

Nicoleta Cinpoes

## Handling Ophelia: a Story in Four Unscripted Scenes

Referring to several European productions of *Hamlet* between 2001 and 2014, Nicoleta Cinpoes in this article examines the stage struggle to ‘recuperate’ an Ophelia that both discursive criticism and visual objectification bury prematurely, albeit by different means and for different aims, when they claim, in Laertes’s words: ‘The woman will be out.’ She takes Laertes’s words to mean both taking the woman out and putting the woman on view, and offers a preliminary survey of the customary textual cuts and their effect on Ophelia’s part, exploring ‘the four unscripted scenes’ of three directors – Vlad Mugur, Radu Alexandru Nica, and Jan Klata – and their impact on Ophelia’s role as found in Shakespeare’s play. Nicoleta Cinpoes is Principal Lecturer at the University of Worcester and author of *Shakespeare’s Hamlet in Romania 1778–2008* (Mellen, 2010) as well as editor of, and contributor to, *Doing Kyd* (Manchester University Press, 2016). She has published articles in *Shakespeare Bulletin*, *SEDERI*, *Testi e linguaggi*, *Arrêts sur scène*, *Theatrical Blends*, and *Studia Dramatica*.

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LIKE MOST of my projects, this began in the theatre as a spectator of both *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. At the end of the latter, the rival families gather around the dead bodies of the star-crossed lovers and do more than ‘give hands’; they promise a ‘living monument’ to their children (V.3.299–304).<sup>1</sup> Similarly, at the end of the funeral scene in *Hamlet*, Claudius promises that Ophelia’s ‘grave shall have a living monument’ (V.i.293). Most stage productions of *Romeo and Juliet* do not end until some kind of monument to the memory of the dead lovers has been raised. However, productions of *Hamlet* dump Ophelia (her body, her story, and the promise of a monument to her) and return to the tragedy of the Danish Prince.

In her ‘living monument’ to Ophelia, Carol Chillington Rutter argues that her role ‘simply vanishes when her body is snatched, and that is bad news . . . not just for her but for *Hamlet* too’.<sup>2</sup> It is important to observe that the business of disputing Ophelia usually starts from the character’s uneven presence in the play and the question of the discrepancy between Ophelia-the-text and Ophelia-the-body. Along with this material comes a whole history of ‘snatching’, re-fashioning,

and handling Ophelia for projects that range from historicism to feminisms, textual imperialism, performance studies, and early modern manuals of conduct for studies of contemporary teenage behavioural disorders; and from French impressionist painting, German expressionist poetry, cinema, pornography, Goth iconography, and Manga Shakespeare to music, fashion brands,<sup>3</sup> computer games, and recently, and most unfortunately, beverages such as ‘Fonte Ophelia’, an Italian brand of still water sold in France, and even ‘Ophelia – Fine Colorado Ale from Breckenridge Brewery’, available in the USA.<sup>4</sup>

If in her book *Enter the Body* Rutter’s project was ‘to discover what narrative is silenced in [three] filmtexts, and to what cultural aim’,<sup>5</sup> my pursuit of three European stage productions of *Hamlet* – Vlad Mugur’s for the Cluj National Theatre, Romania (2001), Radu Alexandru Nica’s for Sibiu Theatre, Romania (2008), and Jan Klata’s for the Bochum Theatre in Germany (2013, which I saw at the Gdansk Shakespeare Festival in Poland in 2014) – focuses on how Ophelia is repeatedly ‘put out there’ – exhibited? sold? – in another snatching game as well as recruited choreographically. In doing so, my

aim is to explore the 'narrative(s)' anatomized in these stage productions.

### Handling the Text

In the *Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, Ophelia appears in six out of the play's twenty scenes and she speaks, in five of these six for a total of 168 lines.<sup>6</sup> When at home, Ophelia is mostly spoken *to*; her first self-initiated speech (in II.i) is as much prompted by Hamlet's 'piteous' (II.i.82) state as it is by her father's 'command' to 'repel his letters and den[y] / hi[m] access' (II.i.107-9). Her only soliloquy (III.i.151-62) is mostly about Hamlet; she 'enters distracted' to deliver her longest self-initiated speech, 'a document in madness' (IV.v.179) totalling 74 lines.

