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Transmutations of Ophelia's "Melodious Lay"

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Literature and Language

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in English

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by

Danielle Nicole Byington

May 2017

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Keywords: Ophelia, Ekphrasis, Shakespeare, Millais, Art History, Representation, Translation

## ABSTRACT

Transmutations of Ophelia's "Melodious Lay"

by

Danielle Nicole Byington

There are multiple ways in which language and image share one another's aesthetic message, such as traditional ekphrasis, which uses language to describe a work of art, or notional ekphrasis, which involves literature describing something that can be considered a work of art but does not physically exist at the time the description is written. However, these two terms are not inclusive to *all* artworks depicting literature or literature depicting artworks. Several scenes and characters from literature have been appropriated in art and the numerous paintings of Ophelia's death as described by Gertrude in *Hamlet*, specifically Millais' *Ophelia*, is the focus of this project. Throughout this thesis, I analyze Gertrude's account in three sections—the landscape, the body, and the voice—and compare it to its transmutation on the canvas.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe.”  
--Sir Philip Sydney, *Astrophil and Stella*

A painting by Francesco Furini, *Allegory of the Arts*, depicts the muses of Painting and Poetry engaged in a whisper. The muse of painting holds her paintbrush in one hand, and a mask resting behind her wrist as if it is not needed. Her loose robe partially exposes her body, and her gaze looks at her sister rather than the audience and her face is shadowed by the face of Poetry. The muse of poetry, however, looks intently back at the observer while she receives her sister’s message. Unlike the other muse, her body is not only covered, but turned away from potential onlookers. In one of her hands, which embraces the muse of painting, she welds her quill, and has already composed some writing. The narrative of this image engenders a theoretical space of word and image not only getting along but having a conversation—one that we cannot hear; however, though there is concordance, the conversation is one-sided: Painting speaks, and Poetry listens. Deciphering this conversation can allow for further understanding regarding the appropriation and translation that occurs in ekphrasis.

There are multiple ways in which the visual arts and the language arts share one another’s aesthetic message. Ekphrasis is classically defined as poetry or a detailed description about a work of art, suggesting that the visual product of an artist has inspired a writer to translate the musings of that image into words. The reversal of this sequence, notional ekphrasis, involves literature describing something that can be considered a work of art but does not physically exist at the time the description is written—such as the description of Achilles’ shield in *The Iliad*. When it comes to notional ekphrasis, the technical definition of this term is not inclusive to *all*

art works depicting characters and scenes from literature since the original text may not be a verbal manifestation of a painting or sculpture. Art works such as the statue *Laöcoon* and paintings like William Hogarth's *A Scene from 'The Beggar's Opera' VI*, do not fit the mold of ekphrasis or notional ekphrasis because their textual sources do not prescribe these scenes as pieces of art; however, there are numerous instances of these works.

Regarding this category of images which illustrates scenes from literature, I will specifically be examining Gertrude's account of Ophelia's death in *Hamlet*. The eighteen lines describe where and how Ophelia has drowned:

There is a willow grows askant the brook  
That shows his hoary leaves in the glassy stream.  
Therewith fantastic garlands did she come  
Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,  
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,  
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.  
There, on the pendant boughs her crownet weeds  
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,  
When down her weedy trophies and herself  
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,  
And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up,  
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds  
As one incapable of her own distress,  
Or like a creature native and endued  
Unto that element. But long it could not be



Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,  
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay  
To muddy death. (4.7.164-81)<sup>1</sup>

Representations of this scene have been created several times by many artists, and “Why?” becomes an unavoidable question. Although this scene is not notional ekphrasis, it seems to incite an ekphrastic desire as so many artists have made Ophelia their subject, and more than often she is portrayed as part of Gertrude’s account rather than any of her other instances in the play. After the deaths of Polonius and Laertes, men who “revise” Ophelia’s character with the advice they give her, Martha C. Ronk describes Ophelia as possessing an open-canvas quality as those who originally created her persona are absent (21-22). This would explain not only the choice to represent Ophelia, but to specifically recreate a segment of this scene. Roman Jakobson defines a relevant type of translation in linguistics—transmutation—as verbal signage being adapted into non-verbal signage (233); this happens with the many appropriations of Ophelia’s death in art. Like Ronk’s suggestion that Ophelia appeals to artists who want to take liberties with their adaptation of her on the canvas, transmutation best describes the situation of the eighteen lines being translated in many different ways. These representations do not just illustrate instances of action, but transmute a scene from the limits of language to vast visual possibilities.

Different segments of this scene have been rendered on canvas by various artists who tend to focus on either the beginning, the middle, or the end of the collective lines. Throughout this project, I will refer to these sections as the landscape, the body, and the voice. The landscape portion of lines indicates to the audience the setting, the answer to Laertes’s “O

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<sup>1</sup> Though Ophelia is the subject of the succeeding gravedigger’s scene, only a mentioning that she drowned is brought up again; there is not another vivid description relayed to the audience about her death.

Where?” Next is the body; this portion of lines explains what happens to Ophelia’s body in this landscape, representations conveying the motion of her figure falling or on the brink of falling into the brook. The final section, the voice, focuses not only on Ophelia’s voice sinking away as she drowns, but also the voices of those rendering this image. Breaking Gertrude’s account into these three sections allows for a more organized analysis of the class of Ophelia paintings and how the transmutation of the description typically focuses on only a few lines instead of the entire scene.

The attention given to either the landscape, the body, or the voice, is detectable across the spectrum art representing Ophelia. Arthur Hughes, John William Waterhouse—who created three different paintings—and Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret, demonstrate their Ophelias collecting flowers near water, a scene with a greater emphasis on the landscape. Alexandre Cabanel, Richard Westall, and Carl F. W. Trautschold provide paintings exclusive to the lines that inform readers of Ophelia falling into the brook, the concentration on the motion of her accident centering on the body<sup>2</sup>. Paul Steck, Léopold Burthe, and Salvador Dalí have all produced Ophelias who are drowning or drowned, ceasing the voice of “her melodious lay.”<sup>3</sup> While these are not the only paintings of Ophelia, I am including them for comparison based on their familiarity.

Sir John Everett Millais’ *Ophelia* differs from this catalog of other Ophelias in that it manages to encompass all the qualities of the voice, the body, and the landscape and not just a singular part of the representation. Other paintings of Ophelia tend to capture only one segment

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<sup>2</sup> Paintings in this category also frequently reflect the debate of whether Ophelia’s death was an accident or a suicide. This is demonstrated by artists through Ophelia’s facial expression—her lack of coherent concern or fear from the fall conveying one side or the other.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Delaroche’s *The Young Martyr* is also often mistaken for an Ophelia painting in this category by those unknowing.

of the eighteen lines, but Millais' work demonstrates an equal focus on the landscape and what Ophelia is doing there with the residual flowers drifting from her hand, her body is still in the first moments preceding the fall with "her clothes spread wide, / And mermaid-like," yet the segment of the voice is also exhibited, as "she chant[s] snatches of old lauds" with her mouth partly open—a trademark of Pre-Raphaelite women in their paintings. The point is that Millais' painting manages to address Gertrude's eighteen lines in one holistic image, instead of capturing only a singular sphere of the scene's textual physiognomy.

In further examination of this scene, I will also look at three constants that occur throughout the eighteen lines which significantly inform the content of the image: the willow, the water, and the flowers. The willow is the landmark for the landscape, and is at fault for Ophelia's body falling which leads to the last of her voice before she drowns. The water simultaneously informs us of the location like the willow, since the tree "shows [its] hoary leaves in the glassy stream," and breaks the fall of Ophelia's body, but is ultimately what drowns her voice. The flowers are why Ophelia is in this landscape as she collects them, and when the "envious sliver" breaks, the flowers fall into the brook like her body, eventually disappearing in the water, like Ophelia's voice<sup>4</sup>. The relationship between the willow, the water, and the flowers acts as a sub-interconnectivity within the landscape, the body, and the voice of transmutations of Ophelia's death.

