Ophelia in Her Three Guises

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Ophelia, as Hamlet's beloved, lies at the heart of *Hamlet*'s mystery, and she is also the figure in whom the play's two major plot lines come together. She could be thought of as three sequentially appearing characters: Ophelia, the mad Ophelia, and The Spirit of Ophelia Past ("One that was a woman . . . but rest her soule shee's dead" [TLN 3326-7]). As a spirit, she hovers over the action of Act V. She has 169 lines, 117 of them in meter and 52 in prose, but, like Gertrude (who has only 128), Ophelia does not give herself away. Her mad speeches and songs are tantalizing, but conceal more than expose the back story. Perhaps much of Ophelia's allure lies in the cruxes, contradictions, and ambiguities that make her role so challenging to fathom. It is not surprising that Ophelia has been the most frequently portrayed character in *Hamlet*, as Alan Young in his essay on *Hamlet*'s "Visual Representations" points out. Robert Hapgood tells us that Ophelia did not become a featured role until 1827, late in its performance history, the role before then associated with "the melodious delivery of Ophelia's mad songs, the general consensus of Ophelia as virginal, proper, inhibited, and weak, a lyrical figure of sadness" (see the "Ophelia" section of Hapgood's "Essay on *Hamlet* on the Stage in England and the United States").

As a character, Ophelia derives from the Belleforest source, in which King Hamlet's murder is part of the action and known by all, so that no ghostly informer must impose any secret revenge mission; Hamlet adopts his madness as the protective disguise of a very young, vulnerable prince, and the Ophelia character is one of the king's two spies (one of whom hides in the queen's chamber) to find out whether or not Hamlet is only pretending to be mad. In a deep sense, the role of spy is part of the nature of Shakespeare's Ophelia too, someone made malleable by her sense of duty and by her nature as well, both like and unlike the ambitious Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who make love to their employment. Yet Shakespeare engineers it so that it is Ophelia's own father who places her in the position of spy, and the fact that she (like Hamlet) complies wholly with paternal "commandment," despite what we see is her genuine love for Hamlet, lessens while complicating her guilt.

If Gertrude's marriage to Claudius has made her secure as the "imperial jointress" of Denmark, Ophelia is in the vulnerable position of many of Shakespeare's heroines—being an isolated figure in a patriarchal world, yet she is more isolated and powerless than almost all of them. Not only is she without a female confidante, but after Laertes' leave-taking and her agreement to avoid Hamlet's company in 1.3, she is without a peer or friend of any kind for the remainder of the play. This isolation seems to contribute greatly to her mental collapse. Also unlike Shakespeare's heroines in the comedies or tragedies, she is

more often spoken to or about than speaking: her witty response to her brother in 1.3, her monologue about being "so affrighted" in 2.1, her lament for Hamlet's apparent madness (with its proleptic irony) in 3.1, her spying encounter with him in the "nunnery" scene, and her lines of dialogue with Hamlet in 3.2 (the play-within-the-play) are all reactive forms of speech. The speech acts that she does initiate are relegated to the demands she makes and the songs that well out of her once her reason has been "o'erthrown" in 4.5.

In 1.3, as Laertes dilates on Ophelia's need to be wary of Hamlet and protective of her chastity, audiences are likely to begin gathering hints about her character from her unscripted stage responses to his long-winded and sententious lecture. Her terse first lines, "Doe you doubt that" (TLN466) and "No more but so" (TLN472), embody contradictory undercurrents, suggesting both a challenge to her brother[1] and a kind of echoing of his thoughts. Hamlet's attentions to her, Laertes insists, are merely "a violet in the youth of primy nature," a judgment that anticipates Ophelia's constant association and self-identification with flowers. Lyons in his Commentary Note points out that "Shakespeare's complex use of the Flora figure in connection with Ophelia can be associated with well-known literary and visual traditions, and on the use that both of these traditions made of the ambiguous language linking sexuality with flowers . . . " (CN 502-5 Lyons [1977]). This thematic association defines Ophelia first as a sexual being, and thus audiences' notions of her character take form largely as she reacts to the sexualized objectivity Laertes imputes to her. He warns her that "The canker galls the infants of the spring" (TLN 502). The metaphor, connoting venereal disease, continues the floral motif yet conflates Ophelia's love for Hamlet with all else in Denmark that is "rotten." How stark a contrast with Juliet's initial "bud of love" that so quickly proves a "beauteous flower" in *Romeo and Juliet*! In Denmark's unweeded garden, the potential springs of regeneration implicit in the love between Ophelia and Hamlet are tied from the play's beginning to the ongoing theme of dissolution and decay—in turn connected to Ophelia's mental and physical dissolution at the play's end.