But even in Shakespeare's script, Ophelia's 'presence' amounts to much more. There is not only the ghosting '*the corpse of Ophelia*' performs when it enters (never to exit!) after V.i.213, but also the ongoing ghosting she performs that rivals the Ghost of King Hamlet's own project. She is 'presenced' when spoken about as a 'sister' by Laertes and a 'daughter' by Polonius in II.ii; and as a 'fair nymph' by Hamlet in III.i. In IV.v, she is 'presenced' first as 'importunate, indeed distract' and 'her speech . . . nothing' by a Gentleman, and later as a 'rose of May' by Laertes, who continues to call her 'Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia!' (159-60), even when Ophelia's very presence says otherwise. She is 'presenced' in IV.vii as 'drowned' (164), 'mermaid-like' (176), and a 'poor wretch' by Gertrude, and finally as 'grave matter' in the lively debate between the Clowns at the beginning of V.i and later by Hamlet. This is the rich and conflicting script material available to every stage production of the play.

As with all scripted parts for the stage, Ophelia's is subject to cuts and additions that prioritize directorial (rather than actorly) projects, and such negotiations can be poles apart. In Richard Schechner's environmental *Hamlet: That is the Question* (Shanghai Theatre Academy, 2007; at the International Shakespeare Festival in Craiova, 2010), Ophelia was more involved in the plot. She doubled

as Marcellus on the battlements, 'got mad' when she discovered Polonius's dead body, and 'went mad' not only over the murder of her father but over Hamlet's relationship with Horatio, its eroticism extensively explored in this production.

In Elizabeth LeCompte's Wooster Group *Hamlet* (2007; Gdansk Shakespeare Festival 2012), on the other hand, the choice to double Ophelia with Gertrude (through Richard Burton's 1964 film, which the production emulated and erased throughout), made it necessary to 'cut the Ophelia business' – a line scripted in for Hamlet to instruct the computer board team every night. As a consequence, Ophelia was erased in this production from every scene in which she and Gertrude should have shared the stage.

In the three productions focused upon in this article, the overall textual cuts were drastic in order to meet a performance time of just over two hours. While, statistically, Ophelia's part is affected no more than that of others, four scenes are commonly up for negotiation. Two are commonly trimmed, namely Ophelia's only soliloquy (III.i) and the Gentleman's description of Ophelia before her first mad scene (IV.vii). The other two, namely Hamlet's visit to Ophelia's closet (II.i) and her drowning (IV.vii), end up being performed on the stage despite both being reported events – one by Ophelia herself, the other by Gertrude.

Two points are of interest. First, when cutting the Gentleman's description in IV.vii, productions trade off the (Gentleman's) concern – that Ophelia's state is a threat to the body politic – for the shock effect that Ophelia's entrance as '*distracted*' has on both watching characters and audiences. In the process, the complex issue of articulating and interpreting 'mad' Ophelia is also eliminated.<sup>7</sup> Second, it provides wider scope for voyeuristic psychoanalytical enquiry into madness as a sexual and/or social deviance as regards productions that choose to stage Ophelia's closet scene and her drowning (to be returned to shortly).

In this article I will focus on the work that non-speaking Ophelia does from her very first entrance, examining how the three

productions in question use this body *at their disposal* and *do not* ‘dispose’ of it in Act Five, and what issues such choices might raise.

### Handling the Body

Listed in the *Dramatis Personae* as ‘daughter to Polonius’, Ophelia ‘enters’ the play in I.iii in ‘a room in Polonius’ house’ as ‘sister’ to Laertes. Vlad Mugur in 2001, Radu Alexandru Nica in 2008, and Jan Klata in 2014 rewrote her entrance in an elaborate choreography. In Mugur’s production, all actors were summoned by the three customary gongs at the beginning of the performance. They left the auditorium, climbed on to the stage, and literally took up their parts, at random on chairs, in what looked like a cold reading. The production’s first tableau was of four men and three women symmetrically positioned behind a row of three tables: stage right, a young, fair Ophelia was flanked by two strong young men, Laertes and Bernardo; centre stage, an elderly woman – Hecuba – was seated on her own; stage left, a middle-aged woman – Gertrude – was flanked by two men, Claudius and Polonius.