Additionally, I will discuss theorists throughout this project whose work brings a greater insight to my research. One of these is Freddie Rokem, who writes about Walter Benjamin's "thought-images," and explains the role of the voice as a performance of words creating images. Another individual's work I will incorporate in a later chapter is that of Elaine Scarry, whose

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<sup>4</sup> While a visualization captures all three of these constants in the scene, the flowers are only elements verbally making it through the landscape, the body, and the voice sections.

philosophical writings especially enlighten examination of the constant of flowers throughout the scene's representations, as well as the role of the body and its conceptual experience of pain. Finally, the precise work of Caroline Spurgeon will be included throughout this project, her scholarship on Shakespeare's imagery significantly influencing several points I address. The combination of these writers has allowed me to bolster an argument that explores not only the territory between art and poetry, but offers a new space for the special genre of Ophelia transmutations conveyed in painting from literature.

The analysis that can be deduced between the landscape, the body, and the voice of Millais' painting allows the observer to further experience the visual aesthetic of the verbal text. Elaine Scarry's essay, "On Vivacity," explores what she calls "mimetic content," language that does what traditional ekphrasis does—only there is no artwork to which to reference, or words that assimilate to create notional ekphrasis—only the words I will be discussing do not describe art. As Scarry details in her mimetic content, "there is no sensory content, whether immediate or delayed," but "mimetic content [is] the figural rooms and faces and weather that we mimetically see, touch, and hear, though in no case do we actually do so" (3). So, it is not just the instance of mimesis—a representation of real life we can find in the arts—to be broken down with textual physiognomy, but the mimetic content layered throughout it, the constants of the willow, the water, and the flowers acting as the real-life representations upon which Shakespeare's verse is presented.

W. J. T. Mitchell quotes Emerson describing that "the most fruitful conversations are always between two persons, not three" (47), and the conversation between painting and poetry has been happening for a long time:

“This principle may help to explain why the dialogue between poetry and painting has tended to dominate general discussions of the arts. [...] the differences between words and images seem so fundamental. They are not merely *different* kinds of creatures, but *opposite* kinds. (Emphasis Original *Iconology* 47)

Considering, again, Furini’s painting, this conversation shared between word and image is best viewed as mutual correspondence that does not just duplicate the other’s message; instead, it creates a new narrative that previously did not exist. As Stephen Cheeke states, the conversation between poetry and art is “the *nature* of the *encounter* between the verbal and the visual” (Emphasis Mine 13), meaning that this conversation and the space that contains it innately entails both mediums—specifically when the painting and the poetry involve the same subject. When discussing how language responds to an image—or vice versa—combing through the anatomy of a transmutation, such as the representations of Ophelia on the canvas, allows the source that inspired it to be thoroughly dissected, developing a greater understanding of the ekphrastic desire to translate Gertrude’s account visually.

Throughout the following chapters, I will isolate each phase of Gertrude’s account—the landscape, the body, and the voice—and discuss the three constants layered throughout. In the landscape section, details ranging from the personality of the setting to the audience’s expectations of the scenery will be discussed, as well as how Millais’ adaptation of the fictional creek bank from Gertrude’s account compares to the settings rendered by other artists. In the body chapter, I will analyze the lines of the scene’s transmutation that center on Ophelia’s fall, and compare the notion of her body on the canvas to the various ways in which her figure is painted by other artists, often captured at the cusp of her fall. In the final chapter, that of the

voice, I will consider each source of the depiction—Shakespeare, Gertrude, and Millais—while juxtaposing it to the final segment of the scene that observes Ophelia’s “muddy death.”

## CHAPTER 2

### TRANSMUTATION AND THE LANDSCAPE OF “HER MELODIOUS LAY”

#### Introduction to the Role of the Landscape

Landscapes in both literature and paintings act as a narrative’s container, allowing language and image to intertwine and show an audience a scene’s setting. In fiction, poetry, or drama, for example, the knowledge we have of the characters’ surroundings can influence our expectations of the conflict and resolution—perhaps even more than the language. In this same way, the landscape of an image based on a literary scene becomes a part of the text’s face, inferring to the observer many potentials of the narrative without any words. By the time Millais had painted *Ophelia* in the mid-nineteenth century, landscape painting had become recognized as a prestigious medium, specifically for its ability to show the role of nature in history (Park West Gallery). Similarly, by singling out the landscape in Millais’ *Ophelia*, the observer can trace the role played by the landscape in the image’s narrative.

The landscape conveys the narrative of the text’s scene it reflects; however, the landscape will also reflect any intrinsic motifs symbolized by said text’s scene, as well. Mitchell refers to landscapes translating the historical in his introduction to *Landscapes and Power*, juxtaposing this interpretation to the semiotic potentials of the landscape:

The study of landscape has gone through two major shifts in this century: the first (associated with modernism) attempted to read this history of landscape primarily on the basis of a history of landscape painting, and to narrativize that history as a progressive movement toward purification of the visual field; the second (associated with postmodernism) tended to decenter the role of painting and pure formal visuality in favor

of a semiotic and hermeneutic approach that treated landscape as an allegory of psychological or ideological themes. (1)

Especially because I am writing about the transmutation of Millais' *Ophelia* and the respective eighteen lines from *Hamlet* on which the painting is based, I will be considering both of Mitchell's defined interpretations while discussing the landscape's role in this chapter. By examining the three elements constantly present throughout Gertrude's speech of Ophelia's death—the willow, the water, and the flowers—and how these objects influence our perception of the landscape on the page and the canvas, examining the transmutation of the scene can provide a more in depth look into its aesthetic construction.

#### The Role of the Willow in the Landscape

Classically, the medium of landscape paintings is comprised of any various degree of terrain, trees often being a significant factor. Stretches of earth might be demonstrated as soft horizons, perhaps with the inclusion of folds and juts from slopes or mountains. The presence of trees in a landscape painting creates a focal point that typically exists vertically, balancing the feminine quality of the horizon's ability to carry things it grows with the masculine, phallic trees growing from the ground. With their upright figures, trees in landscape paintings also mimic the human figure, acting as bodies contributing to the narrative of the image. Similarly, the willow near the location of Ophelia's death is described Gertrude and depicted by Millais as much a persona as the drowning girl.

#### Gertrude's Description of the Willow in the Landscape

In Act 4, Scene 7, Queen Gertrude enters and tells Laertes that his sister, Ophelia, has drowned, to which Laertes asks, "Drowned! O, where?" (4.7.163). Gertrude begins the explanation of Ophelia's death:



There is a willow grows askant the brook  
That shows his hoary leaves in the glassy stream.  
Therewith fantastic garlands did she come  
Of crowsfeet, nettles, daisies, and long purples,  
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,  
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them. (4.7.164-9)<sup>5</sup>

These six lines, which I note as the foundation of the landscape, are all about the foundation of the location. When Laertes asks, "Drowned! O, where?" the question directly points to wanting to know *where*, not *how*, but it is as if something about the landscape described by Gertrude will infer to Laertes that is he knows *where* his sister drowned, he will know *how* his sister drowned.

The willow is the first object of the landscape to be cited, even before the brook in which Ophelia drowns, as if it is an accessory to her death. Also, the willow "shows [its] hoary leaves in the glassy stream," placing itself in the place where Ophelia will die, its image fused into the water that will drown her. After the location of the brook is identified with "*There is a willow*" (Emphasis Mine), the second complete sentence of Gertrude's speech points to the location a second time with, "*Therewith fantastic garlands*" (Emphasis Mine), the first time describing the location without Ophelia, the second time depicting her in the landscape. Gertrude's three lines indicate a space that is not only an alternate to the play's scene but is a setting otherwise never visited, making the landscape allegorical to Ophelia, the masculine properties of the willow perhaps representing Hamlet.