Yet when Ophelia first speaks at any length (TLN 508-14), she seems to be quite her own mistress, and a master, as well, of the riposte. Ophelia's spirited reply to her brother lightheartedly extends the floral metaphor. She rebukes Laertes for his sententiousness and his willingness to lecture her to be cautious and circumspect while, in all probability, he will himself tread "the primrose path of dalience" (TLN 513). Coleridge finds in Ophelia's "short and general answer to the long speech of Laertes the natural carelessness of innocence," an astute remark that contrasts with some modern critics' suppositions that her love affair with Hamlet prior to the play's beginning has already placed her in a compromised situation (as interpolated flashbacks in the Branagh *Hamlet* establish). Yet other critics see in Ophelia's

response a gentle sophistication and wit implicit in her rhetorical move of one-upsmanship that subtly draws upon Matthew's "Enter ye in at the strait gate" (7:12). Kittredge remarks that "Ophelia is quietly amused at the wise airs of her brother, who resembles his father in his fondness for holding forth. She receives the sermon demurely; and then, when he is least expecting a retort, she bids him take a leaf out of his own book. The effect is diverting: Laertes suddenly remembers that he is in a hurry" (CN 508-14 KIT2 1939). Such sophistication is not out of keeping with a virginal Ophelia who is nonetheless wise to the hypocritical ways of men.

These initial hints of an independent Ophelia capable of inspiring and sustaining a loving relationship with Hamlet can give rise to a strong conception of the role. Julia Marlowe, playing Ophelia in 1927, saw her as "very much the high-placed daughter of the Lord Chamberlain, in the eyes of the royal family a suitable bride for the Prince, whatever fears her brother and Sister might have" (See Hapgood, "Ophelia.") More evidence for such a characterization is provided both by Polonius's rueful regret for his cynical dismissal of Hamlet's love, and by the queen's too-late reflections in 5.1: "I thought thy bride-bed to haue deckt sweet maide" (TLN3437). Bernice W. Kliman notes Ophelia's poetic turn of phrase in "tenders of his affection" and concludes that "Polonius's question to Ophelia suggests that she, too, is given to image-making and that he, the image-maker, comically questions her image" (CN 569 *tenders*, Kliman, 1995).

Still, Polonius's game of one-upsmanship seems to have the effect of crushing his daughter with its vulgar interpretation of what is clearly a mutual love. Polonius extracts a mercenary meaning from "tenders," a cynical line of thought that degenerates as Polonius improves upon Laertes' lecture. Hibbard notes, "For Polonius, as for all men of position in Shakespeare's day, the only reliable 'tender of marriage' is a legal document, concerning dowries and the like. To him Hamlet's tender of affection is highly suspect. As it says nothing about money, it is not "true pay" [TLN 572], not sterling [TLN 573], and the "holy vows of heaven" which Ophelia protests that Hamlet has given her are not only merely "springes to catch woodcocks"[TLN 581] but "brokers" or go-betweens for Hamlet's lust. Whether Ophelia is played as virginal or knowing—or both—her father's scanting of Hamlet's and Ophelia's honor continues its poisonous assault on his daughter and pours its gall into her ear. Peter Seng even argues that this scene itself dramatizes "the spoliation of her mind's purity and her child-like trust" [Peter J. Seng, "Dramatic Function in the Songs in *Hamlet*," qtd. in Cyrus Hoy's Norton Critical Edition of *Hamlet*, pp. 220].

In turn, Ophelia's reply to her father's demands, "I shall obey, my lord" (TLN 602), whether staged as resentful, as a meek bow to the inevitable, or as a cowed response to a nasty rebuke of someone with a

guilty conscience (perhaps having already gone too far with Hamlet), becomes a key to her future actions. Landis [see CN 602 LANDIS (1984)] argues that early on in the play, this line "develops the theme of wrongful obedience." This theme is heightened by the fact a similar line is uttered by Hamlet to Gertrude (1.2.), by Gertude to the king (1.3), by Marcellus (about whether or not it is fit to obey Hamlet in 1.4) as well as by Guildenstern (2.2) to the king. Within this scene of masculine prolixity and feminine terseness, Ophelia's tight-lipped capitulation creates a deflating sense of her character that may surprise audiences, given her spirited pleadings with her father to take Hamlet's "holy vows" as signs of his honorable and serious commitment to her. Hamlet's later allusion to Jeptha and his daughter reminds us not only of the biblical daughter's wrongful obedience but of Jeptha's rash promise and sacrifice of his daughter. Certainly, Ophelia's future actions and speech show that she has been carrying out Polonius's "commandment" not to "slander any moment's leisure" with him.

Ophelia's next scene is riddled with puzzling and contradictory elements. In itself, her exchange with her father is damning, since by its very nature as a narrative flashback, it begins to confirm the "frailty" that Hamlet associates with all of woman-kind. It occurs just after Polonius's comically absent-minded exchange with Reynaldo, but the mood is radically altered by Polonius's alarm ("How now *Ophelia*, what's the matter?" TLN 970) and by her exclamation of fright. Once again, Ophelia conveys her character by her reactions to others' actions. Of the many possible ways of interpreting what she tells her father of Hamlet's behavior, an obvious conclusion that can be drawn from the initial lines of the scene is that Hamlet has counted on her "frailty" to spread rumors of his madness to the meddlesome Polonius and thence to the court. The mere fact that she comes to him first about what has happened heightens the sense of Ophelia's dependency and her reliance on her father's reassurance. As she launches into her physical description of Hamlet's disheveled appearance, audiences again get a fuller sense of her character from her line-by-line disclosures of how Hamlet may be viewing her. It seems possible that he has come to confide in his lady after seeing the ghost of his father. Indeed, this is the last we have seen of Hamlet prior to this scene. But Ophelia also reassures her father that she has returned Hamlet's letters and refused to see Hamlet, implying that time has elapsed since Hamlet has seen the ghost. Shakespeare's "double-time" compounds the questions. Her account of Hamlet's long "perusal" of her face seems at best to suggest that if he has come to her in order to spread rumors of his madness, he might be rethinking that strategy on the spot in order to see if there is some core of strength he can lean upon. After all, "Ophelia" in Greek means "help" or "succor." If Hamlet has had some momentary inclination to trust her, however, he evidently thinks better of it before exiting with his eyes "bending their light" on her.