Despite the actors’ nondescript costumes and the silence they all kept throughout the abridged I.i and II.ii, two women’s performances stood out. They wore their bleached blonde hair ‘with a difference’: the younger was visibly uncomfortable and belittled by her beefy-looking brother; the other was more than comfortable in male company and generous in her gestural support of the visibly young(er) King Claudius.

But Ophelia’s first entrance was a site of yet more telling tales. Shakespeare’s I.iii in Mugur’s production began in complete silence with Ophelia – a punk-gothed-up Degas ballerina – bizarrely whiling away time by playing golf (see Figure 1). Her costume and performance mapped conflicting stories: the white ballerina tutu constrained into the black bodice summoned up childhood and sexuality; the white ballet leggings with black Doctor Martens shoes made her the live opposition between ‘good girl’ and ‘grrrl power’. The costume both infantilized and idealized the actor’s body. It was a site of

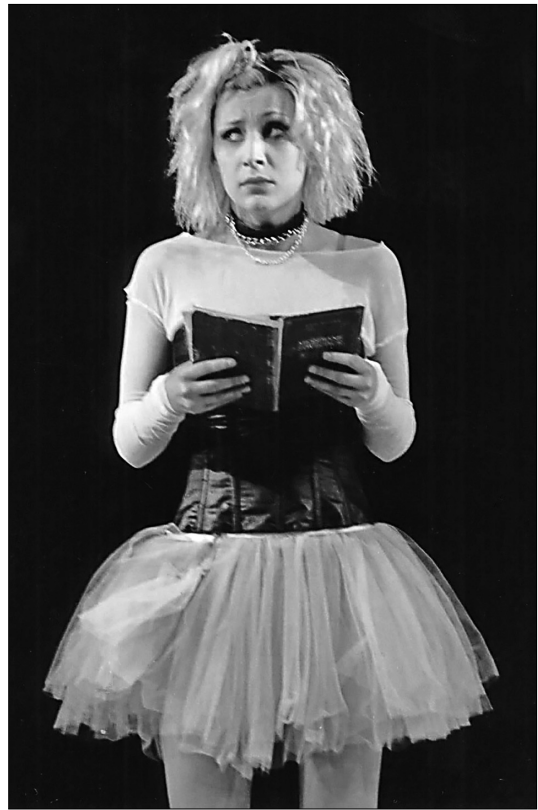


Figure 1. Ophelia (Luisa Cocora) in Vlad Mugur’s *Hamlet* (National Theatre, Cluj, 2001). Courtesy of Luiza Cocora.

conflicting cultural metaphors and a disturbing sight of objectification, albeit in conflicting conventions (not just in terms of period, but also of medium – dance).<sup>8</sup>

There were similar conflicts signalled by Ophelia’s entrance in Klata’s production. After having crossed half of the stage, she settled centre stage and, with meticulous gestures, put on and tied up her pointes, arranged her leg-warmers, then proceeded, not without some reluctance, to the ballet barres (stage left), only to break into a free-style dance to a disco tune. Polonius’s entrance curtailed her joy and freedom in more than the scripted way: in this production, he doubled as a tough ballet instructor who changed Ophelia’s tape upon his arrival and ensured her immediate return to a strict ballet routine under his instruction (see Figure 2, overleaf).

The golf game (another set of strict rules) in Mugur’s production was read by audi-



Figure 2. Ophelia (Xenia Snagowski) practising under the strict eye of her ballet instructor, Polonius (Jürgen Hartmann) in Jan Klata's *Hamlet* (Schauspielhaus, Bochum 2013, Gdansk 2014). © Greg Goodale / Greg Veit Photography.

ences first as masculine, then, and perhaps more importantly, as foreign. This was the new language Ophelia spoke, and the audience had to learn. Her actions, reflected in a mirror at deep stage left, told yet another story. Allegorically, her game of golf anticipated the way in which she would be pushed from pillar to post by Laertes, Polonius, Hamlet, and Claudius, much like a golf ball. Metatheatrically, it illustrated the director's method of moving from one situation to the next during I.v: Ophelia arranged the balls so that each time she hit one, it stopped in the exact spot that each of the male characters had occupied earlier. Whether Ophelia was

toying with her constraints or working out her priorities were questions directly posed in this *Hamlet*.

