

# JOHN AUSTEN'S OPHELIA: A NEW AUTONOMY

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**Abstract:** This article explores how Austen's drawings re-envisage the typically sentimental Victorian perception of Ophelia as tenderly pathetic and lacking in agency, a view rooted in the patriarchal reduction of the feminine which produces a 'flattened' reading of Ophelia's textual complexity. This re-envisaging partly reflects nineteenth- and early twentieth-century onstage practices but often exceeds them in the degree to which they portray her with psychological autonomy.

Depictions of Ophelia as insane and isolated are the central focus. How her madness is performed strongly influences our perception of her dependence or autonomy and reveals an interiority that is obscured in her interactions with others by social, familial and patriarchal conventions. As this article will show, traditional depictions of a mad Ophelia are fairly restrained when compared with Austen's versions.



Ophelia's mad [laugh] is licensed to command.  
Nina Auerbach (1981, 240)

## Introduction

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a prolific period for illustrations in editions of Shakespeare, many of which did little more than reflect simple--often sentimentalized—popular assumptions and prejudices about the plays and their characters, as can be seen in the *Victorian Illustrated Shakespeare Archive* (Goodman 2016), a useful database of such illustrations. This paper explores the ways in which visual art can go beyond these assumptions and engage not only with the specific literary and dramaturgical complexity of such intricate texts, but also with the popular and critical traditions that accreted around them. My argument takes as a case study English artist John Austen's highly Aestheticist, proto-Surrealist, art nouveau edition of *Hamlet* (1922), which is lavishly illustrated in a style that superficially recalls the work of Aubrey Beardsley.

Beardsley has remained in vogue, with a style that resembles that of many modern-day artists. It is strange that John Austen's *Hamlet* illustrations, done in a Beardsley-esque style, have not proven equally durable. A series of competing factors may account for this, including Austen's small-scale production of *Hamlet* and his subsequent slow emergence from Beardsley's influence. Austen's edition occupied only a small pocket in time. Beardsley's contrasting prominence in the aesthetic movement and prolific production of works in this particular style could have placed Austen's *Hamlet* at a further disadvantage. I pay close attention to symbol, gesture, expression, and overall artistic composition as they reflect Austen's close reading of the play as dramatic text and his unique and even transgressive interpretations of characters' implied interiority.



Fig. 1. 'Midnight Ophelia' in John Austen's *Hamlet* (1922)

Austen precludes late twentieth-century critical and performative interpretations particularly of Hamlet and Ophelia. Provocative and imaginative, his illustrations present an unprecedentedly dark prince, a complicated and independent Ophelia, and a host of symbolic, disturbing, supernatural, and feminine entities. Women are no longer relegated to the background in his *Hamlet* as in so many theatrical, artistic, and filmic adaptations of the twentieth century; instead, they are granted a position center stage. In order to fit within the confines of an article, the following discussion will focus exclusively on Ophelia's representation in one of Austen's portraits of her entitled "Midnight Ophelia" (fig. 1)<sup>1</sup>. My focus here is on depictions

<sup>1</sup> The author and the editors thank undergraduate intern Corinn Smith for their invaluable help tracking down images and permissions. The title is invented.

of Ophelia as insane and isolated. How her madness is performed strongly influences our perception of her dependence or autonomy and reveals an interiority that is obscured in her interactions with others by social, familial, and patriarchal conventions. As I will show, traditional depictions of a mad Ophelia are extremely restrained when compared with Austen's versions.

Austen's slim and elegant edition of *Hamlet* was an expensive issue *de luxe*, printed on handmade paper; a copy can be found in the Cambridge University Library. Just sixty copies were made, only fifty of which were for sale, numbered and signed by the artist. Its expense and rarity indicate that the edition was meant not for the mass market of the cheap Globe edition, but for a sophisticated intellectual's private consideration, someone likely to be capable of appreciating the complexity of meaning in Austen's drawings. In short, these traits suggest that it was an aesthetic object and a symbol of artistic and intellectual prestige, a signifier of taste and cultural capital.

Dover Publications reprinted Austen's *Hamlet* in its Calla Editions series in 2010, in time to catch the last two decades' rising wave of academic interest in the exploration, of Shakespeare's complex characters through the visual arts. This movement was spearheaded by Stuart Sillars, one of the most prolific and influential writers on this topic. Austen seems to have been fascinated by the hermeneutical potential of the illustrator's art. Shortly after he produced his illustrated *Hamlet*, Austen shifted his primary source of inspiration from Beardsley to other artists, particularly his good friend Alan Odle. Austen wrote that "Odle is, I believe, the world's supreme master of the pen . . . no other pen and ink draughtsman has ever shown such imaginative power, such fertility of invention, or developed his designs with such mastery" (1937, 42).<sup>2</sup> Austen's belief in the creative autonomy and power of book illustration is also evident in his praise of his companion:

His book illustrations are never mere illustrations. He takes the theme of the book and expounds it with his rhythmic fantasies; explaining and interpreting his author in terms of pen work. A hint, even a word, enables him to create, to the volume's enrichment and the reader's delight, an epic aside. His page designs need no legend to explain them, rather they explain the story; and at times, such is the power of his imagination, he will take his author by the scruff, and hurl him into realms of wonder unimagined by any literary scribe. (1937, 42)

His enthusiasm suggests that he sought to produce this power and depth of meaning in his own work, investing literary illustration with the same significance as its accompanying text. If we look at his illustrations, including early ones such as found in *Hamlet*, we see ample evidence of this. Austen produced his own "epic aside."

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<sup>2</sup> Austen held a joint exhibition with Harry Clarke, Alan Odle and Austen Spare in 1925 (Stenson 2004, 34).

The tradition of illustrating Shakespeare's plays, although no longer as popular, has continued into the present and taken on a wider variety of forms, such as the graphic novel. Nicki Greenberg's *Hamlet* (2010) is a recent, particularly well-known example. However, the play's text (almost invariably conflated) rarely survives intact in these recent works; it is instead cut, partially updated, and/or rearranged, as in Greenberg's work. Early illustrated editions (dating from the eighteenth to late nineteenth centuries) more closely resemble performances because they contain a conflated but unabridged text. Consequently, the images in these editions represent a unique moment in Shakespearean illustration. The fact that they seek to represent actual or possible performances opens them up to the same kind of psychological critique as performance itself.

The examination of illustrated editions of Shakespeare has been largely confined to nineteenth-century examples, with the exception of Stephen Orgel's chapter "Shakespeare Illustrated" in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture* (2007), and Sillars' article "Shakespeare in Colour" (2015). However, the latter does not venture into discussion of the 1920s, leaving Austen's designs outside its investigatory scope. While Orgel claims of the Cranach Press *Hamlet* (1927) that "[t]here is no illustrated Shakespeare in which the images are so thoroughly integrated with the typography, and in which text, book, and performance are conceived so completely as a whole"; this edition "reconceives the book of the play as a performance," he omits Austen's edition of *Hamlet* (1922) from this assessment, despite its apparent congruence with this description (89).

