so I moved quickly into a set of rough sketches.



Figure 14. "Dead Men's Fingers" Ophelia Thumbnail



Figure 15. "Dead Men's Fingers" Ophelia Rough Sketches

In the rough sketches (Figure 15) I moved to exploring a more "Millais-style" nightdress or a period houppelande or in the smaller image, a medieval smock. I like the idea of actually using the Millais-like dress to fight against the makeup and other elements of death done with makeup or prosthetics; the white would especially show stains and other nastiness of death. I originally had an idea of something absolutely gruesome, but have since pulled back so that it will not overshadow the words of her monologue. The pallor of death makes its point, and fights romanticizing, but the point of the play is not shock value. As I'm not aiming for

anything too gruesome in the final rendering, the color and detail will enforce my ideas.

***Hamlet II* by Sam Bobrick**

Hamlet II (Better than the Original) is a two-act comedy by Sam Bobrick that follows the same structure and plot of *Hamlet* but with a deconstructed and modernized language and bawdy jokes. In the action, Ophelia runs off to Athens with a trombone player, and they have a mock funeral with an empty coffin instead, and the final scene of deaths is farcical and full of accidents rather than intent, with Hamlet surviving to live ever after. While the setting is described as “Royal Castle in Elsinore. The Year is 1217” (Bobrick 5). The play is extremely anachronistic with mentions of modern pop culture and fashion, including inhalers, leather jackets, and the “Golden arches” of McDonalds.

Ophelia is represented as a stoner who is visibly becoming more and more pregnant throughout the play. In her first appearance she is “*rolling a joint*” and explains to Laertes that at thirteen, she’s not a kid anymore. When Polonius and Laertes tell her to be chaste, she asks “when are you going to learn sex doesn’t have to be dirty?” and claims it is a “normal” thing (13). Then, throughout the play, she appears with a larger belly each time she comes onto stage. Her entrance into the madness scene emphasizes the point: “*OPHELIA enters singing and passing out stems from a marijuana plant. Her clothes are dirty, her hair is frizzed, and she’s in her fifth month*” (57). Her death does not happen, though her funeral does, and according to Gertrude “Ophelia’s in Athens. In her depression she ran off with a

Greek musician" (66). Luckily, she comes back from Athens "Very pregnant" to stop Hamlet from killing himself and settle down to have their child (76-78).

This is another play where the possible subtext in "baseline Ophelia" becomes text in the adaptation. Ophelia is sexually free and active, resulting in a child with Hamlet that he goes on to raise. I really enjoyed the idea of Ophelia as a weed-smoking free-love character, and began to form an idea of Ophelia as related to the free-love, flower-power hippies of the late 60s and 70s. Hippies turned the passivity, sexuality, love, and even flowers that Ophelia has been connected to since she was first written and used it as a political protest that made waves in society. The costume note at the end of the play, as well as the play itself, leads to envision a world that is first "Indigenous" to the period" while elements of more modern costumes such as the fact Bobrick writes that "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern should both be dressed as Groucho Marx" while the principals wear more "authentic costumes" describe a kind of mixture. I image the world and scenic design of Elsinore in 1217 to sit solidly within the medieval period, leading to my world board (Figure 16). For this board I found extant period clothing items, as well as medieval paintings, sculptures, and extant medieval castles. For this production I envision the surroundings being more realistic and period specific while costumes and props reference but deviate from that period, as the play itself does.

Ophelia's character board (Figure 17) is based on "authentic costume" research of the period 13th century directly beside images of hippies. Images of the 70s costumes were chosen that reflected Ophelia's iconic representation and early medieval styles. For instance, the images of women with flowers in their hair from

the 60s and 70s are extremely relatable to many of the images in Figure 1 where Ophelia is represented surrounded by flowers.



Figure 16. "Hamlet II" World Board





Figure 18. "Hamlet II" Ophelia Thumbnail

This thumbnail (Figure 18) was the beginning approach at combining hippies and 13th century, which was then expanded In the group of rough sketches (Figure 19) I played with the bliaut dress style more, as well as different belts and hairstyles related to the flower power movement.



Figure 19. "Hamlet II" Ophelia Rough Sketches

Into the final sketch, I have questions about how to give this look more intentional elements, specifically more recognizable 70s belts or patterns.