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<sup>5</sup> I end the landscape section of Gertrude's description here because nothing has happened to Ophelia's body yet.

## Millais' Depiction of the Willow in the Landscape

While Gertrude's speech nearly personifies the willow as another character, Millais demonstrates a willow that virtually disappears into the landscape. This blending in of the scene-critical tree maybe due to our expectations of an ideal willow—a weeping willow. However, the text never refers to the tree as a *weeping* willow. Instead of drooping, melancholy limbs, Millais' willow defies the ideology of a weeping willow—though this is a tragic scene—and utilizes a breed of willow the painter observed in Surrey by the Hogsmill River while creating his work: the crack willow (Tate Britain). The crack willow<sup>6</sup>, or *Salix fragilis*, also commonly called brittle willow, gets its name from the weak constitution of its branches which easily snap from the trunk (USDA Forest Service), which, of course, points to the next moment of Gertrude's account in which the bough breaks. While the inclusion of this willow species may have been based purely on Millais' actual observations for his work, the presence of the crack willow instead of the weeping willow with its more elastic-like branches better serves the realism of the scene.

Comparing Millais' landscape to the dual space created by Gertrude's lines, a similar parallel occurs involving the willow preceding Ophelia's presence. Just as the lines point to the willow and its landscape first, "There is a willow that grows askant the brook," then in the next sentence insert Ophelia, "Therewith fantastic garlands did she come," Millais first painted the landscape of the artwork, later inserting his observation of Elizabeth Siddal in a bathtub posing as Ophelia some months later (Secher). Millais not only channels the physical role of the tree branch by selecting the crack willow, but additionally the painter echoes a personification of Ophelia's brittle mental state at this point in the play.

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<sup>6</sup> The appearance of the crack willow also seems more aesthetically synonymous with Ophelia's madness, considering its somewhat derranged arrangement of branches.

### Other Artists' Depictions of the Willow in the Landscape

As mentioned in the introduction, other artists have appropriated Ophelia's death on the canvas, and specifically the paintings of Arthur Hughes, John William Waterhouse, and Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret demonstrate Ophelia in the landscape segment of the scene. The presence of the willow in Hughes' painting conforms to the ideal of the weeping willow, its identity noticeable with one of its drooping branches plunging into the scope of the picture. Waterhouse's *Ophelia*, 1894 also displays the maiden perched on the tree trunk like Hughes' work; however, Waterhouse's painting, like Millais', incorporates the crack willow instead of the weeping willow. Unlike these two paintings, Dagnan-Bouveret's Ophelia is not accompanied by the willow; instead, her figure is tall and erect, much like the other trees in the background, melding her body with the idea of the willow's role in Gertrude's account.

### The Role of the Water in the Landscape

Landscape paintings attempt to replicate the intrinsic quality of a place, and that place exists as its own past, present, and future in one space—on its canvas. When moving water is present in a landscape painting, it does not rely on the same permanent stillness, but rather, it figuratively travels through the picture. Of course, painters can represent paused creeks with crests or ripples, anchoring the water's movement to its brush strokes on the canvas; however, the audience knows that seeing the image in real life would mean everything is static *except* the water. Unlike an ocean or lake, in which a subject within this body of water has many directions it can travel, observers can understand a river, stream, creek, or brook offers only one direction, one resulting movement, even if the canvas confines its imagined flow. In the same way that a painter can cease the movement of water, a writer can tell their audience that it is moving. These

running streams in pages and motionless currents on canvases create a binary present in Millais' *Ophelia*.

#### Gertrude's Description of the Water in the Landscape

When Gertrude answers Laertes' "O, Where?" with the first six lines of her speech, the landscape is designed by her language, the willow and Ophelia designated as players in the potential conflict—but so is the brook with its minute mention. Gertrude says the willow "shows his hoary leaves in the glassy stream," and though she marks the precise area with the tree, the willow becomes synonymous with the stream as the audience cannot see the water's surface without seeing the tree's reflection, exemplifying the stream's dominance in this landscape by acting as a container for everything around it. The water's glassy surface depicts a clean, nearly unnaturally manicured landscape, as if it is a fishbowl inside of which the audience can see the narrative of the play. This shiny surface the Queen describes reflects the adjectival, common name of the crack willow or brittle willow, and like so, the fragile state of the "glassy" stream experiences a similar shatter once Ophelia falls into the water, the mental state she represents departing from the landscape's ground—that of the brittle crack willow—to become a part of the aquatic figure figuratively broken in the landscape.

#### Millais' Depiction of the Water in the Landscape

The landscape that becomes the famous visual in Millais' work takes some unnatural liberties in representing the natural, primarily the water. Millais, being a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, adhered to a mission statement assuming to imitate nature with utmost realism (Plunkett et al. 150), an artistic promise to which he is clearly faithful in his bibliography of work, yet has ignored when considering the verbal description of Ophelia's water. While Gertrude's speech describes a landscape focusing on a clear running stream, the water in Millais'

painting has an abundance of algae, conveying an unnatural stagnation. Millais modeled his landscape after the Hogsmill River in Surrey, England which is also not a motionless body of water. This artistic choice to paint the water's surface with algae does not reflect intentions of realism, but a decision to alter any suggested movement in the narrative. This characteristic of the painting acts as a metacommentary on the scene it replicates by figuratively pausing the narration, transforming the image into a relic of Ophelia's death.

Though Millais has painted a body of water contrary to Gertrude's description, the "glassy stream" and the landscape exists in a small detail of his painting: in Ophelia's eyes. The sheen the artist has applied to the model's eyes resembles that of welling tears. This relationship of the language and the image may not be literal, but the figurative connection of these hysteria-glazed eyes and the "glassy streams" of tears they might produce melds the written landscape with Millais' representation of Ophelia's mental state. In Mitchell's theory of the metapicture, the image comments on its content ("Metapicture" 38), and with the "glassy stream" being altered from the landscape outside of Ophelia's body to the internal landscape of her grief, her potential "glassy stream[s]" of tears act as a metacommentary which connects these exterior and interior landscapes. This fusion of the text-based description of water and Millais' rendering and manipulation of it on the canvas acts as a prime example of how exploring the landscape and its relationship with the water in this scene tells us more about artistic appropriation of Gertrude's account.

#### Other Artists' Depictions of the Water in the Landscape

Other paintings of Ophelia also exemplify the relationship between the water and the landscape in Gertrude's speech, sharing similarities and differences with Millais' work. Arthur Hughes' 1852 painting, also titled *Ophelia*, exhibits a likeness to Millais' with its pond-still

water cradling algae. While John William Waterhouse's *Ophelia*, 1910 painting has a glimpse of the water behind a crazed Ophelia, only his 1894 painting of Ophelia relies on the water as a significant component of its landscape. The body of water in *Ophelia*, 1894, like that of Millais and Hughes, portrays stillness, lily pads littering the surface of what should be the "glassy stream." Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret's *Ophelia* displays a large body of water behind the maiden, and though it is not smothered with algae or lily pads, its surface provides only a glint of reflective surface, the rest of the water's composition dark and still. Though these stationary landscapes are natural on their own, they provide an unnatural representation of the text. Gertrude's speech depicts a flowing body of water, but the choice of several artists to immobilize this element slows down the narrative of the tragedy's scene, perhaps so that its image is not merely left "off stage."

#### The Role of the Flowers in the Landscape

As I mentioned earlier, the presence of trees in a landscape painting can remind the observer of human figures as they stand erect within the setting, and like said plant life echoing people, flowers in the landscape are like the faces of those anonymous figures. In her essay, "Imagining Flowers: Perceptual Mimesis," Elaine Scarry explores the difference between our imagining of a human face versus the imagining of a flower:

The daydreamed face expresses the lapse of the imagination from the perceptual ideal it has taken as its standard [as there is no standard for an imagined face], whereas the daydreamed blossom...expresses the capacity of the imagination to perform its mimesis so successfully that one cannot be sure an act of perception has not actually taken place.