Thus, her speech to her father is fraught with complex uncertainties and dramatic ironies. Though she concludes that he has lost his reason, audiences are likely to interpret Hamlet's reported behavior as a response to losing *her*. When she affirms that she has "repelled" Hamlet's latters and refused to see him, she earns what Brandes (CN. 971-97, 1920) sees as Hamlet's "'silent farewell' to Ophelia [and reaffirms] his disillusionment with all of womankind. She is among the 'trivial fond records' that he will now abjure," since he has sworn his own oath of obedience to *his* father. Jenkins concludes that "the notorious problem of what is and is not feigned. . . is by its nature insoluble," but concerning what Ophelia describes as Hamlet's 'transformation," he argues that

> the clearest clues to the significance of the episode are the perusal of the face (987) and the parting with eyes turned back upon the woman parted from (994-7). Deliberately or not, the eyes that 'bended their light' on her echo Ovid's description of Orpheus, *flexit am oculos* (*Metamorphoses* 10: 57), at the moment of his losing Eurydice when coming back from hell (*MLN,* 93: 982-9). This is Hamlet's despairing farewell to Ophelia, and emblematically to his hopes of love and marriage.

The focus in this scene is on the eye of the beholder, the bewildered, guilty, pained witness of what she reports. Of these Orphic echoes, the teller of the story herself seems not to be conscious, but the depth of her feelings for Hamlet is surely confirmed here.

Is Ophelia present as her father goes with his suspicions to the King and Queen? In Q2 and F, there is no evidence of Ophelia's presence on stage during the letter reading—though in contemporary performance, she is often present.[2] Jenkins astutely notes, "Many suppose that Q1, with Ophelia's entry here and with the plan for her to waylay Hamlet (lines 162-4 [1196]) followed immediately by its execution and the 'nunnery' scene (3.1), preserves an earlier version. Comparison of the texts, however, points to Q1 as the derivative one . . . . It seems clear that Ophelia's letter was introduced in place of Ophelia in person; and in Q1, no less than in the other texts, the discussion of the letter proceeds as though Ophelia were not present" (CN 1019 JENKINS, 1982).

Even if Ophelia's presence is merely invoked by the letter-reading, however, the scene can but drive home for audiences the humiliating embarrassment any young woman would surely feel knowing her private letters are to be shown or read aloud to the royal audience by her crass and insensitive father. The letter-reading will also remind audiences—and her, if, she is present on stage—of a love so genuine that Hamlet cannot "recken [his] grones" (TLN 1149-50). The Q1 nunnery scene, though much briefer and much less violent than the equivalent scene in Q2 or F, derives a great deal of its energy from following directly Ofelia's description of Hamlet's disheveled appearance and manner to her father.

In what we think of as the "normal" sequence (Q2 and F), we do not directly see what Ophelia has reported, i.e., the "transformed" Hamlet, until he appears with Polonius. That exchange continues the vein of sexual innuendo under cover of Hamlet's playacting madness and reminds us once again of Hamlet's association of Polonius with his daughter. Hamlet remarks about "conception" and refers to the ballad of "Jeptha and his daughter," whom Jeptha sacrificed to fulfill his pledge to God that he would sacrifice her for victory against the Ammonites; as mentioned above, Jeptha's daughter, too, was obedient to her father's will, but asked for two months' grace so that she might "bewail her virginity" [Judges 11:37]), which prefigures this theme in Ophelia's mad songs. Meanwhile, in Q2 and F, before Ophelia and Hamlet are together on stage for the very first time, Hamlet has already met Polonius and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as well as the players and has devised the play-within-the-play. He is keenly aware that all whom he encounters are in the king's grip.

When Ophelia enters in 3.1, with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, she hears both those gentlemen's debriefings and the queen's encouragement. Ophelia also hears the queen tell Claudius "I shall obey you," which supplies Ophelia with a royal model for her complicity in their eavesdropping on this conversation with Hamlet. Yet seen from Ophelia's point of view, the scheme has been plotted to find out whether or not her rejection of their love is what has driven Hamlet mad, and her role in the scheme has been urged by the king, queen and her father. If this indeed this is the cause, she doubtless feels that she can be the means to "bring him to his wonted way againe" (TLN 1691). But does Ophelia hear his "To be or not to be" soliloquy (or, as James Hirsh has argued,[3] his "false soliloquy")? Just as it is not clear from any of the texts whether or at what point Hamlet knows he is being spied on, so too it is not clear at what point in this scene, if ever, Ophelia becomes conscious that own actions and "acting" are a betrayal of Hamlet, although audiences are quite conscious of this, since they're aware of King Hamlet's murder.