***Living Dead in Denmark* by Qui Nguyen**

Living Dead in Denmark is a full-length play by Qui Nguyen that tells the story of Ophelia being raised from the dead to fight zombies alongside Juliet and Lady Macbeth, two other prominent female characters by Shakespeare. Nguyen is a Brooklyn-based playwright and serves Co-Artistic director of nerd-theatre troupe Vampire Cowboys, as well as the only sponsored playwright for New York Comic Con (Bio, n.d, para. 7). *Living Dead in Denmark* was first performed in 2006 and had the pulpy, comic-book style one would expect from so-called "Geek" theatre. Reviewer David Cote at Timeout New York to states that the "Gamely trashy treat is a perfect storm of theatre- and horror-geek obsessions" (Cote 2006).

Living Dead in Denmark relates directly to a contemporary trend in literature that creates adaptations of literary champions fusing such classics with supernatural elements as an effort to subvert, comment, or relate to a younger audience. One of the most notable of these adaptations is *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, which finds Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennett in a war against the undead. Within Nguyen's nerd expertise, an influential example is the *Marvel Zombies* series where Marvel comic book's classic and most recognizable characters exist in an alternate universe where each is infected with a zombie virus. Nguyen has applied this trope to adapting to Shakespeare's canon of characters, including Ophelia, within his play.

In the play, Ophelia, Juliet, and Lady Macbeth fight *Macbeth's* witches, *The Tempest's* Calaban, and the zombie Hamlet who has teamed up with *Midsummer's* Titania. In the end, Ophelia confronts Fortinbras the real villain, and brings the war between humans and Zombies to an end in a "kung-fu extravaganza." If that wasn't enough, Juliet and Lady Macbeth fall in love, and Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, and Horatio all make attempts at eating Ophelia

Ophelia first appears after being raised from the dead and is immediately descended on by men in scrubs and surgical masks. Using "enormous" strength she fights them off (3). After running, Juliet and Lady Macbeth finally convince Ophelia to join Fortinbras's cause of fighting off the zombies (7). He explains that his scientists have modified all three of them to be better fighters in order to defend humanity (10).

Overall, the play is thoroughly in the modern idea of pop feminism. This type of feminism uses pop culture to deliver feminist ideas to the masses, but often dilutes or sanitizes them to allow a patriarchal society to accept them. Primarily this form of feminism focuses on the more easily accessible aspects of feminism such as female supremacy, or the more accessible “Girl Power,” and a “Preoccupation” with female sexual matters (Porter 24). On one hand, this type of feminism brings new people to accept some feminist ideas, but often leaves off more urgent matters in female representation in order to present a strong female character. These characters, like Buffy the Vampire Slayer, fill traditional male action hero roles but instead of proposing multiple different types of femininity, the singular “strong” heroine is praised and represented. Often because of the need for acceptance in pop culture, these pop feminist characters become sexualized for a male gaze. The Ophelia in *Living Dead* fits into this, as she is literally stronger than all the male characters, and can defeat them physically. The play also amplifies radical feminist notion of focusing on lesbian individuals. Juliet and Lady Macbeth fall in love in the action, often making out. Physically destroying patriarchy, another aspect of radical feminist ideology, in order to raise up femininity is also represented. When Ophelia finally ends the conflict of the play, it is a strong symbolic blow to the patriarchal society that Fortinbras represents. This becomes clear when the weapon that Ophelia uses to kill Fortinbras is Lady Macbeth’s battle axe (70). The double headed axe, or labrys, has represented radical feminism, matriarchy, and goddess worship (Case 73). Using it to vivisect Fortinbras’ head from his body and end his control over her, Hamlet, and the other women is a powerful symbolic event. From there

Ophelia takes charge and ends the war. Important as well is that, though she kisses Hamlet she tells him “Another time, baby. Another day” and leaves him on stage, remaining her own entity rather than a character described by her relationship to other men (70).

The setting is in “Time: Post-apocalyptic Present Day/ Setting: Europe.” (Nguyen) The world board (Figure 20) focuses on images of zombie apocalypses and medieval castles, a fusion of which I see as the setting for the proposed production. Considering parts in the play where it’s difficult for Ophelia to distinguish between zombies, herself, and humans; zombies that are not overtly gruesome (like those of *The Walking Dead*) but rather the almost human (more fresh zombies of *Warm Bodies*) are appropriate. The image board also includes weapons, both a traditional labrys and an improvised post-society machete.