In Muger's production, Ophelia was choreographing *Hamlet* the play, albeit through a sophisticated game of golf. Her story was one of the three dumbshows that the director scripted into *Hamlet*; the other two were the Ghost's re-enactment of his poisoning and Hamlet's silence(ing) during the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy. One effect of the dumbshows was to increase the pace of the performance. The other was to render any following speech and action as acts of violence against the respective silent (silenced?) pro-

tagonist. The Ghost would be present at the re-enactment of its poisoning during the play-within-the-play; Ophelia would be deprived of speech in the closet scene (played onstage as a dumbshow and commented on by Polonius, who appropriated Ophelia's lines).

### The Objectified Ophelia

Later, Ophelia would be deprived of action by Polonius, who manhandled her like a puppet to 'look natural' for the nunnery scene, then by Hamlet in aggressive foreplay and lovemaking, only to be discarded by him; and finally she would be raped by Claudius, aroused by the nunnery scene he had just watched. Klata's 'nunnery scene' was equally violent, and ended with Ophelia lying on the stage among the scattered books – another discarded object. This was the state in which Ophelia delivered the speech generally regarded as 'her only unmediated articulation of subjectivity'.<sup>9</sup>

From her first entrance in Nica's production, Ophelia (played by Ofelia Popii), was also 'out of her text' and 'out of her part' – as Olivia and Viola would put it. She entered the CCTV-ed space not to Laertes, but to Hamlet, whom Horatio was busy convincing to take up the Ghost's task of revenge. Like Claudius, Polonius, Laertes, and Gertrude, who, as soon as they made their entrances, took the mic (stage fore) and declared their part in the story, Ophelia, too, was a contestant in the *Hamlet* play. She captioned her story: 'Hamlet and Ophelia: a Love Story by William Shakespeare', and followed it with a song and dance number whose lyrics – 'Doubt thou the stars are fire. / Doubt that the sun doth move. / Doubt truth to be a liar. / But never doubt I love' (II.i.115-8) – she delivered in English.

Ofelia Popii's performance, like that of Luiza Cocora in Mugur's production and Xenia Snagowski's in Klata's, worked in multiple codes. Her polka-dotted red velvet mini-dress with layered underskirts and her 'fair' hair were not childish but versatile (see Figure 3). Her out-of-a-bottle blonde hair spilled out of two red elastic bands matching her red boots. These details, together with



Figure 3. The 'nunnery scene': Hamlet (Ciprian Scurtea) and Ophelia (Ofelia Popii) in Radu Alexandru Nica's *Hamlet* (Sibiu, 2008). Courtesy of 'Radu Stanca' Theatre, Sibiu.

the low-neck dress – with one sleeve bursting at the shoulder and held together by safety pins, and the other made of beige lace to match her stockings (forever dropping) – signalled that this Ophelia was not playing but playing *with* 'dumb blonde' and 'girl power' objectifications. She was performing and clowning both entities deliberately. For Hamlet, she put on an *X-Factor*, pole-dancing number, playing both pretty and erotic. For her father, she pulled her underskirt down to her calf (level of 'propriety') but only half listened to his words and gave her replies distractedly because, behind Polonius's back, she was blowing kisses to Hamlet who, she knew full well, could see her on CCTV in this Elsinore under surveillance.

While Luiza Cocora's Ophelia played hide-and-seek with Laertes – who piggy-backed her, as well – Laertes was oblivious to both her sex appeal and Hamlet's interest in

her, and Ofelia Popii's Ophelia responded to Laertes' and Polonius's double standards with some of her own. In Nica's 2008 production, Laertes' first entrance interrupted Ophelia and Hamlet's dance; their obvious intimacy prompted his warning; he returned twice to complete his advice and to drag Ophelia out of Hamlet's arms.

In a similar manner, while Polonius poured his advice ('to thine self be true') on his son, Ophelia was not only present on the stage, thereby occupying the counter-story in this *Hamlet*, but also mocked her father's double standards: she and the Prince, cuddled up in two chairs, dubbed Polonius's words loudly and burst the soap bubbles Horatio was busy blowing over them. Likewise, Xenia Snagowski's Ophelia kept 'her [own] council'. Considering that Polonius found her half undressed, with ankles and wrists duck-taped to the top ballet barres in her room (during the aggressive foreplay the audience had just witnessed), her speech 'as I was sewing in my closet' (in II.i) was, blatantly, a cover-up story.