Ophelia's exchange with Hamlet in 3.1 is the first of the two scenes in which she and Hamlet are on stage together, and it creates almost as many puzzles and cruxes as does the narrated action of the scene in her closet. 3.1 is a scene of shocking confrontation, often played with violence, anger, and smoldering sexual tension. Hamlet greets Ophelia after his soliloquy as "nymph in thy orizons" (TLN 1743), which some have seen as suggesting that he sees her in her prayerful presence as someone still uncorrupted by the pollution of the court and others as suggesting she is someone acting a part in order to "pluck out the heart of [his] mystery," like his false friends. (Q2 differs from the Folio in having Hamlet enter earlier, before Polonius and the king withdraw.) John Dover Wilson, for example, notes the "touch of affectation in 'nymph' and 'orisons,' etc. [that] shows that Hamlet speaks ironically" (CN709 Wilson, 1934). Early commentators like Samuel Johnson assume that at the first glimpse of Ophelia, Hamlet forgets to play

mad but rather "makes her an address grave and solemn, such as the foregoing meditation excited in his thoughts" (CN 1743 JOHNSON, 1765). The manner of Ophelia's initial engagement with him in this scene will necessarily be in some part a reaction to his delivery of "Nymph."

Ophelia's encounter with the prince is one that carries the blight of double consciousness, her hopes and fears for him mixed with what must necessarily be self-consciousness and/or guilt at her role-playing. She begins with a gentle greeting but an implied lament that she hasn't seen Hamlet for "this many a day" (TLN 1746). Then, mysteriously, she pours salt in the wound by returning Hamlet's "remembrances," something that not even the king, queen, or Polonius has asked her to do. As Thompson and Taylor remark, "the fact that she clearly has these *remembrances* with her for what is supposedly a chance encounter may arouse his suspicion" (N. 3.1.91, p. 288 *Q2 Hamlet*). Tannenbaum sees this decision as "her little contribution to the good Queen's and King's plans," (see CN 1785), but, again, her motivation must be guessed at. Critics and actors have variously interpreted her responses to Hamlet's angry words throughout this scene as speeches she has prepared beforehand ("Rich gifts wax poore when giuers prooue vnkind" [TLN 1756]), as the axioms that roll readily from the tongue of the Lord Chamberlain's daughter, or as the hurt, angry response of someone who is genuinely stung by what she now knows is Hamlet's rejection of her.

Ophelia responds to Hamlet's "Ha. Ha. Are you honest?" [TLN 1758] with incomprehension, merely inquiring, "My lord?" and doubtless alarmed at his sudden shift. At a minimum, Hamlet's repetitions of "honest" and "honesty" must cause her embarrassment if not shame about her false position in this supposedly chance encounter. By harping on her "honesty," Hamlet calls up Polonius's cynical reconstruction of the "tenders" that Ophelia has claimed as signs of his former love. Though Ophelia's desire to understand the source of Hamlet's distraction is still her central motivation, at this point in the scene she cannot be unconsciousness of her own deceit or the blow she has just delivered of the returned love tokens even as she begins to comprehend something even more painful: what may be the finality of Hamlet's rejection of her as his beloved. His sudden "Where is your father?" [TLN 1785] must at the least cause her to blush or stammer in shame. (Many critics point to *this*, rather than the line returning his remembrances, as the point at which Hamlet is sure there are eavesdroppers.) After Ophelia's prevaricating "At home, my lord" [TLN 1786], the increasing violence of Hamlet's speech, his contempt for women in general (and, it seems, for himself) as well as his fury at her become more and more overwhelming.

His repetitions of "get thee to a *nunnery"* and "to a nunnery go" are particularly striking, though considerable disagreement still exists over the idea that *nunnery* was an obvious double-entendre signifying a house of prostitution.[4] When Hamlet denies he ever loved her, Ophelia's simple "I was the more deceiued" is resonant with loss. Hudson (CN 1775, 1856) quotes a spectator, Mrs. Jameson, of Sarah Siddons' performance of the role: "Those who have ever heard Mrs. Siddons . . .cannot forget the world of meaning, of love, of sorrow, of despair, conveyed in these two simple phrases."

After his exit, Ophelia abandons herself to her woeful outcry at his presumed loss of sanity in a speech that haunts the action. Her monologue prefigures her own mad scenes while contributing to our sense of her increasingly pitiable state as a lady "most deiect and wretched" (TLN1811). Despite the undeniable violence in Hamlet's speech and his aggressive sexual innuendo, it is Hamlet's loss of mind that causes her the most unbearable sorrow, though Ophelia laments too her own credulity in having "suckd the honney of his Musicke vowes" (TLN1812).

Ophelia next is subjected to hearing the king's derision of the idea that love could be at the bottom of Hamlet's "lunacy," and to overhearing his plans to ship Hamlet off to England, as well as her father's dismissive "We heard it all" [TLN 1837]. She must surely feel that she has lost any hope of reaching Hamlet ever again, which seems to be borne out by his behavior in the play-within-the play, when we see her for the second and last time with Hamlet.