(92)

Scarry goes on to explain how this lack of challenge in summoning to our minds the image of a flower compared to the impossibility of imagining a face, even with an author's directions, defines "what is at stake": the ultimate conflict of the reader "sees" when they read the text ("Imagining Flowers: Perceptual Mimesis" 92). Because of this visual conflict of perception, the flowers are not only part of the landscape, but, in this instance, also become the identity of an otherwise faceless Ophelia, conflating her visage with the landscape.

#### Gertrude's Description of the Flowers in the Landscape

When Gertrude describes the landscape where the willow and brook are located, she states that, "Therewith fantastic garlands did she come / Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples" (4.5.166-7), telling the audience why Ophelia is in this landscape, or rather what she is doing in this landscape. Besides being part of Ophelia's mission to hang the garlands from the willow, no further description of these flowers is given, and as Scarry states, "The poet gives us the easily imaginable flower (the object that we can fairly successively imagine even in daydreaming) and does so in order to carry onto that surface other, much less easily imaginable images" ("Imagining Flowers: Perceptual Mimesis" 95). Thus, Gertrude's flower catalog acts as a hinge to which the conflict is adhered of Ophelia eventually falling into the brook and drowning due to hanging the "crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples" (4.5.167).

#### Millais' Depiction of the Flowers in the Landscape

The catalog of flowers listed in the landscape segment of the scene informs the audience about not only what Ophelia is doing there, but the named flowers also clearly influence the details of Millais' painting. The "crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples" make their way from Ophelia's garlands to the vegetation with which Millais fills his canvas, simple flower names unaccompanied by textual description with which the painter liberally surrounds the

landscape containing Ophelia's death, just as Scarry has suggested. Of the four flowers mentioned to be in the garland, Millais renders only the daisies in the floral braid spilling from Ophelia's hand in the water. Millais's painting places the remaining three cataloged flowers growing naturally along the creek bed, this artistic liberty creating an image of these flowers being out of reach, acting as observers in the landscape, their blossoms like faces of those who observe the event and relay the information to Gertrude.

#### Other Artists' Depictions of the Flowers in the Landscape

The depiction of flowers in the Ophelia paintings of Hughes, Waterhouse, and Dagnan-Bouveret all also demonstrate deviations from Gertrude's account. Hughes' painting is heavily saturated with green vegetation, the only glimpse of petals coming from a small collection grasped by Ophelia, almost dismissible by her large bundle of Greater Pond Sedge and a crown made of the same grass; the small flowers she drops into the water may be of the four Gertrude names, but the artist has chosen to ignore this detail. In Waterhouse's three renderings of Ophelia, the flowers transition from being a large part of the landscape in the 1889 version with only a few plucked crowsfeet in Ophelia's hand, to less flowers growing in the landscape and more having been collected by Ophelia in the 1894 painting, and finally, in the 1910 painting, nearly no flowers grow in the landscape; several flowers are in the painting, but they have all been collected by Ophelia. Daisies are the predominant flower in each of the three pictures. The relationship between the flowers and the landscape in Dagnan-Bouveret's Ophelia is similar to that of Hughes; the flowers have a minimal presence, being only in her coronet and hands but not actually in the landscape. It seems these discussed artists who have focused on the lines of the



landscape more frequently attach the flowers to Ophelia's body than the ground, which addresses her body as part of the landscape and not an object inserted into it.<sup>7</sup>

### Chapter Conclusion

The role of the landscape in transmutation extrapolates the place that influences our ideas about the narrative. The dual landscape described by Gertrude, the place without a person and the place interrupted by a disturbed girl, creates expectations about the conflation of Ophelia and the willow as one object in one setting is a phenomenon that occurs in the landscape segment of this scene, and this hybrid of person and tree is best explained with Mitchell's ekphrastic other. In the landscape segment, the otherness experienced likely comes from the blurring of lines between landscape and girl, the separation of Ophelia's figure from the willow, "the glassy stream," and the flowers initiating the first phase, "ekphrastic indifference." As Gertrude begins her account, the audience cannot possibly all recognize the same landscape in their minds, and the realization of this, according to Mitchell, becomes the ekphrastic indifference. Because there is an anxiety to "see" the same landscape, the other elements, such as Ophelia, the willow, the water, and the flowers, begin to merge. Charles Harrison discusses this merger, describing bodies as metaphorically intertwining with their respective landscapes, and suggests cliffs and folds or separations of land as symbolic of "furrows of flesh, and specifically the human vulva" (221). Millais' image of Ophelia in a stream places the hysterical maiden between two folds of ground,<sup>8</sup> and she drowns within a space resembling the anatomy that represents the virtue she once had, her madness not just part of the landscape, but the landscape part of her ruin.

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<sup>7</sup> This could also point to Laertes' later line at Ophelia's burial, "And from her fair and unpolluted flesh / May violets spring" (5.1.228-29).

<sup>8</sup> The imagery also echoes *The Murder of Gonzago* scene, in which, while watching the play within the play, Hamlet asks Ophelia, "Lady, shall I lie in your lap?" (3.2.108) and upon her refusal, "That's a fair thought to lie between maid's legs" (3.2.112).

When we consider a setting and its landscape, the sizes in which we imagine the content of that landscape will reflect the scale of which we imagine the picture of place. Scarry describes how flowers are the perfect size for imagining up close without sparing their entire image (“Imagining Flowers: Perceptual Mimesis” 95). This idea of mentally miniaturizing larger visuals in order to see all of their details at once suggests that the flowers listed in Gertrude’s description are brought closer to our eyes with the mentioning of their names, but withdrawn and placed in the landscape by Millais. The ekphrastic other explains the eerie presence of the flowers in the landscape. Some of the flower catalog is growing along the creek’s bank instead of being woven in the floral garland Ophelia still holds in her hand. The expectation set up by the text potentially disrupts our interpretation of the landscape in Millais’ painting, the anxiety of experiencing a difference between verbal description and visual depiction as described by Mitchell (157). The willow, the water, and the flowers all expose both the blending of language and image, but also the anxiety to find their separation.

## CHAPTER 3

### TRANSMUTATION AND THE BODY OF “HER MELODIOUS LAY”

#### Introduction to the Role of the Body

While a described landscape can inform how we perceive a narrative or shape our expectations of that storyline, once the bodies of characters are introduced we rely on their presence as they reveal to us the actions, conflicts, and results that make interpreting a story possible. Both the verbally and visually described posture of a body can indicate joy or pain that asks us to empathize with a character, an understanding obtainable due to familiarity with our own bodies. The body’s role is more concerned with the figure, since the collective of the landscape, body, and voice provide the “face.” On the canvas, the body imitates actions, while language describing the same scene tells readers how to visualize the body—directly or indirectly—so that the mimesis of those actions can be imagined.

This role of the body is similar to the purpose of stage directions. Much like the body’s portrayal in the translation from word to image, the history of Shakespeare’s quartos primarily began with just the lines, the stage directions later added; however, since Ophelia’s death does not happen on stage, the rendering of her death on canvas fulfills our mimetic imagining of her body’s blocking off stage, Gertrude’s account acting as the stage directions. These pseudo stage directions fill the canvas in the same way that interpretive dance tells a story, as Daria Halprin states, with the body’s movement through space, the awareness of what the figure can intimate basically becoming not just a symbolic moment, but even a spiritual one (65). In this chapter, I will examine how the body’s role implies movement in images and emotions with language to influence our imagining of Gertrude’s description of Ophelia’s death.