### The Ophelia Austen Knew

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, academic criticism and the theatre followed similar trajectories in their representation of Ophelia. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, critics argued either that Ophelia was a sexual hypocrite and was blameworthy for not aiding Hamlet, or that she was a vulnerable innocent, a sacrifice (Desmet 1992, 11). Rebecca West considered that "[n]o line in the play suggests that she felt either passion or affection for Hamlet" (22). A. C. Bradley called her "childlike," "young and inexperienced," claiming that she existed primarily in relation to other characters such as Hamlet, not in her own right (160–61). However, the emergence of feminist and post-structuralist criticism complicated the issue: Lacan reduced her to an "O-phallus," an intrinsic "lack" and a dangerous female sexuality that can never be realised (cited Showalter 1985, 77). In contrast, Elaine Showalter argued that Ophelia's appropriation in different periods and cultural frameworks argues against the existence of a single Ophelia (79; 91). Austen's atypical representation of her demonstrates this point.

The sentimentalized Victorian representation of Ophelia as "a picture of helpless, suffering girlhood" who "turn[s] all things, even the delirium of the mad scene, 'to favor and to prettiness'," as *The Times* described Lily Brayton's performance at the Adelphi in 1905, persisted well into the twentieth century (April 2, 1905). In Olivier's 1948 film of *Hamlet*, Jean Simmons, probably the most widely viewed and culturally

influential Ophelia of her time, played the character as a physically and emotionally delicate girl, described by *Variety* as “perhaps too childlike” (May 12, 1948).<sup>3</sup>

The New Woman movement of the late-nineteenth century coincided with a series of more assertive onstage Ophelias. We see this empowered version of Ophelia in Austen's illustrations. The increasing tendency of actors and directors to rely on an unbowdlerized text was also a factor in granting Ophelia's character more agency onstage; this allowed Ophelia's supposedly problematic sexual awareness to resurface from the text. From the 1880s on, many stage Ophelias began to show something of the kind of independent agency that we see in modern productions. *The Times* complained, for example, of Bernhardt's 1886 performance of Ophelia in Paris (at the Porte Saint-Martin Theatre) that she “did not . . . answer to the English ideal of the victim of filial, paternal and sexual love” (*The Times* March 1, 1886).<sup>4</sup>

Some late nineteenth-century Ophelias were poised uncomfortably between traditional docility and emerging agency. Austen's imagery reflects the tension created by these opposing forces in the public eye. Ellen Terry considered that “[Ophelia's] brain, her soul and her body are all pathetically weak,” portraying her as a “consistent psychological study in sexual intimidation, a girl terrified of her father, lover, and life itself” (165–66; Showalter 1985, 89). Despite this, the actress still sought to convey an impression of agency:

Ophelia only *pervades* the scenes in which she is concerned until the mad scene. This was a tremendous thing for me, who am not capable of *sustained effort*, but can perhaps manage a *cumulative effort* better than most actresses. I have been told that Ophelia has “nothing to do” at first. I found so much to do! Little bits of business which, slight in themselves, contributed to a definite result, and kept me always in the picture. (Terry 1932, 165–66)

American actress Julia Marlowe portrayed a possibly unprecedented degree of agency in the role of Ophelia. The *Sunday Times* described her as having “almost too much forcefulness of character for Ophelia” (May 5, 1907), although C. E. Russell considered her to have the perfect amount, “suggest[ing] dignity, worth, a self-respect, without loss of sweetness and innocence” (362), and the *New York Herald* (1904) praised her emancipation of the role: “Here was not a gentle lady going daft to slow music, but a woman of strong passions and fine intelligence who succumbs to a terrible catastrophe.” Austen may also have been influenced by those *fin de siècle* artists who had begun to depict a less sexualized but more sexually aware character, reflecting a direct influence from the complete text rather than the stage.<sup>5</sup> However, the

3 The (silent) cinematic Ophelias Austen may have seen were similarly intended for a popular, unreflective audience and were similarly sentimentalized; see Judith Buchanan's *Shakespeare on Silent Film* (2009).

4 Sophie Duncan has examined *fin de siècle* Shakespearean actresses “who gave the most iconoclastic and controversial performances of Shakespeare's heroines” (Duncan 2017, 1). She observes that, by this period, “popular culture depicted the successful star actress as an overwhelming, even magnetic figure” (20).

5 See Kimberly Rhodes' discussion of this in her chapter “Performance Anxiety: Pictorial and Theatrical Representations at the *Fin de siècle*” in *Ophelia and Victorian Visual Culture* (2008), with special attention to p. 160. As Rhodes observes, Edwin Austin Abbey's



prominence (twelve appearances, five of which are individual portraits), agency and complexity afforded to his Ophelia trumps contemporary and preceding stage and visual artistic depictions.

The cumulative image we receive of stage Ophelias in the early twentieth century is that maturity, both intellectual and sexual, and its attendant agency, were the hallmarks of an emerging new strain of characterization. Childlike, “pathetic” and prettified Ophelias were losing some of their popularity and being relegated to repertory (and amateur) theatre and popular film. However, this new emphasis on her adult sexuality retained an implication of nonthreatening compliance. While Austen amplifies this emerging trend of Ophelia’s independence, he invests Ophelia’s sexuality with greater self-determination, even to the point of her sometimes appearing predatory. As discussed further below, the illustration in figure 1 in which she stands in a small clearing in a dark forest, her sanity already slipping, is a particularly strong example of this.

Victorian (including *fin de siècle*) Ophelias as depicted and represented onstage are highly relevant to a study of Austen’s work because they provide the Ophelia of the popular imaginary in his moment. Further, they bear on Austen’s illustrations because the artist not only mirrors but also subverts common Ophelia stereotypes. It is unlikely that he saw any of these Drury Lane Ophelias, given that “he devoted the scant leisure he allowed himself to amateur theatricals” (Richardson 1930, 20), but since Shakespeare tends to take a dominant place in amateur theatricals, this suggests at least a strong interest in the theatricality of Shakespeare’s texts. It follows that Austen is likely to have been influenced by major performances of Shakespeare, if only indirectly: he moved in educated, middle-class circles where they would have been discussed, and would have seen performance reviews and the exhibited artworks which they inspired.