**'T'have seen what I have seen, see what I see'**  
(III.i.162)

In most productions of *Hamlet*, Ophelia breaks in the 'nunnery scene', yet, as the productions discussed in this article suggest, she does so at different points in the scene. Overtly sexualized in all three productions, the choreography of the 'nunnery scene' removed the ambiguity of Hamlet and Ophelia's relationship and, in doing so, did more than objectify Ophelia and satisfy the voyeuristic spectators – Claudius and Polonius as much as the audience. This objectification, however, did not deny Ophelia 'her subjectivity in the process' – as it was the case, Rutter argues, in Branagh's 1996 film version.<sup>10</sup> In Mugur's production, this began as a love consummation scene for the two protagonists, which turned abusive only when Hamlet suspected they were being watched, and realized that he was thus objectified in a different story, that of Claudius and Polonius. In Nica's and Klata's productions, Hamlet and Ophelia's love story was in close compe-

tion with Hamlet's task of revenge from the beginning, and only lost terrain when Hamlet was finally recruited to the revenge plot.

In this sense, both Hamlet and Ophelia were objectified in projects neither of their making nor choosing: Hamlet in his father's Ghost's project, Ophelia in Polonius and Claudius's. It is with this realization, then, that the love story as a possibility fell apart: Ophelia, who came to the scene with 'love remembrances' to return, was forced to keep possession of them. In Nica's production, these tokens and Hamlet's lines 'I loved thee once' and 'I loved you not' would be remembered in everything Ophelia did thereafter: grotesquely, at the end of the nunnery scene (III.i), when Ophelia, staring blankly at the TV screen at stage left – which played on a loop, a merry-go-round clip in black-and-white, complete with musical-box soundtrack – lulled the 'Never doubt I love' of her first song.

The line returned in IV.v, first as screeched refrain linking her 'mad songs' and then when she handed out sleeping pills (this production's flowers?), slipped to her earlier by Claudius. The lines recurred one last time, when the ceiling projection from the 'nunnery scene' was replayed with a difference: the green floral pattern invaded by red stems became blurred by Hamlet's letters, whose blue handwriting dissolved to give it a watery quality, anticipating the drowning. In Nica's production Ophelia remained on the stage to hear the news that Hamlet had returned and to see Laertes come in.

As in any *Hamlet* production, Ophelia's transformation was registered at the level of costume, too. In Mugur's production, Ophelia – abused and discarded by Polonius, Hamlet, and Claudius, her tutu torn to reveal raw-pink underwear, black eye-liner running down her face, 'hair in disarray' and 'knees knocking' (reminiscent of Hamlet's state when he burst into her closet earlier) – crawled stage left to deliver her soliloquy, which, although truncated to six lines (three about her and three about Hamlet), registered that she had seen his madness and foretold her own collapse into one 'of ladies most dejected and wretched' (III.i.156).

But Mugur's production did not go for 'decorative madness'.<sup>11</sup> Ophelia's costume changed to a black tube dress whose extra-long sleeves were reminiscent more of a straitjacket than a fashion statement. In both 'mad' scenes she entered abruptly and unannounced. She interrupted the King and Queen, following Hamlet's curt dispatch to England, demanded their attention, and held it throughout her scene. Her 'pray you, mark' (IV.v.28) in this production was closer to a military order, which translated into Romanian literally as 'Attention, please'.

Ophelia's exit was equally disturbing in its ambiguity: her coach (IV.v.72), a wheelbarrow, made her body disposable rubble and, as well, construction material (see Figure 4). On her second coming, Ophelia descended from the heavens (a fallen angel abseiling on ropes, which had buckets tied to their ends) and interrupted Laertes, Claudius, and Gertrude's council to give her tokens of remembrance.

Similarly, in Klata's production, Ophelia's madness was inscribed in her costume and make-up as much as in her behaviour. When she entered 'distracted', Ophelia wore an oversized white T-shirt and laddered black tights; red lipstick was smeared around her mouth. On her second entrance, however, Ophelia as a half-dressed ballerina did not sing her scripted part but spoke the lines of another Ophelia – Heine Müller's – in a disconcerting textual intervention which both anticipated and commented on her own drowning (see Figure 5).