### The Role of the Willow in the Body

In the previous chapter, I discussed the likeness of trees and bodies in the landscape, how the former visually mimics the latter. In the landscape of this scene, the physical likeness of the willow and Ophelia begins with their vertical position; however, neither the girl nor the tree are perfectly upright. The landscape segment informs readers that the willow “grows askant the brook,” and as Gertrude’s speech transitions to the body’s respective section of lines, it is implied that Ophelia, too, is leaning over the water as she “clamber[s] to hang” her garlands on the branches. The relationship between the body and the presence of the willow spans beyond their similar external image to an internalized anthropomorphism, the trunk and the limbs of the tree personified as if it, too, suffers like the trunk and the limbs of Ophelia’s body. Ophelia’s emotional suffering is only ever observable; she does not bluntly describe her pain. According to Scarry, the experience of such pain—mental or physical—is uncommunicable, its “unsharability” more easily understood through metaphors and a reliance on “the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (*The Body in Pain* 4). Thus, through the presence of the willow, Ophelia’s emotional pain is exemplified by the physical snapping of the branch and the sound of that break.

### Gertrude’s Description of the Willow in the Body

As Gertrude’s account transitions from the landscape’s segment of lines to the body’s section, she explains the accident suffered by Ophelia:

There on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds  
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke,  
When down her weedy trophies and herself  
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide

And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up. (4.5.170-4)<sup>9</sup>

In these five lines, the threshold between landscape and body has been crossed with the final instance of pointing to the landscape in “*There* on the pendant boughs [...]” (Emphasis Mine). From this moment, the scene focuses on the events of Ophelia’s body. It is especially Gertrude’s verbs—“clambering,” “fell,” “bore”—that express the inner crisis of Ophelia’s pain, all three terms connotated with a desperate discomfort and executed in the presence of the willow. Additionally, each of these verbs tells the reader about *what* happened in the landscape, moving from Laertes’ prompt of asking, “O, where,” to a description of the drowning, as if Gertrude wants to answer as quickly as possible whether it was an accident or suicide. She also mitigates suspicions of suicide by personifying the willow as “an envious sliver,” as if it is a villain to blame for the drowning, as if the branch decided to break at its own accord rather than Ophelia’s weight.

#### Millais’ Depiction of the Willow in the Body

One way in which Millais’ painting represents the scene thoroughly is the small detail of the tree’s splintered heartwood from the broken branch. This feature of the image profoundly represents the events of the body section’s five lines, the moment between landscape and affected body hinged to the bristles where the bough used to be, providing an explanation about the body in the water. Unlike the rest of the landscape, which appears—though wild—somewhat manicured, the crack willow and its many small wiry branches exhibit a chaotic tangle of growth, much like Ophelia’s body below, her ornate dress sparkling beside of the eerie discord on her face. Millais also exaggerates the “askant” growth of the willow, giving it not just a

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<sup>9</sup> I end the body section of Gertrude’s account here as the focus on especially her body staying afloat fades in the succeeding line.

leaning posture, but a practically horizontal growth, as if, with its previous personification in mind, it looks down at Ophelia's body.

### Other Artists' Depictions of the Willow in the Body

Other artists who have recreated this scene often indicate Ophelia's body somehow connected to the willow. Alexandre Cabanel's painting shows Ophelia's body in mid-fall, passing from the landscape section to the body section of the lines, the broken branch visible behind her arm that reaches for another limb so that she might save herself. Richard Westall demonstrates the body of his *Ophelia* gripping a willow as she leans over the brook to hang her garland in the tree, exemplifying the trust she puts forth, which the audience knows will be broken. Like Westall's image, Carl F. W. Trautschold's *Ophelia* grasps a willow branch in the same trusting way, leaving the maiden on the canvas in a liminal space between the landscape and body, counting on the knowledge of the audience to translate the anticipation of Ophelia's fall. Though Cabanel, Westal, and Trautschold depict the scene by connecting the tree and Ophelia, Millais is able to convey the same relationship about the willow's role by simply composing a ragged bough, accelerating the audience's perception of the scene by passively informing us what has previously happened.<sup>10</sup>

### The Role of the Water in the Body

The object of water on its own in the landscape apprises the observer of many topics from history to spirituality, but once an artist inserts bodies, a more complex, social meaning can be deduced. As Mitchell quotes Emerson, "'landscape has no owner,' and the pure viewing of landscape for itself is spoiled by economics considerations: 'you cannot *freely* admire a noble

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<sup>10</sup> Though not just confined to Ophelia paintings that represent the moment of her fall, it is also interesting to consider that Ophelia's body is sometimes demonstrated as partially exposed, such as Madeleine Lemaire's *Ophelia*, 1880.

landscape, if laborers are digging in the field hard by” (Emphasis Original “Imperial Landscape” 15); similarly, the natural setting of Ophelia’s death by the brook becomes difficult to admire with a grieving, mad girl falling into the water. The dynamic between Ophelia’s body and the water is the stepping stone between the observation of the landscape and the voice, and eventually the rest of her presence in the play, even in death.

The primary activity the water does with Ophelia’s body is the transition from the vertical position to a horizontal pose. Unlike the upright figure of the tree, the water bears Ophelia on her back, like the body laid in a grave. The presence of flowing water also assists willows in germination, their twigs washing down stream, washing up on the ground and eventually germinating; in this same way, Ophelia’s body has fallen from the willow, and after being removed from the water is buried, the afterlife of her character still sprouting in our culture for four hundred years. Though death is the occurrence in this scene’s water, analysis of the body segment’s lines suggest rebirth has happened—and continues to happen—as well.

#### Gertrude’s Description of the Water in the Body

Much like the conflation of Ophelia’s body with the willow, Gertrude’s speech instills anthropomorphic qualities in the constant of the water. The audience is aware of Ophelia’s grief, but it is as if her anguish has transferred to the water when Gertrude refers to it as “the weeping brook.” This empathetic quality of the water causes the reading of Ophelia gradually sinking to seem like conscious assistance to remove Ophelia from her misery. Not only is the brook attributed with this compassion, but it is never given the criminal-like illustration apparent in the description of the willow. This further defines masculine and feminine qualities of the willow and the water, respectively. In her essay on Ophelia’s madness and drowning, Elaine Showalter describes the feminine characteristics of water:

Gaston Bachelard traces the symbolic connections between women, water, and death.

Drowning, he suggests, becomes the truly feminine death in the dramas of literature and life, one which is a beautiful immersion and submersion in the female element. Water is the profound and organic symbol of the liquid woman whose eyes are so easily drowned in tears, and her body is the repository of blood, amniotic fluid, and milk. (225)

Ultimately, Gertrude describes a death that is far from peaceful, but the feminine qualities symbolically associated with the water, as well as the personality of the brook—one that is “weeping” and not “envious” like the willow—make the water a maternal figure that cuddles Ophelia.

#### Millais' Depiction of the Water in the Body

Millais' painting focuses less on the movement of Ophelia falling into the brook and concentrates more on her stasis, as if her body is not foreign to the water, and the way in which the artist meshes the unnatural with the natural is most apparent in this section. It is not just Millais' depiction but the development of *Ophelia* that informs the painting's narrative. Spending a great deal of time at Hogsmill River, intending to give an ideal representation of the natural space in his painting, Millais also unnaturally inserted his body in the landscape. Though not on the canvas, he inadvertently damaged the hayfield he treaded through daily to set up himself and his easel, his destructive path in the timothy grass echoing the narrative of Ophelia making her way to a similar body of water. While Millais rendered a naturally ghastly expression of madness on his model's face, Elizabeth Siddal's work for Millais left her with not a mental illness, but a physical illness—pneumonia—from her long hours posing in a bath tub of cold water (Secher).



### Other Artists' Depictions of the Water in the Body

Millais depicts an Ophelia whose body seems comfortably stabilized above and below the water's surface, woven into the element, "her clothes spread[ing] wide / And mermaid-like," as if her figure has been altered from living on land to sea. Cabanel's painting especially depicts the role of the garments gathering at the surface, though his Ophelia's body has hardly penetrated the water with only one leg submerged, leaving enough of her figure above the water to retain the anxiety and impossibility of stopping the moment. Westall's work places Ophelia's body just on the brink of falling into the water, the angle of her body beginning to become horizontal. Similar to Cabanel and Westall, Trauschold's *Ophelia* is in a stasis of both pre-fall, as she grasps the branch, and submersion, her feet visible beneath the water's surface. While these three artists express the moment of Ophelia disconnecting from the landscape to its body portion of the scene—roughly the first three lines—Millais' *Ophelia* differs with its focus on the last two lines, in which Ophelia has fallen into the brook and her clothes hold her afloat.