The onstage representation of Ophelia’s madness became increasingly confronting towards the end of the nineteenth century. In 1863, psychiatrist John Conolly had encouraged actors to attend asylums to imitate the “partial rudeness [. . .] acute observation, the sudden transitions, the broken recollections” of “mental disorder,” rather than evoke Ophelia’s sentimentalized “prettiness” (180). Terry attended a ‘madhouse’ in 1879 for inspiration (122). By contrast, Stella (a.k.a. Mrs. Patrick) Campbell intended to play a traditional, sentimentalized Ophelia, remarking that “[t]o my mind she should never be mad enough to lose her womanly charm. My one object will be to avoid anything approaching the maniacal” (*The Pall Mall Gazette* September 11, 1897). But critical taste was beginning to change, the *Bath Chronicle* remarking dryly that “Mrs. Campbell’s Ophelia is a study of much refinement, a trifle too reserved in point of fact. [. . .] The ‘mad scene,’ she will probably improve upon as the run of the tragedy proceeds” (*Bath Chronicle* 16 Sep-

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painting *The Play Scene in “Hamlet” (Act III, Scene ii)* (1897) exemplifies the way in which visual artists increasingly relied on textual evidence rather than memories of performances.

tember 1897). British sentiment increasingly preferred an Ophelia who exhibited convincing rather than prettified madness.<sup>6</sup>

Portraits of an insane Ophelia either bereft of context or during the flower scene represent one major trend in her depiction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Austen pays credit to this tradition, although he also goes beyond it, adding greater complexity to her ‘mad’ depiction. One early nineteenth-century critic wondered “what can be more beautiful, more sublimely pathetic, than Ophelia’s manner of distributing flowers?” (Oxbery 1818, xxi). The first portraits of a mad Ophelia emerged in the late eighteenth-century. Published in 1775, Bell’s six-penny (third) edition of *Hamlet* includes one of actress Jane Lessingham, designed by James Roberts and engraved by Charles Grignion (fig. 3). Pictured against a blank backdrop, she extends one arm, offering flowers to someone we cannot see. Ophelia’s expression lacks any obvious sign of madness, although her hair is decorated by flowers and partially unbound. To the early modern viewer, unkempt locks traditionally signaled insanity despair, or (as mentioned) a lack of sexual restraint.<sup>7</sup>



Fig. 2. John Hamilton Mortimer. 1775. Engraving of the mad Ophelia. Part of a set of twelve engravings entitled *Shakspeare's Characters*. Held in the Folger Shakespeare Library.

6 It seems that Campbell may have hearkened to this criticism, because a few weeks later, George Bernard Shaw, an advocate of theatrical naturalism, praised her “progress” in “making Ophelia really mad” and changing “something that has always been pretty” into something “painful,” rendering the audience “horribly uncomfortable” (Shaw 1897, 365). Similarly, Clement Scott experienced the “shiver” of “something [. . .] pretty” turned “painful” when watching her in the role (Scott 1900, 169).

7 Consider Spenser’s Despaire, whose “griesie lockes, long growen, and vnbound, / Disordred hong” (FQ 1.9.35). In Q1, the stage direction that begins Ophelia’s mad scene (4.5) is “Enter Ofelia playing on a Lute, and her haire downe singing.”



Fig. 3. Charles Grignion. 1775–1778. Engraving of a design by James Roberts depicting Mrs. Jane Lessingham as Ophelia. *Shakespeare's Plays*, edited by John Bell. Held by the Folger Shakespeare Library.

As I will show, Austen's mad Ophelia has evolved far beyond Grignion's. Although she bears the standard signs of madness, including wild hair and sexual fixation, she is less naturalistic, her breasts are exposed, and she is sexually lewd and hostile, whereas Grignion's is not. In a portrait designed and engraved by John Hamilton Mortimer, Ophelia is pictured from the elbow upwards against an indistinct background. She is clearly psychologically disturbed, staring vaguely over her shoulder, her gaze fixed and yet unfocused (1775; fig. 2). Young claims that "this Ophelia's expression shocks the viewer with its declaration of psychic disorder and is one of the most disturbing images of Ophelia's madness that would ever appear during the eighteenth or the nineteenth-century" (313). The believable madness of Austen's Ophelia does not exceed that of Mortimer's. As I will discuss, however, her portrait image (fig. 1) carries a menacing, sinister air which the other lacks.

As to nineteenth-century depictions of the flower scene, these were overwhelmingly sentimentalized, perhaps partly prompted by Laertes' patronizing description of Ophelia's turning "passion, hell itself / [. . .] to favour and to prettiness" (4.5.185–86). Austen's drawings reject this reductive assessment of her character.



Frank Stone's *Ophelia: A Scene from 'Hamlet,'* engraved by the Dalziel Brothers [1839–1842], portrays Ophelia on her knees in act 4.4, one palm outstretched and gazing imploringly upwards as if wordlessly communicating with God (fig. 4). Henry Nelson O'Neil's *Ophelia* (1852) (of which now only an engraving exists) depicts her similarly; she is kneeling while Laertes is standing, and she clasps one of his hands and locks eyes with him.<sup>8</sup>

The tendency to portray a sublimely pathetic Ophelia continued late into the century. Robert James Gordon's mad Ophelia, displayed at the Society of British Artists' exhibition in 1885, is a case in point: her large eyes communicate a “pleading look” (Young 2002, 314).<sup>9</sup> Performing in the role in 1878 onwards (at the Lyceum, alongside Henry Irving's Hamlet), Terry, as mentioned, was among those actresses who sought to deliver a sentimentalized Ophelia onstage, hoping to instill “beauty,” “nature,” and “pity” in her movements during the mad scenes (154).



**Fig. 4.** Frank Stone. “Ophelia: A Scene from ‘Hamlet.’” *The Pictorial Edition of the Works of Shakespeare, ‘Tragedies,’* vol. I., engraved by the Dalziel Brothers, edited by Charles Knight, London, Virtue & Co., [1839–1842].

<sup>8</sup> The Mander and Mitchenson Collection possesses an engraved copy (Hamlet Box—Designs, Paintings, etc); the original cannot be found.

<sup>9</sup> The painting for it appears to be lost. An unsigned wood engraving of it emerged in 1886 in the *Magazine of Art* (9:164).

One of the most popular subjects for painters was Ophelia's drowning and the moments preceding it. Her madness is rarely confronting in these images, although it is in Austen's depictions of the scene. She typically is shown alone within a natural environment of dense woodland or reeds, and often, a large body of water.<sup>10</sup> She is frequently trying to "hang" her "crownet weeds" (4.7.171–72), or is falling into the water, having failed in the attempt. Less often, she is submerged, face upwards. Romantic male artists developed a tendency to merge Ophelia with her watery deathbed.<sup>11</sup> With the exception of Millais, these artists generally depict her in a white dress, fully clothed, with hair unbound and in disarray, often with her arms and/or legs exposed. In a few rare instances, at least one of her breasts is visible; Léopold Burthe's *Ophelia* (1852)<sup>12</sup> and portrayals by Delacroix (1843 and 1844) are early examples of this (Young 2013, 13). Overall, Austen's illustrations of Ophelia's insanity and resulting death draw upon and challenge traditional depictions, subverting the voyeuristic depiction of her madness while foregrounding her suffering and implying her self-determination.