Still preoccupied with fears for him and her own heartbreak, Ophelia seems especially taciturn in 3.2. In this great scene of the play-within-the play, she must again be in great perturbation, confusion, and fear of her former lover, with denial perhaps also playing a part in what might still be a hope for another chance. Hamlet as "loose cannon" must make her wary—though of course she is not the only one feeling this way; surely, her wariness is in silent dialogue with that of Claudius and with the anxiety of Gertrude. She enters with the courtly processional, listens to her father and Hamlet's wordplay about Julius Caesar, likely taken aback at least somewhat by Hamlet's "No good mother, heere's mettle more attractiue" (TLN 1964) and perhaps scarcely catching her breath before the stinging "Lady, shall I lie in your lap?" (TLN 1966). She replies with negatives ("No, my lord," and "I think nothing my lord") that Hamlet bandies back with crude and cruel innuendo. Yet, as in her first scene, there is a discipline in her as she remains low-keyed, answering with a simple, sardonic "You are merry, my lord" (TLN 1975). The dumb show spurs her to attempt to question Hamlet as to its import. It shows not the murder but the poisoner's seduction of the widow, another reminder of female frailty, and Hamlet's further provocation can only cement her grievous sense of having lost her love. Still, his verbal violence here leads to her chastisement

for indecency: "You are naught, you are naught. I'll mark the play" (TLN 2014-15). Her reward for urging Hamlet's patience when he rudely calls out "Is this a prologue or the posy of a ring?" (TLN 2020) and for reminding him that "Tis breefe my Lord" (TLN 2021) is his reply, "As womans loue" (TLN 2022), which silences her yet again.

Hamlet's further editorializing on the forthcoming action of *The Mousetrap* and his identification of Lucianus as "nephew to the king" lead to the last set of exchanges between Ophelia and Hamlet in the play. She chides him for his choric interruptions, and he reverts to the bawdy of "puppets dallying" (TLN 2115, suggesting that he is the stage interpreter for the puppet show of Ophelia and a lover) and to his keenness that would cost Ophelia a "groning" to "take off [his] edge" (TLN 2118). How far we have come from Hamlet's epistolary love language: "I haue not the art to recken my grones" (TLN 1148-49)! Ophelia's last line to him, "Still better and worse" (TLN 2119), suggests her inability to avoid the brutal lash of his language. Some Ophelias, notably Helena Bonham Carter, seize on this dialogue and the moments just afterwards to show Ophelia's descent into madness.

With these bitter denials, the sane Ophelia vanishes from the play forever and the mad Ophelia takes her place. We hear nothing further about Ophelia till hints of her madness (omitted in Q1) dramatically open 4.3 In Q2, a gentleman (or in the Folio, problematically,[5] Horatio) explains to the queen that "she" is "importunate—indeed, distract"(TLN 2744) and goes on to give the conjectured causes ('she speaks much of her father" TLN 2749) and symptoms of her madness, her paranoid suspiciousness of "tricks i'th'world" (TLN 2750) her "unshaped" use of words, her "winks and nods and gestures" (TLN 2756) moving Gertrude to express her fear that this is "prologue to some great amisse" (TLN 2763).

When Ophelia enters for the first of her two appearances in 4.5, we pass from prologue to catastrophe. Q1 uniquely supplies us with the stage direction that Ophelia wears her hair down (which as Taylor and Thompson point out has passed into stage tradition) and she plays the lute (this second feature not usually shown in performance). Ophelia's disheveled appearance, her shreds of ballads, and speeches of half-sense are indeed a symbolic dissolution, reminding audiences of her own description of Hamlet's "mad" appearance in her closet.

In these mad scenes she is quite clearly a foil to Hamlet, their being "method" in the snatches of ballads she borrows and rearranges for her own purposes with slight or major changes, some of which are difficult to interpret. If Hamlet has been bereft of his father, mother, and then Ophelia, Ophelia has been bereft of her brother, her father, and of Hamlet, and her speech often confuses the three men. Just as the absent Hamlet presides in many ways over this scene, so will the absent Ophelia preside over the scene of

Hamlet's return to Denmark—the graveyard scene—in which both will have undergone significant sea changes as well.

Her mad lines during the first of two entrances in 4.3 include several references, often puzzling: her song with the familiar lover-as pilgrim motif, the particular pilgrim of this ballad having indeed journeyed overseas, with "his cockle hat and staff/ and his sandals shoon" **[**TLN 2770**]** her probable reference to her father, who "beweept to the {ground} <graue> did not go [TLN 2781] with its hypermetrical and irrational negation (i.e., "did not go"); her curious reference to a story of a baker's daughter who refused to give alms to Jesus and was turned into an owl, perhaps because it is a story of unfortunate transformation. The transformation motif continues, too, in Ophelia's bawdy song of St. Valentine's Day, wherein she appears (oddly pro-active) to her would-be lover early in the morning at his window, so that she will be the first thing he looks at and, according to legend, become his Valentine. As she exits temporarily from the royal audience, her salutation, "Good night, ladies, goodnight. Sweet ladies goodnight, goodnight" (TLN 2808-10) turns all the company of the court into one gender, there being no other "ladies" beside Gertrude on stage. The gender conflation echoes Hamlet's "Farewell, deere mother" 2713 expressed to Claudius (which in turn echoes Hamlet's own "Goodnight, mother" after the closet scene), since, as Hamlet explains to the king, "Father and mother is man and wife: man and wife is one flesh. So—my mother" (TLN 2715-17). The logic of this collapse of gender, and indeed of rationality, follows her beyond the grave and becomes a remarkable feature of the graveyard scene.