### The Role of the Flowers and the Body

It would be an understatement to say that flowers have frequently been used in literature to personify humans; however, the way in which each story does this is unique to its cast of characters. Beverly Seaton states:

Flowers acutely illustrate the beauty of youth, the fading that comes with middle age, and finally death, thus serving as a common, easily grasped sign of mutability [and] throughout Western literary history, women are the persons most often represented by flowers. (680)

It is not just the likeness of women in which the connection to flowers and the body comes to mind, but the cultural significance of each of the stages listed by Seaton to which flowers are

associated. Flowers are gifted to young women in courtship, carried by the bride, and decorate the grave of the deceased; flowers follow the body through many phases of life and, similarly, the constant of flowers in Gertrude's account follow Ophelia's body from being collected in the landscape, to falling into the brook with her, and eventually Gertrude tosses flowers into Ophelia's grave. This constant of flowers that trails through the landscape, the body, and the voice segment works as a symbol to propel Ophelia's identity through all of these life stages by Act 5. By examining one subject—the flowers—a significant amount of detail can be concluded regarding the body.

#### Gertrude's Description of the Flowers in the Body

In the previous section of the scene, Gertrude catalogs the flowers Ophelia is collecting, but now in the body's segment of this scene, Gertrude describes the connection of the flowers to Ophelia's body. The flowers are never referred to as flowers in these five lines, having gone from their common names listed in the landscape's segment to, now, "crownet weeds" and "weedy trophies." Here, the garland Ophelia has made has gone from being something floral and pretty to a bundle of weeds, vegetation that is typically unwanted. Weeds reflect the opposite sort of plant that might be received at any point in Seaton's mentioned phases of life, allowing these weeds to become a representation of Ophelia experiencing the opposite of courtship and marriage. Weeds can also subdue or prevent the growth desired plants, or in Ophelia's case, preferred results from hanging the crownet weeds in the willow's branches. When Ophelia's fall is detailed, Gertrude does not only tell us that the girl fell into the brook, but that "her weedy trophies and herself" fell into the water, as if the weeds do not only follow Ophelia's body, but lead her body. The transition from the botanical names to the rough

reference of weeds allows the constant of the flowers to portray the change of the scene's tone from benign landscape to unwanted calamity with the body.<sup>11</sup>

### Millais' Depiction of the Flowers in the Body

The collective presence of all the flowers and their foliage in the painting, both those from the catalog and those he added at his own volition, consume as much canvas space as Ophelia's figure. Considering the body's section in these eighteen lines, Millais' depiction of flowers not only copies the spatial orientation of Ophelia, but also mimics the angles of the willow and the water. The landscape along the creek is abundant with foliage, many of the blossoms traceable in vertical directions. All the flowers shedding from Ophelia's hand in the water, however, drift in a horizontal line.<sup>12</sup> This correlation between the willow and the water as represented by the flowers is relevant to Ophelia's body in that the garlands have traveled with her person, going through the same "clambering," falling, and bearing afloat in the water Gertrude describes.

### Other Artists' Depictions of the Flowers in the Body

The constant of the flowers throughout Gertrude's speech seems to have inspired artists who depict the body section of the scene to surely include a floral garland as part of the mission that leads to Ophelia's fall into the stream. Cabanel's painting, much like Millais', places the flowers both on Ophelia's body as well as floating on the water's surface, their petals scattered as evidence of Ophelia's attempt to hang them from the branches. In Westall's image, the flowers Ophelia attempts to hang from the willow appear to have been her crown as the wreath her arm stretches towards the branches is still being pulled away from the length of her hair.

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<sup>11</sup> Consider, also, in this metaphor how weeds typically require effort to be removed and continue to grow back, but Ophelia's flowers—though collected in the wild—often require cultivation.

<sup>12</sup> At the top of the line by Ophelia's head is a small, pink rose bud; the bottom of this line is marked by an open rose—the beginning reflecting Ophelia's innocence and the latter her lack of chastity.

Trautschold's *Ophelia* wraps her arm around the tree the same way her garland wraps around the branch, placing both her body and the flowers in an identical position, the garlands haphazardly dangling above the surface like her body. The way in which the flowers and the body of Millais' *Ophelia* differ from these three examples is its relationship to the landscape—we can see from where she has collected these flowers, making Millais' transmutation more inclusive to Gertrude's account.

### Chapter Conclusion

Unlike the landscape segment, the section of this scene concentrating on the body elaborates on the narrative with the implied circumstances of which the body endures. Considering Mitchell's ekphrastic other, the body section is most related to the phase of ekphrastic hope:

This is the phase when the impossibility of ekphrasis is overcome in imagination or metaphor, when we discover a "sense" in which language can do what so many writers have wanted to do: 'to make us see.' [...] It is also the moment when ekphrasis ceases to be a special or exceptional moment in verbal or oral representation and begins to seem paradigmatic of a fundamental tendency in all linguistic expression. ("Ekphrasis and the Other" 152)

The role of the body fulfills this ekphrastic hope because it is more simple for our imagination to draw conclusions about what is trying to be expressed with words about the body because we have an ability to observe the movements of other bodies in real life.

*Ophelia*'s body is also the figure followed throughout the eighteen lines, the scene's linear description of the event encircling itself, what Murray Krieger calls "circular repetitiveness within the discretely linear" which creates a stillness (107). The narrative quality

of Gertrude's account has a beginning and end about what happens to Ophelia's body—the linear—but it is the constants of the willow, the water, and the flowers that demonstrate the narrative encircling itself to create a still image. Millais' depiction of the body section of this scene captures the figure of Ophelia in the middle of the linear aspect of Gertrude's account, though also encircled upon itself with all of the landscape section's traces rendered on his canvas and the voice segment approaching.

## CHAPTER 4

### TRANSMUTATION AND THE VOICE OF “HER MELODIOUS LAY”

#### Introduction to the Role of Voice

The idea of the voice regarding Ophelia’s death scene focuses on the dwindling of her voice as the account is told through a polyvocal source: from the voices of Shakespeare, Gertrude, and eventually Millais, as well as several other artists. Though each of these voices will be isolated for analysis, they are never truly functioning alone. Shakespeare’s voice that authored the scene was surely influenced by not only the voices he read, but voice of place—his boyhood in Stratford. As J. M. Nosworthy writes:

It has often been remarked that there is a link between [Gertrude’s] speech and the death of a Tiddington spinster, Katherine Hamlett, who was accidentally drowned in the Avon [in] 1579. The apparent similarity is one that should not be pressed too far. The ill-starred Katherine went merely to fetch a pail of water, and there is nothing to suggest that she attempted to hang fantastic garlands on willow-trees. [...] And the Avon at Tiddington can hardly be said to resemble a brook. On the other hand, the willow-lined stream, the crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples, even the liberal shepherds and cold maids, carry us deep into the heart of Shakespeare's Warwickshire. (345)

Here, the voice of place and past are suggested to have bred the author’s voice, and though the lineage would be stretched, those voices also speak through Gertrude’s character and Millais. Additionally, the variances between the first quarto (Q1) and the first folio (F)—the second quarto (Q2) does not play as significant of a role in this situation since its differences from F

“vary at the level of individual words” (Thompson and Taylor 4)—persuade the audience’s perception of Gertrude’s voice as well as how Millais rendered his painting. All of this distillation of the voice crosses into the field of translation.