### Austen's *Ophelia*: A Midnight Encounter

In one of two separate illustrations of her impending death, Austen portrays Ophelia treading on winding grass and ferns, probably a riverbank (see fig. 1). She is encompassed by darkness and an ominous wilderness. Evoking the stereotypical setting of Gothic horror novels with their typical narrative of threatened virginity (Young 2002, 325–27), this was a strong motif in Victorian depictions of the scene. Reflecting visual tradition, Ophelia's style of dress is both Victorian and early modern. Her beauty spot, the last suggestion of heavy makeup that dishevelment has worn away, adds an exotic French touch to her appearance. This recalls Hamlet's misogynistic tendency to link Ophelia with cosmetics. He sardonically addresses a love-letter to "the most beautified Ophelia" (2.2.109–10), another example of his belittling her through ambiguous praise (she is meant to take *beautified*—cosmetically enhanced—for *beatified*). Here, Ophelia's makeup reminds us of the prince's misogynistic condescension, but simultaneously, her representation challenges it. Her depiction also points to Claudius's agitation (on the page opposite), exacerbated by a tragically transformed Ophelia.

Claudius laments to Gertrude ("O, this is the poison of deep grief" (4.5.75)) after Ophelia has left them—that "poor Ophelia / [is] Divided from herself and her fair judgment, / Without the which we are pictures, or mere beasts" (85–6). His reference to "pictures" is ironically mirrored in the picture shown opposite. Equally ironic, the reductive patriarchal view of women is that they are both aesthetic objects and mere beasts, whether unruly or domesticated. The placement of Austen's illustration points to this contradiction. In conjunction with her wild appearance and decision to position herself within a protective

10 These are too numerous to require individual mention.

11 Young places special emphasis on Delacroix and Millais as examples of this (see Young 2002, 338–41).

12 Located in the Musées de Poitiers. See Lafond (177–78) for a more detailed description.

cluster of trees, Ophelia's wary, hostile gaze hints at her having become the "mere beast" Claudius imagines, "divided from herself": Austen provides his own reimagining of what had become a cliché.

Ophelia stands on a patch of daisies, suggesting that she picks flowers. It may be these to which she points, foreshadowing the cause of her death: "There on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds / Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke" (4.7.171–72).<sup>13</sup> It is interpretable that in pointing toward the daisy-covered ground, Austen's Ophelia silently insists on her innocence. If we take this as a refutation of Hamlet's claim that she is corrupt, Ophelia demonstrates agency. John Waterhouse's 1910 *Ophelia* clasps daisies in the folds of her dress, while Arthur Hughes' *Ophelia* of 1871 (fig. 6) carries a daisy amid miscellaneous flowers; Young (2002) suggests that this denotes her "purity" (332). Daisies are an ambivalent symbol, pointing to both corruption and innocence.



Fig. 6. Arthur Hughes. *Ophelia*. *Ophelia* ("And will he not come again?"). 1863, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

<sup>13</sup> Mentions of daisies as signifiers of innocent springtime love in literature go all the way back to Chaucer.

Given that daisies may connote infidelity and deceit but also innocent love and romance, Ophelia also appears to be directing our attention to the subject of her grievance: her lover cruelly turning against her. Their pervasive presence in Austen's illustrations amplifies Ophelia's sense of suffered injustice, contributing to a more complex and negative reading of Hamlet. Greene (1592) makes a clear link between daisies and masculine infidelity: "the dissembling daisie, to warne such light a loue wenches not to trust every faire promise that such amorous batchelers / make them" (A3ff.).<sup>14</sup> This recalls Ophelia's unhappy song about a sexually betrayed maiden. In pointing to the daisies, she highlights Hamlet's betrayal and seeming deceit, having proven himself an inconstant "amorous batcheler." It is significant that Ophelia also clutches daisies in the mad scene because it is left unclear who receives Ophelia's daisy. Gertrude's supposed infidelity and deceit partly precipitate the problems of the play, suggesting that they are intended for her; alternatively, Ophelia may hold onto the daisies because they represent her grievance. Like Hamlet, communicating covert but intelligible meaning, Ophelia conveys an impression of feigned insanity.

The effect of the rigid lines in the composition is to make Ophelia seem less aestheticized than in traditional depictions and to contribute to an impression of psychological tension, suggesting mental instability. Ophelia's nonnaturalistic features, including her huge eyes and sharply pointed chin, contribute to this impression. The numerous straight lines are found in the diagonals of Ophelia's dress and necklace, the verticality of many of the trees and their horizontal stripes, and the harsh angularity of her face. She bends diagonally from the waist without curving her back. Geometric triangles feature prominently: the angle of her necklace is mirrored in the gesture of her hands, while there are also triangular shapes in her outer sleeves and the hem of her dress.

The surrounding darkness seems to signify the dim obscurity of Ophelia's unstable mind. Hughes' Ophelia of 1852 is cast in moonlight; according to Young, this "suggest[s] the disorder of Ophelia's psychological state" (332). Jameson's unsigned engraving entitled "Ophelia and the Fates" (1832, fig. 7) in her *Characteristics of Women*, may have been first to portray Ophelia thus, a crescent moon hanging in the night sky (188). This dark landscape bears little relation to Ophelia's mental disposition, however, as she is already dead; the waning moon seems to reflect this. Via bold contrasts and increased shadow, the moonlight in Austen's monochromatic drawing throws the central figure and surrounding objects into stark relief. This luminescence seems to sear itself onto the landscape. Suggestive of a spotlight being cast on Ophelia during a performance, this emphasizes the shocking transformation of her psyche, as well as her importance in the play.

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14 Greene's reference to "Rue [. . .] called herb grace" suggests Shakespeare might have had this passage in mind. See Thomas and Faircloth (2014, 85–86) for a discussion of the variations in meaning attached to daisies. They claim that the darker meaning for daisies is contentious.



Fig. 7. Anna Jameson. “Ophelia and the Fates.” *Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, and Historical*, 2 vols. London, Saunders & Otley, 1832.