**'There is a willow grows askant a brook'**

(IV.vii.166)

In Mugur's production Ophelia's being suspended on ropes and the buckets attached to them were not the only references to her drowning. The fact of her drowning recurred in Gertrude's speech as the Queen struggled to make sense of events. It returned with clear visual impact in the Clowns' debate on whether she 'drowned herself wittingly' or it was a case of '*se offendendo*' (Vi.9–10), a debate this production played out: the Clowns lifted a trap in the floor to reveal the 'brook' full of



Figure 4. Ophelia's coach in Vlad Mugur's *Hamlet* (National Theatre, Cluj, 2001). Courtesy of Luiza Cocora.

Figure 5. 'I am Ophelia. The one the river didn't keep. The woman dangling from the rope. The woman with her arteries cut open. The woman with the overdose. SNOW ON HER LIPS.' © Greg Goodale / Greg Veit



white lime paste (whose composition was carefully timed to solidify by the end of each performance). The hole became Ophelia's grave only after it was emptied of the other stories brought out as disinterred remains by the Gravediggers.

Nica, on the other hand, pitched his production against two interpretive directions: on the one hand, the psychoanalytical readings of the play epitomized by Olivier's 1948 film, which this *Hamlet* cited frequently and which, the director argued, 'plagued' twentieth-century *Hamlets*; and, on the other, the 'rhetoric-centred tradition of performing *Hamlet* in Romania'.<sup>12</sup> Taking a conscious distance from both, his production 'ventured instead a cinematic montage' that 'engage[d] in polemical dialogue' with both logocentric and 'cinema' productions. The choreography of the 'drowning scene', performed three times – in the clip from Olivier's film projected on one of the TV screens on the stage; in Gertrude's speech; and in Ophelia's enacting – rendered this dialogical relation reiterative as well as negotiable, in the spirit of drama-therapy convention which this production espoused.

The actor in the role of the Danish Prince mimed Olivier's speech (simultaneously projected on the TV screen stage left), then gunshot it to make room for his own 'To be or not to be'. The result was that his Hamlet literally muted Olivier's, cutting off the film sound but not erasing the image: the projection let Ophelia linger, with her 'nymph'-like body floating in the depth of Olivier's 1948 set of dark corridors, which framed her in and then out of view, finally cutting to a shot of Olivier's naturalistic 'brook and wild flowers' bed for drowned Ophelia.

This live cross-referencing of Ophelia's drowning with its cinematic and visual heritage worked at the level of iconography, textual intervention, and spectating. Gertrude delivered the news at the mic forestage, while Claudius and Laertes continued to choreograph the duel unperturbed, stage right. At stage depth, Ophelia performed the scene upside down, drowning in the water projected on the ceiling screen that boxed this production's set.

Although simultaneously delivered, the three actions were taken by the spectator's eye individually (as they had to prioritize the stories in a manner akin to computer editing) and relationally (as cause and effect), registering the 'drowning' as speech, as action, and finally, as viewing, when the whole scene uncannily resembled a news report with live footage, ending in this production where Shakespeare's scene started: 'Your sister's drowned, Laertes' (IV.vii.164). This was another example of the production's employment of close-up and long shot, used productively to juxtapose Gertrude and Ophelia as well as their respective stories.

The two female characters reversed performances after their respective closet scenes: the more exposed and sexualized Ophelia's performance was, the more composed and restrained was Gertrude's. Their costumes also shifted order: the Queen's outfits changed from provocative red and black minis to full length black, while Ophelia's became more revealing – the polka-dotted red dress and red boots were shed for a black bodice and suspenders, accessorized with a full-length lace gown and boots in matching black.