Figure 20. "Living Dead in Denmark" World Board

Physically Ophelia is only directly described at her first appearance: “*Dark-haired and pale young girl... she wears a hospital gown*” (1). She is also clear to Fortinbras that she is allowed to talk like a teenage girl because she is one (11). Like *In Juliet’s Garden* it is important that Ophelia be allowed to be her age, and act it. Too often people judge Ophelia’s life and decisions based on those of an adult woman, which obscures her real character.

I have decided that Ophelia needs at least two clear looks, the first, ascribed hospital gown, looking very much like her “iconic” appearance. It is important that it is this Ophelia, connected to her “iconic” imagery (Figure 1) who can throw men and fight zombies. However, a second costume, when she joins Fortinbras army against the zombies, would be quite different: armored, military (Specifically Danish military as nod to Elsinore), and imbued with the comic-book fashion of “post-apocalypse” and “Geek.” Portraying pop-feminist strength and blatant clothing items with power, such as combat boots and armor as well.

For the Ophelia character board (Figure 21) I have presented images of Danish military women in uniform, drawings of women portraying the hodgepodge of military and improvised clothing that is associated with post-apocalypse style, and a woman in a traditional hospital gown and how a hospital gown was worn to accentuate shape.



In my first round of rough sketches (Figure 22) I drew a couple of options, one for the first hospital gown look, and two for the second look.



Figure 22. "Living Dead in Denmark" Ophelia Rough Sketches

"Post-apocalypse" is a style often associated with a mix of military, improvised, and tattered clothing that stems from combat conditions and lack of steady infrastructure. Countless artists, video games, comic books, movies and televisions shows have approached after-civilization fabric, often including tactical clothes and dirt stains but also interesting elements or colors that provide personality. Several of these trends are represented in both Figure 21 and 22. In these rough sketches I

included these elements as well as medieval armor, veils, and open sided shirts that reference Ophelia's roots.

After this round of roughs, I plan to more physical strength to the character's rendering to push my point, specifically broader shoulders to communicate her strength immediately and contrast with the waif-like representation of Ophelia. Colors added would consider the geek and pop-culture roots of the play, possibly graphic and bright colors, while still communicating with the muted tones of the end of the world.

Conclusion

The Ophelia from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* represents a negative model for femininity that playwrights and other artists are beginning to challenge. In analyzing, and then recreating Ophelia I take part in that legacy of disassociation where Ophelia's long-engrained and limited representation are challenged, and to a greater extent fight back against Shakespeare's representation of women. As a feminist theatre maker, the work of challenging representations of women and creating feminist artwork is probably the work of my entire creative lifetime in some way or another. Using theatre and costumes I can fight back against limiting and damaging representations of femininity in all forms, Shakespeare included. Together, my renderings and research paint a picture of who Ophelia could be: Diverse, interesting, empowering, rather than the tiny box she has been placed in. I hope that going forward with my career and with projects like this I can free more than just Ophelia from this box, and create art that empowers and expands the roles of women in this world.

Appendix: Final Renderings

The final step in the costume design process is a full colored rendering that is used to communicate the final design to the shops, patrons, and actors. Often accompanied by research and fabric swatches, these drawings encompass all of the work and thought of the costume designer up to this point, and are often the most important piece in the process because of how much it conveys beyond just costume, but also style and character. Four of the five plays have only one rendering but I have done two full renderings for *Living Dead in Denmark*.

In these drawings I have applied color, assimilated research and character, and presented the final rendering for one possible costume design of the Ophelia in each play.

"Fortinbras"
Ophelia



Illustration A "Fortinbras" Ophelia Rendering

"In Juliet's Garden"
Ophelia



Illustration B "In Juliet's Garden" Ophelia Rendering

"Dead Men's Fingers"
Ophelia



Illustration C "Dead Men's Fingers" Ophelia Rendering

“Hamlet II”
Ophelia



Illustration D "Hamlet II" Ophelia Rendering

"Living Dead In Denmark"
Ophelia Look #1



Illustration E "Living Dead in Denmark" Ophelia First Look Rendering

"Living Dead In Denmark"
Ophelia Look # 2



Illustration F "Living Dead in Denmark" Ophelia Second Look Rendering

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