A motif that he borrows from traditional depictions and exaggerates, the moon frequently features in Austen’s edition. There are any number of possible, likely coexisting, reasons for this. The Ghost comes in the nighttime, and its influence drives the narrative such that its presence is constantly felt. Further, Horatio describes how in “Rome, / A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,” the “moist star, / [. . .] / Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse” (1.1.116–17; 121, 123) — such imagery also may account for the edition’s frequent inclusion of pitch-black darkness and waxing moons. Likewise, as a ghost story set in medieval Denmark, Austen’s *Hamlet* almost demands a dark Gothic setting. Moons also symbolize madness and the feminine, themes that pervade the play’s text. Reinforcing this impression, Austen frequently portrays Ophelia resembling or pictured within the moon. Lastly, Diana is the goddess of the moon; as discussed below, this classical motif appears in the play’s text. The moon’s emphasis in Austen’s illustrations underscores Ophelia’s significance in the play, despite her relatively few lines. Indeed, the imaginary feminine is a prominent theme in the play.

Despite the moon’s symbolization of female chastity, Ophelia’s appearance in the “Midnight Ophelia” drawing (fig. 1) is highly sexualized. This reflects her objectification on the late nineteenth-century stage, in response to growing public expectations. Terry’s distinctive brand of sexual allure boosted her success (Young 2002, 50). Henry James considered her “lovely, . . . ] a somewhat angular maiden of the Gothic ages, with her hair cropped short, like a boy’s, and a straight and clinging robe” — in short, an “embodiment of sumptuous sweetness” (143). John Martin-Harvey viewed the actress in the same light, considering her “long virginal limbs, her husky voice, her crown of short flaxen hair, her great red mouth” as altogether demonstrating an “absolutely irresistible physical attractiveness” (29).

Marlowe’s Ophelia was imagined in comparable terms. In transcribing a promptbook for a performance of hers, Lark Taylor appears to imagine a barely masked passion on Ophelia’s side: upon entering in the nunnery scene, she “presses [Hamlet’s love poems] to her breast, looks at it again, presses it to lips”; she



also “fondles” the pearls gifted to her by the prince, and “extends arms tenderly towards Hamlet” before he questions her honesty (qtd. Young 2002, 52). Images of Marlowe in performance also carry a faint tinge of eroticism (52). However, unlike Terry’s and Marlowe’s Ophelias, Campbell’s was not described in erotic language (Duncan 2017, 119). The *Era* “half expected that she would adopt the ancient German and ‘up-to-date’ English theories of Ophelia’s impurity . . . in her embodiment,” as if disappointed that her character was not licentious (September 18, 1897). That Ophelia’s sexuality was a focal point both in performance and in critical discourse reflected a more sophisticated awareness of the male characters’ obsession with it in the play.

At her first appearance in 1.3, Laertes and Polonius independently obsess about Ophelia’s sexuality as a kind of threatened asset, a theme taken up by Hamlet in 2.2 (“Conception is a blessing, but as your daughter may conceive—friend, look to ’t” (2.2.184–86). Laertes also insists that Ophelia “keep [herself] in the rear of [her] affection / Out of the shot and danger of desire” (34–35). In reacting to this obsessive commodification of her sexuality, Ophelia subtly demonstrates agency in response to Laertes’s anxiety about the security of her “chaste treasure,” which erases her as a subject, a moral agent capable of choice. Ophelia reproves his objectification by speaking as though he had expressed his concern for her moral agency, and thus covertly but adroitly rebuking him:

Do not as some ungracious pastors do,  
 Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven  
 Whiles, a puffed and reckless libertine,  
 Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads. (1.3.47–50)

The ways in which Ophelia is characterized in the play by the men around her also point to her objectification and infantilization even when mad, despite her disturbing comportment. We see this ironically reflected in Austen’s illustration. Claudius calls Ophelia “pretty” despite her madness and Laertes similarly claims that “She turns [all] to favour and to prettiness.” “Pretty” is a diminutive term, used either for women or children; it has the potential to be extremely condescending.<sup>15</sup> In any case, Ophelia’s insanity is anything but “pretty.” Her disturbing songs aside, the garland she attempts to hang before she drowns is sinister, its flowers either noxious (“crow-flowers”, i.e., buttercups and “nettles”) or obscene: “long purples, / That liberal shepherds give a grosser name” (4.7.168–69). Laertes reverts to demeaning, sexist cliché when describing his sister, failing to perceive the more frightening aspect of her comportment. Gertrude, in contrast, notices it: she chooses the less desirable name for buttercups, unnecessarily points out the lewdness of “long purples,” and describes the garland as “weeds” (171), recalling Hamlet’s description of Denmark’s “rank” garden (1.2.136). The Queen objectifies no other woman.

15 For example, in *Emma*, Harriet is often called “pretty” while Emma is called “handsome.” *The New English Dictionary* (1908) has the following comment: “*Pretty* is somewhat of a condescending term; we grant it: *beauty* is imperious, and commands our acknowledgement” (*OED*, “pretty, adj. 2(a)”).

As Young observes, Victorian artists exploited Ophelia's madness as a means of highlighting her desirability (337). He emphasizes "the erotic potential available to artists who depicted her in her mad state" (337).<sup>16</sup> In nineteenth and early-twentieth-century visualizations of Ophelia's madness and/or death, her expression is often vacant and staring, allowing the viewer a more objectifying gaze; Waterhouse's 1910 Ophelia is a case in point, although she also appears vaguely distressed. More unusually, Hughes's 1852 (fig. 6) and 1863 (fig. 12) Ophelias gaze downwards, lost in melancholy thought; inspiring sympathy, these figurings partially undermine a detached voyeuristic appraisal.

Thwarting this kind of objectifying gaze although she ostensibly invites it, Austen's Ophelia subverts stereotypical depictions. Her shoulders are bared, while her breasts almost seem to spill from her corset, nipples revealed. The artist exaggerates and distorts the voyeuristic trend of exposing Ophelia's body. However, despite the prolonged scrutiny her naked flesh might invite, her glare inhibits it; instead, we are made to feel that we are intruding on her privacy. Watching us determinedly as we watch her, this Ophelia challenges voyeuristic looking, and thus can be compared to a select few highly unusual works from the late nineteenth century that demonstrate similar agency.

Madeleine Lemaire's Ophelia (painted sometime during the 1880s; fig. 8) wears an extremely unorthodox expression, gazing coyly at someone or something beyond the frame.<sup>17</sup> Combined with bare arms and breasts, and a deeply suggestive pose, her appearance strikingly contrasts with traditional depictions. It is suggestive that Lemaire was a female painter and, seemingly, one of few artists of her time to depict Ophelia in complete control of her sexuality; this implies a feminist agenda, making her Ophelia virtually unique among its contemporaries.<sup>18</sup> Austen's echoing representation of Ophelia conveys a similar impression. While Lemaire's looks away from the viewer, allowing a prolonged gaze, her confident sexuality implies that she is indifferent as to how and whether we might look at her. Further, her almost mischievously childlike expression makes the act of looking seem distasteful; she mocks the viewer. Austen's Ophelia presents a similar challenge. Her concentrated look and revealed breasts indicate that she is profoundly aware of her sexuality and unperturbed by its open display. However, glaring at us without the slightest trace of embarrassment, she thwarts a voyeuristic appreciation of her nakedness.