Ophelia's re-entry in 4.3, whether with real or imaginary flowers that she gives to her hearers, is doubtless harrowing to Laertes, who has not seen her since he left for France and has himself entered with his "rabble" to demand a reckoning from Claudius concerning his father's death. He is thunderstruck by Ophelia's appearance—immediately gathering her madness simply by looking at her. "Pretty Ophelia" (TLN 2794), the king's earlier tenderly inept response, is echoed by Laertes, who remarks on how she turns "Thought and Affliction, passion, hell it selfe" to "fauour and to prettiness"; feminist critics, notably Elaine Showalter, highlight the odd aestheticism of this response and the difficulties it leads to staging the scene with an Ophelia either "too picturesque" (as frequently portrayed in 19th century productions) or too grotesque and bawdy in her derangement to be compatible with such a description (CN 2940, qtd. in Thompson and Taylor, ARD3, Q2).

Ophelia's ballads and snatches of songs get harder still to understand, but they allude in some ways to situations we have seen her in or she has witnessed. The Folio version of "They bore him barefaced on the bier" contains the perplexingly mirthful refrain of "Hey non nony, nony, hey nony" (TLN2918); "Fare

you well my Doue" (TLN2910) it seems, is a reference to Laertes, whom she is likely confusing with Hamlet. Her last ballad references in Q2 are a crux:

> You must sing {a downe} [downe] a downe,
> And you call/ him a down a. O how the wheele becomes it.
> It is / the false Steward that stole his Maisters daughter. (TLN 2923-25)

Commentators are unable to explain either "how the wheele becomes it" or the reference to the "false Steward," but Ophelia's story recalls Hamlet's reference to another daughter—Jeptha's daughter, also a story of betrayal. Ophelia's giving away of actual or imaginary flowers continues her conflating references to Hamlet, Polonius and Laertes. There is considerable speculation and divergence of opinion about the significance of each flower and, except for Laertes, the recipient of each. The rosemary that Ophelia declares is "for remembrance" has been explained by its being an evergreen, from ancient times thought to be an aid to memory, also used at funerals. Some commentators, however, see rosemary as associated with weddings; she gives rosemary, together with pansies (from the French, *pensées*), to Laertes, perhaps suggesting that he "remember" and perhaps a chastisement for his absence from Polonius's funeral. Rosemary, on the other hand is also considered a "tender of affection" between lovers, and so probably refers to Hamlet (a number of commentators arguing that she is mistaking Laertes for Hamlet during the entire scene). There is some general agreement that fennel suggests courtly flattery, and columbine infidelity and/or cuckoldry; that the bitter herb rue (as Ophelia tells us) signifies repentance, and daisies love (whether requited or unrequited). Presumably, in "You must wear your rue 'with a difference'" (TLN 2937), the latter phrase alludes to the rules of heraldry as applied to younger brothers[6] and is therefore addressed to the king or perhaps alludes to Gertrude's "descent" in her marriage to Claudius. As for the violets that have withered, though ostensibly associated with her father, these surely echo Laertes' "violet in the youth of primy nature," which brings audiences back full circle to Laertes' and Polonius's preaching to her against loving Hamlet.

As Jenkins emphasizes, though, Ophelia seems to have no real notion of the identity of those upon whom she bestows her flowers, and there are no stage directions to lessen the obscurity of her flower-giving. In this incapacity of Ophelia, Jenkins argues, and in her insensibility as to others' reactions to her, lies the essence of her madness. He follows a host of earlier commentators in concluding that in these symbolic flowers, "her mind drifts back to her father's death to afford yet another instance of the confusion of grief in which the loss of father and lover merge" (TLN 2936 JENKINS [1982]).With one final bawdy song, "For bonny sweet Robin was all my joy," and a prayer for mercy upon all Christian souls (one which subtly sets up the clowns' debate about Christian burial in 5.1), Ophelia exits from the stage, and as we later learn, from life itself.

The ghost of Ophelia past, however, for a while ameliorates audiences' more shocking and pathetic images of her, making her once again beautiful and "beautified" in the Queen's speech while anticipating the macabre in the beauty of her death. Both in the queen's report and in the clowns' dialogue, the last focus upon Ophelia emphasizes her as a being caught between willed action and sufferance. At the same time, though, questions linger as to the actual manner of her death. Given the clowns' debate concerning her strength of will or the lack thereof, her state of grace—or of despair, the posthumous Ophelia retrospectively colors audiences' sense of her character.

Commentators have been divided about the queen's long poetic speech describing Ophelia's drowning, with its many implausibilities. Aside from the perceived clumsiness of Laertes' asking "O where?" there is difficulty in the queen's scene-painting of a spring-time watery death scene when the action is supposed to have taken place in December, and in the fact that Gertrude describes a death of which she could not have been a first-hand witness. And questions linger as to why, if Ophelia's garments bore her up long enough for her to sing her snatches of old tunes, the queen or whoever else had heard her singing hadn't saved her. Then there is the clown's suggestion that those of great sway overrode the questions surrounding her death.

The queen's speech has also been judged as at odds with the dramatic situation, as a case of the poet overtaking the dramatist, yet Kittredge [qtd. in Ard.2 Jenkins, longer note] argues that the queen's is "a speech designed in all its details to provide the Ophelia we have seen with her most appropriate end. And though the Queen does not speak in character, it is an essentially dramatic conception which makes her, who has in large part caused Hamlet's revulsion from love and marriage, the messenger of Ophelia's lovelorn death" (TLN 3158-75).