### 'Maimèd funeral rites'

(V.i.215)

'Drowned' Ophelia was a reality difficult to handle in Nica's production. Laertes never spoke his scripted lines (IV.vii.185-91), but struggled with the weight of Ophelia's dead body – a rag doll in his arms, yet as disobedient in his hands as she was in the advice scene (in II.ii). Eventually balancing her dead body, he placed it on chairs facing each other – creating and impromptu coffin – before handing it over to the two morticians (this production's version of the Gravediggers). Ophelia-the-body and Ophelia-the-icon were both mishandled: the two morticians combed her hair and tried to restrain it with a black hair band (a futile attempt given that her head was hanging down), and touched up her make-up with heavy strokes and strong colours for her last public entrance. The blue lipstick and eye shadow were no fashion statement but stage economy: they





Figure 6. Left: Rosencrantz, Gertrude, Laertes with Ophelia's ashes, Claudius, Horatio, and Guildenstern in Klata's *Hamlet*. Gdansk 2014 © Greg Goodale/ Greg Veit Photography.

actually constructed 'drowned' Ophelia. During the scene – complete with dialogue about death, the law, propriety – Ophelia's head, hanging limp, facing the audience upside down, signalled the separation between mind and body that governed the story she wanted remembered, then subverted this possibility as the image was at once reminiscent of a magician's trick of cutting the boxed female body.

This was another 'box' that could not contain Ophelia's body – much like the dress bursting at the seams she wore in her first scene. Hamlet also felt the weight of this dead body when finally claiming it in the funeral scene: his 'I lov'd Ophelia' speech was another *dance macabre* in which he staggered across the stage with 'fair Ophelia' in his arms, then collapsed on a chair, holding her on his lap (an oversized child in a strangely inverted *pieta*), and finally lay her to rest (on a chair stage depth). From there dead Ophelia watched 'the rubbish' of V.ii.

Mugur, too, ad-libbed Ophelia's last entrance. Ophelia, in her black tube dress stretching over her bloated (pregnant?) body was walked in by the guards and placed

vertically in the grave; as Laertes and Hamlet 'leap[t] into the grave', her body was once again disputed by her brother and her lover – an action that turned her into another dead body tossed around, much like Yorick's skull earlier. But the 'maimèd rites' did not finish there. On Claudius's promise of 'a living monument', Gravedigger 1 walked Ophelia (covered in white lime paste) out of the grave, over the stage, through the audience, and out of the auditorium, clearing the scene for Hamlet's story of revenge.

### 'A living monument'

(V.i.293)

Textually, Ophelia as a body and her story are erased at the end of V.i. Never given the 'living monument' Claudius promises, she is displaced by the play's need for heroic closure, which puts the dead body and the body politic in fierce competition once again. It did so when the Ghost came to trouble Claudius's reign; it does again when Ophelia's body is erased by state matters. In the process, Hamlet's funeral is 'maimèd', too, and *his* story hijacked. It is not 'flights of



Figure 7. In the background, right, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern construct Ophelia's precarious 'living monument' in Klata's *Hamlet*. Gdansk 2014 © Greg Goodale/ Greg Veit Photography.

angels' that 'sing' him 'to [his] rest!' but, at Fortinbras's command, 'soldiers' music and the rites of war' that 'speak loudly for him' (V.i.393–4).

It is in the play's ending where the productions examined here depart most acutely from the playscript and from one another. In Mugur's *Hamlet*, once the scripted Act Five has concluded with Fortinbras – a golden boy aged seven, who appropriates Horatio's lines promising to uncover 'how these things came about' (V.2.374) – the spectators walk out of the auditorium into the foyer only to discover Ophelia – a sinister 'living monument', the lime paste around her ankles threatening to set into concrete.

In Klata's production, Ophelia did not enter as a 'corpse'; she was replaced by a pot of ashes Laertes had to inter in the oversized grave carefully erected by the cast from the books scattered on the stage, and instantly

destroyed in Hamlet and Laertes's fight (see Figure 6). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's subsequent attempts to give her a 'lasting monument' were equally futile, their project set up to fail, to their increasing frustration and the audience's laughter, as the book tower collapsed because they always started with the smaller books as their foundation. However, Ophelia was granted a monument of a different kind. In an uncanny takeover, Horatio, in a white tutu and black pointes, became her 'living monument' and continued to tell her story during the final act (see Figure 7).

In Nica's production, while the bodies of the dead (Ophelia, Gertrude, Laertes, Claudius, and Hamlet) were still visible on stage, the projection on the ceiling showing Horatio and the two Gravediggers as they 'pile[d] dust upon the quick and dead' (V.i.247) threatened to bury all stories in a

communal grave – a site of erasure but also, as in Shakespeare's Gravediggers' scene earlier, one ripe for disinterring and remembering.