16 Rhodes notes that "the portraits of Ophelia served to normalise mental illness as an attribute of femininity by representing the heroine as beautiful and desirable in her madness" (Rhodes 2008, 12).

17 The original cannot be located and its exact date of production is unknown. However, Goupil and Company produced a photogravure in the 1880s which still exists.

18 See Rhodes' discussion of Lemaire's painting for a more detailed argument to this effect (169). Rosemary Betterton remarks that "one strategy [used by late nineteenth-century woman artists] was to assert a different relation to history, one which would lead to the creation of a new identity for women and a resistance to patriarchal history" (1998, 25).



Fig. 8. After Madeleine Lemaire. *Ophelia*. 1880s, Goupil and Company, London.

In conjunction with her exposed breasts, the direct gaze of Austen's Ophelia denotes sexual autonomy. The public reception of Georges Clairin's portrait of Bernhardt, exhibited at the 1876 Salon (fig. 10), reflects the perceived late nineteenth century association between a woman's direct glance and sexual independence. The painting elicited a strong reaction from audiences and the following remark from a contemporary critic: "no lady . . . would have allowed herself to be pictured in such intimate attire or in so inviting a position" (qtd. Gold and Fizdale 1991, 134). These critics perceived Bernhardt's direct, steady gaze as a sexual invitation when paired with her boudoir attire, and relaxed, reclining posture, head propped up by one elbow: if the less prudish French found her physical attitude and direct stare unacceptable (as in the case of the famous outrage at the confronting stare of Manet's world-weary *Olympia* [1856]), the Victorians almost certainly would have. In terms of patriarchal anxiety, a woman's sexual invitation is problematic because it implies female agency. Austen's Ophelia draws on the same assumption because she ostensibly

solicits sexual attention with her direct stare and revealed bosom, signifying sexual independence, although her menacing appearance suggests otherwise, and forestalls any suggestion of a general invitation.



Fig. 9. Édouard Manet. *Olympia*. 1856, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig. 10. Georges Clairin. *Portrait of Sarah Bernhardt*. 1876, Petit Palais Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, Paris.

### Ophelia: Mad and Bad

While Austen's and Lemaire's childlike Ophelias ostensibly reflect the Victorian male tendency towards infantilizing her character in theatrical commentary and visual art, their sinister appearance undermines



it. This reflects the ostensibly childish buttercups she clasps in her final garland instead being described as crowflowers. Compared with traditional depictions, these Ophelias almost seem to menace the viewer with their aggressive sexuality. The traditional Ophelia's often childlike appearance was probably attractive to the Victorian male gaze because it rendered her sexuality less threatening, as in Lewis Carroll's disturbing photo portrait of six-year-old Alice Liddell as a beggar maid (1858). Lemaire's Ophelia adopts a coy, childlike expression. Her profusion of tangled hair and exaggerated features, (large eyes, small, pointed chin, and full mouth) also contribute to an impression of extreme youth. Coupled with her upward gaze, she resembles a child coyly defying a superior. Austen's Ophelia appears equally young, drawn cartoonishly with large eyes in a small face and a petite figure somewhat dwarfed by its attire. The unselfconscious sexuality of these Ophelias is reminiscent of a naked child unperturbed by the fact of its displayed sex.



Fig. 12. Arthur Hughes. *Ophelia*. 1852, Manchester Art Gallery, Manchester.

Sophie Duncan claims of Stella Campbell that “[a]s [her] thin body entered the New Woman iconography, reinscribing her body as childlike reimagined the volatile ‘New’ body as that of a docile, controllable child” (Duncan 2017, 113). She points to Bernard Shaw’s insistence on Campbell’s greenness as an actress: he patronizingly queried whether the actress was able to “fully appreciate the value” of her Ophelia, describing her performances as “immature” and her achievements as far from “conscious” (365). Similarly, the *Standard* dismissed her performance as that of “an overgrown child” who failed to be “sympathetic” (qtd. in Duncan 2017, 122). Some Victorian depictions of Ophelia appear extremely juvenile, such as Arthur Hughes’s *Ophelia* of 1852 (fig. 12), and Henry Lejeune’s of 1857. Quite often, Ophelias of the period,



particularly those in Keepsake portraits, have idealized, child-like features. This widespread tendency likely would have provoked critics to perceive Campbell's performance of Ophelia as childlike.

Austen's and Lemaire's Ophelias challenge this trend. For example, both complicate the daisy-as-purity motif as it pertains to Ophelia. Lemaire's Ophelia pinches a daisy between forefinger and index as if freshly plucked. As Young observes, its symbolic contrast with her conscious display of sexuality seems ironic (334). Austen's Ophelia symbolically points to the daisies at her feet, despite her suggestively exposed bosom. If interpreted as symbols of sexual deceit, the daisies these women hold may denote their mockery of the stereotypical sexual purity of nineteenth-century Ophelias. Both Ophelias have breasts that seem to perch above the bodice of their dress. With a partially rather than completely revealed chest, Ophelia's depiction is more erotic than in cases where her breasts are totally unconfined, such as in Delacroix's 1844 Ophelia, who is naked from her neck to her stomach. In this painting, "[Ophelia's] clothes are being stripped from her body by the motion of her fall" (Young 2013). In contrast, the nakedness of Lemaire's and Austen's Ophelias seems brazenly intentional, particularly as, unlike Delacroix's Ophelia, a fear of dying does not distract them from covering themselves.

The sexuality of Austen's Ophelia seems even more threatening when viewed alongside her frosty, forthright gaze. She seems to stand still, her feet neatly positioned side by side and her arms hanging in front of her as she stares ahead. Her apparent unconcern with her isolation in the wilderness at night exaggerates her seeming mental instability. Even more unsettling, we are her only company; isolated, Ophelia looks straight at the viewer. Situated high in the picture plane on a slope which runs downward towards the front of the image, she looms slightly; positioning Ophelia slightly higher than the viewer, this suggests authority and, on account of her irate stare, possible danger. Rendering her mad appearance more dramatic, her body fills the image vertically. She even appears cramped, hunched forward while the top of her head vanishes beyond the frame.