In her text, *Nine Gates: Entering the Mind of Poetry*, Jane Hirschfield addresses the complexities of original voice in translation:

Translated works are Trojan horses, carriers of secret invasion. They open the imagination to new images and beliefs, new modes of thought, new sounds. Mistrust of translation is part of the instinctive immune reaction by which every community attempts to preserve its particular heritage. (55)

While Hirschfield is referring to the translation of foreign languages, the voices of different art mediums undergo a similar struggle to retain their aesthetic core. Perhaps, Shakespeare fictionalized the accident of the Tiddington spinster, but Gertrude is the mouthpiece for the story, telling it within a context that creates a major turning point in the play. While Shakespeare uses his character to retell the story witnessed at the Avon, the event is not *seen* again until artists like Millais reproduce it on the canvas. These transmutations of the author’s language adapted to the canvas share the same aesthetic space as the various performances of actresses performing Gertrude’s lines. In this chapter, I will explore the range of voices that portray the scene, as well as the voice’s exclusive lines.

### The Role of the Willow in the Voice

In the previous two chapters, the visual parallel of the outline of trees and figures of upright human bodies has been addressed, and the topic of anthropomorphism and trees still remains when discussing the voice section. When considering the author’s voice, his reliance on metaphors for the body frequently connect to botany:

Shakespeare seems to think most easily and naturally [of humans and their habits] in the terms of a gardener. He visualizes human beings as plants and trees, choked with weeds, or well pruned and trained and bearing ripe fruits, sweet smelling as a rose or noxious as a weed. (Spurgeon 19)

Shakespeare does not just leave the relationship between plants and people on the figurative plane, but also physically manipulates the voices of his characters with plant life, such as Lavinia's twig hands after her rape and removal of her tongue—and her voice, and even the boxwood hedge that hides Maria, Sir Andrew, Fabian, and Sir Toby Belch—the four conspirators who leave a faux love letter impersonating Olivia's voice for Malvolio.<sup>13</sup> Though Ophelia's willow does not necessarily have a voice to share, it plays a part in the voice segment of the scene.

#### Gertrude's Description of the Willow in the Voice

In the final seven lines of this scene, Gertrude describes the eventual drowning of Ophelia:

Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds  
As one incapable of her own distress,  
Or like a creature native and endued  
Unto that element. But long it could not be  
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,  
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay  
To muddy death. (4.5.175-81)

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<sup>13</sup> Consider, also, that these instances, including that of Ophelia and the willow, all reflect an element of both mental and/or physical pain.



By the conclusion of these eighteen lines, Gertrude's voice has become like a Chorus rather than a standard character, narrating the event as if she is not acquainted with Ophelia or others who may produce an emotional response to this account. As Abigail L. Montgomery states, "Gertrude has one of the play's major speeches when she brings the news of Ophelia's death to Claudius and Laertes" (108), making it as if the Chorus-like quality of Gertrude's voice has intersected the boundary of players and narrative, and "Shakespeare has Gertrude make Ophelia's death known to the community and provide the first interpretation of it" (108), her interpretation acting as a translation of whether the death was an accident or a suicide. Upon explaining the event in these final lines, the constant of the willow has disappeared from the voice segment, its "envious sliver" being the author of Ophelia's death, her voice fading out of the scene like the tree's presence.

#### Millais' Depiction of the Willow in the Voice

The absence of the willow in the voice's section is ignored by Millais who shows the tree clearly visible near Ophelia's body. The willow takes up a decent amount of space on the canvas, giving it a voice in the event of Ophelia's fall. The topic of the willow and the collective of the landscape, the body, and the voice in the scene demonstrates how Millais' *Ophelia*, unlike some appropriations of the scene, represents all three of the constants. Additionally, Millais' placement of the willow so near Ophelia may be influenced by the line, "As one incapable of her own distress," as Ophelia has the opportunity to reach for the willow to save herself, but remains in her "mermaid-like" trance. Also, considering the personification of the willow, it is as if the willow is the only being to listen to Ophelia's songs, Millais' painting demonstrating her lips parted as if in mid-tune beneath the willow.

### Other Artists' Depictions of the Willow in the Voice

While several artists have created paintings the focus more on the landscape segment or the body segment of the scene, others have contributed works centered on the voice section, ultimately showing a drowned Ophelia. Paul Steck's *Ophelia* places the observer in the final line of Gertrude's voice, in "[...] muddy death," and, besides a few postmodern appropriations of Ophelia's death, is the only famous artwork depicting Ophelia thoroughly beneath the water's surface, the willow left out of sight. Léopold Burthe's *Ophelia* interestingly presents the section of the voice, as Ophelia appears unconscious and her body is mostly submerged like that in Millais' painting; however, though in a seemingly unresponsive state, her hand still grips the willow's branch. Though her body is still connected to the willow, her other hand holds her bundle of flowers, conflating the moments of the fall, the "melodious lay," and her actual death. Salvador Dalí's *Ophelia* is abstracted, her face separate from her body, perhaps to suggest her lively singing divided from her sinking, soon-to-be corpse; this illustration does not include the willow, though streaks and splatters of paint make suggest conceptualized vegetation. Looking at the small or none existent role of the willow in these images that center on the voice's section, the real estate on the canvas Millais provides for his willow implies the importance the figure of the tree played in the resulting drowning of Ophelia.

### The Role of the Water in the Voice

While observation of the actual water to be painted in *Ophelia* would have influenced Millais' work, his imagination and interpretation of Shakespeare's verse about the landscape is not to be left aside. As Caroline Spurgeon discusses, Shakespeare's childhood in Stratford and the common floods of the Avon river influenced how he portrayed water in his works:

He has not been struck by the damage done by a river in flood, breaking bridges, uprooting trees, and carrying along in its torrent stacks and cattle; nor by rivers, as they wind to the sea, being fed and swollen by tributary brooks, nor by the exquisite reflection of the sky in a clear shallow stream, but he is interested almost exclusively in the *life* of the current itself, its course and movement, how violently, and like a living thing, it resents impediment, ‘chafes’ and is ‘provoked,’ swells, rages, overflows its bounds, drowns its shores and floods the neighboring meadows. (Emphasis Original 96)

In this same chapter of *Shakespeare’s Imagery and What It Tells Us*, Spurgeon emphasizes that Shakespeare’s treatment of water imagery is not only more in quantity compared to his contemporaries, but seems to be, as the above passage points out, exclusive to the metaphor of an emotional purge (97). An artist attempting to appropriate Ophelia’s death on canvas would not only have portrayed the obvious character—Ophelia—but the water’s role in the landscape likely transferred to the paintbrush as much as the sight of the flooded Avon adhered itself to Shakespeare’s pen. This dominance of water imagery in Shakespeare’s voice leaks into the voices of Gertrude and Millais.

#### Gertrude’s Description of the Water in the Voice

The role of Gertrude’s voice regarding the water in this scene describes an element that—though it will drown Ophelia—is gentle and even otherworldly. The variation of the body’s segment in Q1 as it transitions into the voice’s segment defines the water as a space between the supernatural and reality: “[...] there she sat / Smiling even mermaid-like ‘twixt heaven and earth” (15.38.45-46). The water also bears up Ophelia, supporting her before death while she sings in this liminal space, F referring to her musical voice twice: “Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds” (4.5.175), and Ophelia is pulled “[...] from “her melodious lay” (4.5.180).

On the other hand, Q1 only makes one reference to Ophelia's voice, "Chanting old sundry tunes" (15.38.47). The constant of water as portrayed by Gertrude's voice is influenced by this anonymous voice of edits that chose to portray Shakespeare's voice differently, which also gives Ophelia and her mad songs a different voice.