Part of the pathos of Ophelia death lies in her final aestheticizing impulse, what seems to be an attempt make something beautiful of the flowers she has distributed (or thought she has done) in the prior scene. Thus she goes to the willow tree—a tree symbolic both of love and of mourning—and makes what Capell describes as ''garlands of the flowers she had gather'd, by stringing them upon boughs of that willow, pluck'd and broken off for that purpose: and when her garlands were finish'd, a thought takes her to make the tree fine with them, and this produces the accident" (CN 3158, Capell, 1774). The tunes she sings add to her pitiable situation, and expand her aestheticizing impulse, perhaps in what might have been a final attempt to turn the clock back to the time when her love still blossomed. The queen's speech, too, mirrors that impulse. As Jenkins points out, Ophelia's

> hymns of praise (and hence the Q2 reading *lauds*,[3160])) have often been objected to as incompatible with her earlier love-songs; but the critics have not perhaps sufficiently appreciated that what both have in common is their very incongruity. Ophelia's uninhibited songs in the royal presence, her lauds while sinking to a watery death show a complete unawareness of her physical surroundings in which the crazed mind is only too consistent. In each may be heard a voice from those deepest levels of the emotional being which sanity keeps secret. What can be incompatible between Ophelia's regard for Hamlet and for heaven? She appealed to heaven in her love's beginning ((I.iii.114)) and also in its crisis ((III.i.135, 143)), and her mad songs are significantly interspersed with pious thoughts ((IV.v.42-4, 68-71, 179-80, 197)). It is in more than one way that her departure from the stage prepares for the account of her death. Shakespeare's conception of Ophelia is profounder than that of his critics; and the present speech [Gertrude's], neither a digression nor an afterthought ((as *SQ*, xv, 345-8)), is its supremely imaginative culmination.

Commentators also note the exculpatory nature of the queen's description, whether or not it indicates that Gertrude is in denial. The "envious sliver" that "broke," Ophelia's obliviousness to her own peril, her singing of "old tunes," all would emphasize that her death was not intentional. On the other hand, there are many who take the opposite attitude to Ophelia's last moments alive. Marvin Rosenberg's *The Masks of Hamlet* refers to the many Gertrudes in performance who show they are obviously fabricating the story of Ophelia's accidental drowning and "disguising an action that we will learn in the graveyard scene was almost certainly a suicide" (p. 822 ff.).

The contrast between the queen's description of Ophelia's death and the speculations of the gravediggers could not be greater. In re-opening the question of suicide, these clowns' legalistic parsing of her actions reprises the theme of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy, the theme of the conflict between the will to action and sufferance of what is, and they take up this conflict in a grotesquely comic vein. In the gravediggers' speculations as to why the coroner has decided to give Ophelia a Christian burial, Ophelia once more becomes a kind of ghostly double to Hamlet, her final actions reduced to a comically literal-minded series of paradoxes: "Is shee to be buried in Christian buriall, {when she} <that>| wilfully seekes her owne saluation"[TLN 3191]? How could Ophelia "drown herself in her own defense"? Did she drown herself "wittingly"? And in circular fashion, "he that is not guility of his own death shortens not his own life" [TLN 3207-9]. Hamlet, newly returned to Denmark, stumbles into this sort of speculation when he inquires as to the inhabitant of the grave, and the gravedigger's equivocations take even greater liberties with Ophelia, turning her into a complete cipher. She is now neither man, nor woman. Even the most irreducible measure of personhood—that of gender—is denied her. Like that of Alexander, about whom Hamlet will also speculate, her essence has become a "quintessence of dust."

The dramatic irony that Shakespeare builds into this scene of Hamlet's dialogue with the clowns lies in how profound is his ignorance of whose grave he is contemplating. As he challenges the skull of his own old friend the jester to hie himself off to his lady's chamber and make her laugh at the 'favour" to which she must come—Hamlet is already, obliviously, standing right there in his lady's chamber, jesting! A little later in the scene, when Laertes reanimates Ophelia by announcing that it is his "sister" who occupies the grave, the thunderstruck jester finds that his joke has turned on him. Thus Hamlet's protestation, "I loved Ophelia," while it is final confirmation of all we have heard of Ophelia's protestations to Polonius at the play's beginning, comes far too late. The past tense—"loved"—comes only a moment after Hamlet has made the mental leap from Laertes' "my sister" to identify "the faire Ophelia." He has named her one last time, and thus, as has Laertes, counteracted the oblivion to which the gravedigger has consigned her merely as "one that was a woman" (TLN 3326).

Yet as in the Nunnery scene, Hamlet's saying that he "loved" her invokes both the full potential of their former mutual love and its absence throughout the play. Now "loved" conveys more than the sense of belatedness. Here in the graveyard, "I loved Ophelia" is sounded at the farthest reaches of negation, for treachery, bewilderment, madness, and death have intervened and stamped the memory of Ophelia in their image. After Hamlet's outbursts in this scene and the queen's grieving comment, **"**I thought thy bride-bed to haue deckt sweet maide" (TLN 3437), never again does Hamlet—or anyone else in the play—mention Ophelia by name or even allude to her, though her madness and death are arguably stronger forces than the death of Polonius in exciting Laertes' wrath against Hamlet in the final duel scene. However beautiful might be the inert corpse over which they fight, however pitiful the death of the maiden who might have been Hamlet's wife, there is a sense in which Hamlet's admonition in his epitaph for Yorick is what remains in our ears: "tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come."