The coldly rejecting female is a Symbolist trope, appearing numerous times in Beardsley's illustrations. "Figure peering through the trees" (1893; book 4, chapter 27 of *Le Morte D'Arthur*; fig. 13), has its protagonist wearing a scrutinizing, angry expression. Coupled with the white, stick-thin trees, black background, and sense of confinement, this causes Beardsley's image superficially to resemble Austen's. However, in terms of composition, and the central subject's physiognomy, physical positioning, and attire, the illustrations are contrasting. Beardsley's figure is shown chest upwards and partially in profile, while Austen's is depicted in a full body portrait, facing the viewer. The body of Beardsley's figure is obscured by her thick, long hair, while Austen's wears medieval dress. What they share is antagonism towards the viewer.



Fig. 13. Beardsley. *Figure peering through the Trees*. 1893, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; also in *Le Morte D'Arthur*.

Like Austen's Ophelia, Lemaire's is menacing. She gestures ambiguously, one hand teasingly raising her skirts to expose an ankle before stepping into the water. Paired with her wolfish expression, this could be interpreted as both a sexual invitation and an implicit dare that we prevent her from drowning. Bram Dijkstra remarks that Lemaire's Ophelia "leer[s] with the glowering light of the vampire in her eyes, thus emphasizing the sexual origin of her madness—an aspect further accentuated by the very indecorous fashion in which her dress has slipped off her shoulders to reveal her breasts" (44). The word "leer" is traditionally associated with the male gaze because it denotes the sexual objectification of another person. Due to Dijkstra's emphasis on the "sexual origin" of Ophelia's insanity, his description recalls the Victorian male anxiety that assertive female sexuality could endanger masculinity. The myth of the vampire epitomizes that deep masculine fear (and fantasy) of the predatory feminine as draining men's vitality, devouring their very lifeblood.<sup>19</sup>

Austen's Ophelia shares some of the vampiric characteristics described by Dijkstra with Lemaire's. The former tilts forward and to the left slightly, her eyes fixed on the viewer. Imagining Lemaire's Ophelia as a

<sup>19</sup> Victorian vampires tend towards the feminine in appearance: some, like Sheridan LeFanu's Camilla, are simply female; others like Bram Stoker's Dracula, are pale-skinned with ruby lips.

“vampire,” and her bared breasts to be “indecorous,” Dijkstra implies that she threatens the viewer with her unashamedly voracious sexual appetite. Her apparent sexual desire recalls Hamlet and the Ghost’s conviction that Gertrude’s desire is parasitic and excessive: “she would hang on him / As if increase of appetite had grown / By what it fed on” (1.2.143–45), though “lust, though to a radiant angel link’d, / Will sate itself in a celestial bed / And prey on garbage” (1.5.55–57) When painting *Ophelia*, Lemaire may have borrowed from these characters’ description of Gertrude, with its implication of an indecorous sexual appetite and thus unforgivable sexual agency. More recently, Seth Lerer plainly speaks of the “creepy eroticism” of this *Ophelia*, comparing her to “a kind of crazy Liberté—her breasts bare, her hair disheveled, her flowers falling out of her hands” (Lerer 2012, 18). This description, falling flowers excepted, also suits Austen’s *Ophelia*. This figure’s madness is not sentimentalized and prettified; rather, she genuinely seems deranged.

As Rhodes (2008) observes, Henrietta Rae’s *Ophelia* (1890; fig. 16) resembles Lemaire’s on account of its subversive nature. Arguably, this comparison can be extended to include Austen’s *Ophelia*.<sup>20</sup> Rhodes attributes this resemblance to the fact that both were women artists (169). Rae was the first female artist whose work was included in the autumn exhibition of the Liverpool Corporation Galleries (now the Walker Art Gallery) (Fish 1905, 36). The Royal Academy previously had also hung her work, albeit in an obscure viewing spot, in a small room and above the line (Fish 1905, 58). In the painting, *Ophelia* stands before Claudius and Gertrude who are shying away from her in their seats. She turns back to look at them, proffering flowers; this creates a seductive, serpentine curve in her body. Bernhardt strikes a similar pose in a select few portraits, such as that painted by Clairin in 1876, showing her in her role as the Queen in Victor Hugo’s *Ruy Blas*. As Young remarks, turning back to look at the viewer while walking away, Bernhardt’s dress and train create a “serpentine movement” in her figure (9). Bart Westerweel observes that this snake-woman motif was “an attribute of the *femmes fatales* of the *fin de siècle*” (266).<sup>21</sup> It is significant, therefore, that Austen’s and Lemaire’s *Ophelias* lean forward and to the left slightly, like serpents. We also find this motif in Beardsley’s *Salome*, most notably in “The Peacock Skirt” image (fig. 16) and the “Contents Page Design” (fig. 14)—in the latter, *Salome*’s pose is strikingly like Bernhardt’s.

20 For a detailed description of Rae’s painting and biographical background, see Rhodes (165–174).

21 Westerweel argues that the woman-snake emblem was “not just an attribute of the *femmes fatale* of the *Fin de siècle*; it is an aesthetic ideal that pervaded all aspects of the culture” (Westerweel 1995, 266–67).



Fig. 14. Henrietta Rae. *Ophelia*. 1890, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.

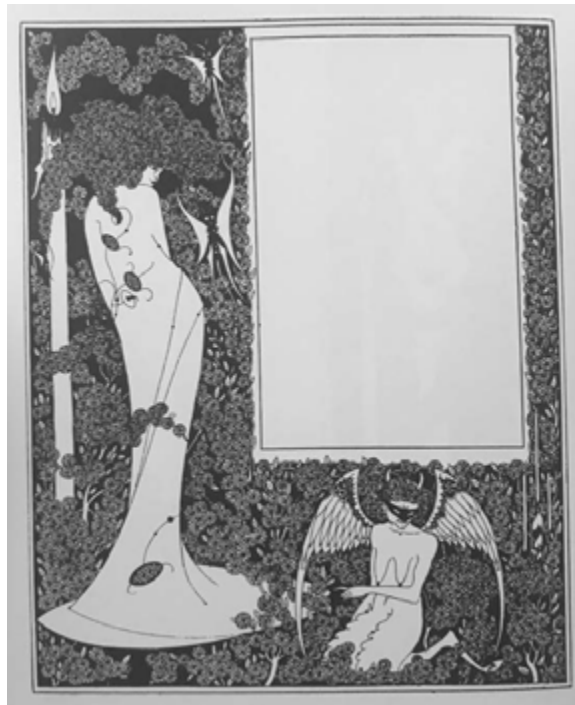


Fig. 15. Beardsley. 'Contents Page Design.' *Salome*, 1894.

Austen includes *femme fatale* imagery in his *Hamlet*, and “Midnight Ophelia” (fig. 1) may be another such example. While visual evidence points to his being influenced by Lemaire’s *Ophelia*, its superficial resemblance to Rae’s *Ophelia* suggests a second inspiration. While Austen’s inclusion of the snake-woman motif may merely reflect his adoption of artistic tropes popular in the *fin de siècle*, further similarities with Rae’s work also suggest that she influenced him. For example, both Ophelias intimidate their viewers with their direct stares, Austen’s wearing a baleful expression.