### 'Exeunt'

Yet little of these productions' brave stage work of handling Ophelia is remembered or directly acknowledged. The promotional material for the productions discussed barely notices it; when doing so, it is not in the directors' or other contributors' notes, but buried among the customary photographic tokens. This stage work is even less visible in the reviews, which do not seem to notice it, or choose to gloss over it in favour of the standard lead-man's story, at best contrasted with previous stage versions. A study of the actors' views on the Ophelia they were directed to perform remains a task for the future, as does the question of which space this live cultural negotiation between theatre practice and academic debate occupies when it comes to Ophelia performed.

My concern is that, in both cases, Ophelia (the part, body, agency, story) is in danger of being lost to Talcott Parsons's fallacy of normative determinism – that is, seeing the normative order as 'constitutive rather than regulative of the self', 'social actors (*qua* role bearers) as a reflex of the social system', and 'meaning as a faithful imprint of the cultural pattern'.<sup>13</sup> While perhaps guilty of its own (mis)handlings, my attempt to recuperate stage Ophelias has been intended to do some of the catching up that theatre reviewing needs to undertake in order to deliver the interpretive 'living monument' to Ophelia that theatre practice has been busy building in recent European productions of *Hamlet*.

### Notes and References

1. *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. T. J. B. Spencer (Penguin, 2005). All quotations from *Hamlet* are from Spencer's New Penguin edition (2005), and are referenced parenthetically in the text.

2. Carol Chillington Rutter, *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 29.

3. The eclectic range of accessories includes: Ophelia bespoke hosiery, Ophelia suicide shoes (complete with detail from Alexandre Cabanel's 1883 painting), Sadistic Ophelia Skate Deck, an Ophelia Corrective Academy Hoodie for Recalcitrant Young Ladies, and an Ophelia's Gaze: Bruised Avatar Skins, in which a black-eyed Ophelia invites potential customers to debate whether sporting it is stylish or sexist.

4. Among recent projects that take up the versatility of this character and its afterlives several are of particular interest: *Five Truths* (video installation by Katie Mitchell, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2011); *The Afterlife of Ophelia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); *Ophelias: Iconography of Madness* (Łódź Sztuki Museum, Poland, 2012; Wrocław Contemporary Museum, Poland, and presented at the Gdansk Shakespeare Festival, 2013); *Claiming the Body: the Ophelia Myth in the GDR* (article by Ruth Owen for the *Germanic Review* LXXXII, No.3, 2007, p. 251–67); and Kristin and Davy McGuire, *Ophelia's Ghost* as part of the exhibition *Shakespeare in Art: Tempests, Tyrants, and Tragedies*, Compton Verney Art and Gallery Park, UK, 2016.

5. Carol Chillington Rutter, *Enter the Body*, op. cit., p. 29.

6. My statistics are drawn from the New Penguin Shakespeare edition of *Hamlet*, op. cit. Statistics on Ophelia's spoken input are similar between editions (Q1, Q2, and F) and editors. For the purpose of this article I have contrasted Spencer's edition with Philip Edwards's *New Cambridge Shakespeare* (2003), Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen's *RSC William Shakespeare Complete Works* (2007), Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor's *Arden Shakespeare Hamlet, Second Quarto 1604–5* (2006), and *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623* (2007), and *The Norton Shakespeare* ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (2015).

7. This is not a strategy unique to the case of Ophelia, but one which Shakespeare employs when dealing with other 'disruptive' female characters. See, for example, Marcus's struggle to comprehend the sight of mutilated Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* or the Gentlewoman's report to the Doctor on Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking in *Macbeth*.

8. Ophelia's part has been associated with dance in earlier productions of *Hamlet*. One Romanian example is Ioan Sapdaru's 1998 production for the Mihai Eminescu Theatre, Botoşani, in which the closet scene, the nunnery scene and the drowning scene were all choreographed as ballet in slow motion (in a combination of strobe and red light). More recently, Ophelia told most of her story through dance in *Tiger Lilies* and Copenhagen Republic Theatre's 'opera grotesque' *Hamlet* (which I saw at the Gdansk Shakespeare Festival, 2015).

9. Rutter, op. cit., p. 30.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

12. *Hamlet*, programme notes, Sibiu, 2008, for all quotations.

13. José Guilherme Merquior, *The Veil and the Mask: Essays on Culture and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 55.