#### Millais' Depiction of the Water in the Voice

The primary detail that Millais' painting captures from the voice section is the progression of "[Ophelia's] garments, [filling] with their drink." The antique wedding dress worn by Elizabeth Siddal while posing for the painting is not depicted in an ample state atop the water, but, rather, has begun to slide beneath the surface with only about half of the bell of the gown still above the water. Stilling the motion just before the final lines sink Ophelia's body "to muddy death" creates an anxiety of the moment being just at the end of Gertrude's voice providing the account. Another detail of Millais' painting includes a visual—rather than audible—insinuation of Ophelia's voice present in the scene with her parted lips. While her partially open mouth reflects both a face detached from sanity as well as the "snatches of old lauds" she sings, it also presents Ophelia as more quickly to drown, the water already inches from her open mouth.

#### Other Artists' Depictions of the Water in the Voice

The soft and benevolent personification of the water in the voice's section of this scene is similarly conveyed by artists besides Millais. Though Steck exhibits an Ophelia who is no longer "bore" up by the water, its feminine qualities may still be apparent in the lack of suffering expressed by the drowned maiden, and the way the element makes gossamer outlines with her hair as if it plays with her tresses. Burthe's *Ophelia* rests afloat in the water with her unconscious expression, her grasp of the willow branch nearly making her appear to levitate at

the water's surface. Dalí's *Ophelia* drifts in a sublime nothingness, neither water or other matter depicted to be the container of her body, and the crossing of her arms suggests a transcendence beyond the water, though her face seems to be attached to the setting of the final lines of the voice's section. In comparison to Millais' water through the lens of the voice section, Millais' water seems to possess a great connection to its landscape and Ophelia's body, the merging of all of these subjects melded within rather equal portions on the canvas.

### The Role of the Flowers in the Voice

The first voice of the flowers regarding this scene, Shakespeare's, reflect, like his imagery of the water and of the willow, the setting of English countryside. At this point, the flowers are absent, verbally, but their catalog and other mentions make it clear that the author intends for the flora to be a part of this scene until Gertrude's account concludes. In the same way that the willow shared the figure of the human body, now the flowers have followed Ophelia's body with her fall into the brook; like the girl they have been untimely plucked from their landscape, and jarringly landed into a situation of which they do not have a capacity to escape. In this section, the constant of the flowers becomes the dainty imagery the author imagines reaped from his rural setting and regrown with another's voice.

### Gertrude's Description of the Flowers in the Voice

The flowers that were previously evident in the scene are understood to have fallen into the brook with Ophelia. Though not mentioned directly in the voice section, the "crownet weeds" and "weedy trophies" can be imagined as still gripped in Ophelia's hand or decorating her body. In the previous event of Ophelia's mad scene, the flowers were synonymous with her songs, and since this singing voice was last associated with the allotting of flowers, the lauds and flora develop a semiotic connection difficult to break. Also, Gertrude's voice ends this scene in

both Q1 and F with “death,” the idea of burial unable to be autonomous from flowers, Gertrude’s voice has burying Ophelia with the flowers even before the grave scene.

### Millais’ Depiction of the Flowers in the Voice

Millais’ representation of the constant of flowers from the voice section relies on his imagination to show how the flora has fallen with Ophelia into the brook. It is not only that the flowers drift upon the surface of the water, but that Ophelia still grips the garland as if meaning to keep it with her. Millais’ depiction of the flowers she has collected also float in a horizontal line, paralleling Ophelia’s body and length. The hues used in the garland of blossoms are unique to the rest of the canvas’ color scheme, with vibrant yellows, purples, and reds, all appearing unnatural within the scope of the rest of the scene like the unnatural appearance of Ophelia’s body. The manner in which Millais has frozen Ophelia one line away from sinking beneath the water leaves her presentation and that of the flowers that float beside of her like a pre-funeral viewing.

### How Other Artists Depict the Flowers in the Voice

Artists who have depicted the voice’s segment of the scene connect flowers to Ophelia just as most other paintings depicting her death do. Steck’s *Ophelia* shows the submerged girl still clutching her collected flowers, the garland streaming upward in an angle that mimics the lines of her body. Burthe demonstrates a connection to the flowers in the voice section by depicting her tightly pressing flowers to her breast, though also a floral garland streams alongside Ophelia’s body as seen in other images. Dalí’s *Ophelia* does not utilize a standard image of flowers, but rather incorporates stylized flora in the illustration, all of which is concentrated around the girl’s head. Juxtaposed to Millais’ painting, it is not just the presence of

flowers in his painting, but their abundance that differs from other appropriations of the voice's section.

### Chapter Conclusion

The complexity of the voice segment touches base with the final phase of Mitchell's ekphrastic other. Throughout his description of the ekphrastic other, Mitchell uses, as an example, the story of two radio show hosts discussing photographs as if their listeners were there in the studio to actually see the photos. Mitchell explains how "ekphrastic fear" is the concern that those photos will not remain imaginary or invisible, and to actually see the source of the original voice—the "voice" of the photos detailed by the voices of the radio show hosts—crosses an unwanted boundary, "the moment in aesthetics when the difference between verbal and visual mediation becomes a moral, aesthetic imperative rather than a natural fact than can be relied on" ("Ekphrasis and the Other" 154). Another way to consider how these voices contribute to Mitchell's ekphrastic other is Walter Benjamin's idea of *Denkbilder* (thought-images). As Freddie Rokem elaborates on Benjamin's *Denkbilder*, it "is a form of writing through which philosophical ideas become immersed in complex and enigmatic performative contexts" (147), the voice using its portrayal of language as a performance; this is the performance that brings to life the body inside of the landscape.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Because paintings such as Millais' *Ophelia* do not fit the technical definitions of traditional ekphrasis and notional ekphrasis, providing art work of this nature with a definite category can enhance scholarly discussion of theoretical approaches regarding where the literary and the visual meet to produce an image. Our present culture is increasingly a visual one, from advertisements relying on images more than words, to smartphones suggesting an emoji if the icon's respective term has been typed. As Krieger's stillness suggests, these singular images are the representation of the linguistic linear encircling itself, a brevity condensed into an experience that can be absorbed and expanded in the imagination. Breaking down the class of *Ophelia* paintings into the landscape, the body, and the voice can offer a critical way to take these encircled thought-images, and unwind them so that their contents may be better understood in the present and in what ways they may influence future art and literature—and the discussion between those two fields.

In Jon Berger's *About Looking*, a short chapter is titled "Field," reflects on a personal setting from the author's childhood as a sort of micro-example, but then proceeds to use this setting as macro-exhibit for what he discusses as "events." While he never refers to the field as a canvas, succeeding previous chapters on images, I understand this as his intention, as Berger calls the field and its openness "a maximum possibility for exits and entrances" (202). Berger touches on this when he states, "All events exist as definable events by virtue of their relation to other events" (204). In another of Berger's texts, *Ways of Seeing*, Berger discusses advertisements and publicity. Here, Berger says that publicity "propagates through images [a] society's belief in itself...Publicity is, in essence, nostalgic. It has to sell the past to the future"



(139). This seems complicated if the past and the future are viewed linearly; however, pointing back to Krieger, again, this linear narrative encircled upon itself is the “field” in which Berger’s “events” make their entrances and exits. The field is the visage, the face containing the circular story, providing a way to extrapolate its elements in a nonlinear way, investigating the “events” as well as their “entrances and exits” through the landscape, the body, and the voice.

Going forward, recalling Ronk’s suggestion about Ophelia’s essence in Gertrude’s account is that of a blank canvas can provide new discussions about art transmuted from these eighteen lines, its three sections acting as a unique toolbox with which to examine the *ut pictura poesis* (as is painting so is poetry). In Lessing’s opening to *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, he describes three observers who compare painting with poetry, the first describing that the two mediums create an illusion, the second stating that the beauty of both derives from one source, and the third declaring that “poetry can help to explain and illustrate painting” (3). Like these three observers who offer distinct yet related descriptions of what the encounter of word and image can yield, the three sections of Ophelia’s death scene can survey the illusion, their singular source, and what it is they say about and to each other, just like the Sister Arts in Furini’s painting.

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