Fig. 16. “The Peacock Skirt” image. *Salome*, 1894.

Rae's Ophelia stands, dominating the foreground, unlike traditional depictions of the mad scene, where she is often shown kneeling in others' presence: O'Neil's *Ophelia*, for example, kneels while surrounded by courtiers and clasping Laertes's hands.<sup>22</sup> Lemaire's Ophelia is similarly empowered, standing front on while prompting the viewer to shy away like the King and Queen in Rae's painting. Austen's Ophelia echoes this in her unabashed frontal stance. Correspondingly, both Austen's and Rae's Ophelias disturb their audience with what their hands display. In Rae's painting, the King and Queen shy away from Ophelia's outstretched hand which clasps flowers, the traditional associations of different flower types communicating silent judgment. In Austen's image, Ophelia makes a harsh, phallic gesture. Rhodes suggests that Rae's work carries strong feminist undertones, and that this is reflected in her signing of the 1899 *Declaration in Favour of Women's Suffrage* (166). She determines that Rae's painting, like Lemaire's, was highly unusual for and ahead of its time. Given that both resemble Austen's Ophelia in some way, avant-garde, feminist readings of Ophelia likely inspired his interpretation of her character.

Considered alongside her mad appearance, the shielded “lap” of Austen's Ophelia suggests that Hamlet's brute sexism partly precipitates her psychological decline. Ophelia's taut, downward pointing hands shield her groin protectively. While this implicitly revokes sexual access, suggesting sexual independence and the

<sup>22</sup> Of which now only an engraving exists.



end of her and Hamlet's relationship, it also signifies her refusal ("No, my lord") of the prince's lewd request to "lie in [her] lap" (3.2.110–12). After subjecting Ophelia to a misogynistic tirade in the preceding scene ("I have heard of your paintings well enough" [3.1.141]), Hamlet sexually harasses her.

While implicitly rejecting any sexual encounters with Hamlet, Austen's Ophelia contemptuously defies onlookers with the same gesture. The positioning of her hands also alludes to her bawdy songs, her right hand with index finger pointed imitating a phallus. Ophelia traditionally is shown holding flowers, in part because it is the hanging of these "weedy trophies" that causes her to drown (4.7.173). In contrast, Austen's Ophelia asserts a stereotypically masculine authority, obscenely gesticulating in front of her groin in imitation of a penis, as if to confuse and intimidate the viewer. Gertrude mentions "dead men's fingers" that "liberal shepherds give a grosser name" as among the flowers in Ophelia's "garlands" before she drowns (167; 169–70), suggesting that this could be a textual influence on Austen's readerly imagination. The appearance of Austen's Ophelia mimics a "cold maid," but does so with aggression and irony, as her coldness also anticipates her death (170). Prompting prudish viewers to recoil from her lewdness, this Ophelia evokes Hamlet's disgust towards female sexual desire. Lemaire's Ophelia has the same effect. Imagery of the natural world (*natura naturata*) can also convey motifs pertaining to feminine sexuality (*natura naturans*).

The natural surroundings in this drawing are laden with feminine symbolism, suggesting that Mother Nature protects Austen's Ophelia but also that the latter is confined to her role as a woman. Although it is implied that Ophelia is in a forest, a few scrawny, perhaps ash, trees punctuating the foreground, the background is pitch-black, ostensibly denoting the dead of night. This also recalls her "good night" as she departs the first madness scene (4.5.72), and the death that this portends; this line is shown on the opposite page. The inscrutable darkness is also reminiscent of a womb, the formation of the trees protectively clustering around Ophelia seeming similarly womb-like. Split along their center, their leaves resemble vulvas, while the pendant around Ophelia's neck mirrors ovaries and a uterus; the pendant seems also to refer to the "pendent boughs" on which Ophelia attempts to hang "her crownet weeds" (4.7.171).

Because this drawing hints at Ophelia's immersion in nature, it intimates her liberation from patriarchal oppression. Freed from its constraints, however, she poses a threat to the masculine world in which she lives, and her demise may represent the only plausible outcome. The vertically diagonal folds of Ophelia's dress and inner sleeves in Austen's image, as well as the leaf pattern of her blouse, cause her to mirror the trees and thus merge visually with her surroundings. A similar effect is produced in a wood engraving of Ophelia by Lucien Pissarro, employed as the frontispiece to volume 2 of Jules Laforgue's *Moralités Légendaires* (1897; fig. 17); the sweeping upward lines of Ophelia's skirt and hair resembles the vertical greenery, prompting Young to remark that "[Pissarro's Ophelia] seems to have nowhere to go except forward into the brook at her feet" (329).



Fig. 17. Lucien Pissarro. 1897. Frontispiece illustration of Ophelia by the brook. In *Moralités Légendaires*, vol. 2, by Jules Laforgue. London: Eragny Press.

It also interpretable that, underscoring women's close connection with nature and thus their "natural, womanly" roles as domestic childbearers, the womblike enfolding of Ophelia in Austen's image also represents this role's ultimately deadly domination over her. Given her situation on a raised mound and surrounded by a few fragile-looking trees, it is ambiguous whether Mother Nature and Ophelia's reproductive potential protects her or renders her vulnerable, leaving her out in the open. Contributing to an impression of peril, Ophelia's mistrustful expression and wary body language, together with her positioning in a small protective space, call to mind a deer spied while grazing. Austen's imagery here (and elsewhere) demonstrates his imaginative close reading of Shakespeare's text and its hints of Ophelia's occluded sexual agency. Other themes relating to Ophelia which tend to be simplified or obscured by a traditional patriarchal reading are sex, death, and suffering. This process makes Ophelia's humanity partly invisible, contributing to a more sympathetic impression of her abusive lover.

## Concluding Thoughts

Austen's drawings re-envisage the sentimental Victorian perception of Ophelia as tenderly pathetic and lacking in agency, a view rooted in the patriarchal reduction of the feminine which produces a flattened reading of Ophelia's textual complexity. This re-envisaging partly reflects contemporary onstage practices but also exceeds them in the degree to which they portray her with psychological autonomy. Ophelia is moved into a new space regarding the control she has over her image and herself, including with respect to her sexuality. These images draw the viewer's attention to her rather than to Hamlet's suffering, portraying her as a victim but not of the sentimentalized variety (the victim of her own weakness). The reading they offer anticipates onstage and filmic interpretations of Ophelia later in the twentieth century; further, these illustrations consolidate an emerging trend of (female) artists depicting Ophelia with agency, as in the works of Rae and Lemaire.

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