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1. Critics are divided about "No more but so." Since it is punctuated with a period in Q1, F, and Q2, some do not see it as challenging Laertes. See TLN472 Commentary Notes below.

2. Alan Young (personal communication, 2012) makes the point that not only does "the Branagh film [have] Ophelia present in the letter scene" but that " Polonius cruelly forces her to read aloud part of Hamlet's letter."

3. See James Hirsh's *Shakespeare and the History of Soliloquies,* Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2003.

4. Harold Jenkins in 1982 was disposed to question this critical assumption, yet admitted that he was struck by frequent repetitions of the word. Joseph Pequigney sees Hamlet as urging "that she should immediately retire from . . . the horrors he attributes to marriage, which . . . include breeding sinners

[1776-7], the maligning of innocent wives [1791-2], and the cuckolding of obtuse husbands [17944-5], (CN 1776-1805, 2008 Pequigney).

5. If Horatio knows about Ophelia's madness, commentators have asked, why doesn't he tell Hamlet about it before the prince discovers the identity of the "unknown" corpse in the graveyard scene?

6. Anthony Burton (personal communication, 2012), reasons that Ophelia's heraldic allusion is embarrassing: "If Claudius and Hamlet are shown in Act 1 bearing their arms on clothing or banners—wouldn't old Hamlet's/Gertrude's arms and Claudius' s be displayed as part of the wedding decoration? — then Claudius' would be similar to the old king's, but with a difference, i.e., bearing a mark of cadency showing him to be a younger son. If that status also left him poor—a king of shreds and patches at whom courtiers made mouths while old Hamlet lived—Ophelia's reminder would be especially galling and tactless as well, a double invitation for Claudius to react with painful recognition of his ambition and crime. And if we think of Laertes' social solecism in raising the king's wager, maybe that weaves nicely into the image of an ill-bred family of upstart Poloniads."

Selected Commentary Notes and Excerpts for "Ophelia in her Three Guises" 12/2

CN 178: On Ophelia's first entry in the Folio

Thompson & Taylor (ed. 2006) "Unlike F, Q2 does not include Ophelia in this entry: she does not speak in this scene in either text, but her silent presence is often significant in productions and films."

CN 469 A Violet in the youth of primy nature,

Kittredge: "**Cf**. Chapman, Revenge for Honour" [5.2] (Pearson ed., III, 351): 'the prime virgins of the Spring, the violets.'"

Falk (1967, p. 32): "Ophelia's destiny, like that of Laertes, also reflects her father's influence: her fate is as much a result of his superficiality and misjudgment as it is of Hamlet's behavior. She is a crucial link between plot and sub-plot, between the family of Hamlet (Claudius-Gertrude-Hamlet) and that of Polonius**."**

CN 472 No more but so

Thompson & Taylor, 2006. "Ophelia's four words are a statement in all three texts but many editors and performers make them a question."

CN 508-14: I shall {the effect} <th'effect> of this good lesson keepe . . . own reed.

Spencer (ed. 1980): "This, and the primrose path of dalliance . . . seem to derive from Matthew 7.13-14: 'Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction . . . . Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life.'"

CN 602: I shall obey, My lord.

Slights (1981, pp. 92-3)<p. 92> "Ophelia accepts her father as an authority; Marcellus, though, decides on his own conscience. These two obeys are less than five minutes apart." </p. 93>

Landis (1984, p. 12) develops the theme of wrongful obedience by Ophelia and Gertrude to question whether Hamlet should obey the ghost, a question he never asks himself. See 1687.

Kliman (1992) re "my lord": "Note that with the Q2 comma before this phrase and not the F1 semi-colon, Polonius's command could easily refer to 'come your ways,' as it does in Q1 'Come in Ofelia,' and her response 'I will my lord.'"

CN 970-97: **{O my Lord, my Lord} <Alas my Lord>, I haue beene so affrighted . . . he comes before me.**

Eckhardt (1853, p. 96, apud Furness, ed. 1877): "The supposition that Hamlet went to Ophelia directly after the interview with the Ghost is incorrect."

Wade, 1855: "The next somewhat indirect proceeding of Hamlet towards avenging his father's murder, is . . . to seek out 'the fair Ophelia,' as she is 'sewing in her closet,' to frighten the poor lady-sempstress nearly out of her wits by a pantomimic scene of miserable bewilderment. After this notable feat, he amuses himself with making a butt of old Polonius, her father . . . ."

Thompson & Taylor (ed. 2006): "At this point the otherwise slightly comic picture of the melodramatic lover becomes frightening: Hamlet, for the audience, if not for Ophelia, resembles his father's Ghost."

CN 981: **Mad for thy loue?**

Granville-Barker, 1930: "Polonius is plainly on the wrong track."

Hibbard, 1987: "Polonius's deduction is a reasonable one, for Hamlet's appearance, as Ophelia describes it, is very close to that of the typical lover in Rosalind's mocking version of it . . . [*AYL* 3.2.373 ff. (1558 ff.)]."

CN 984-97: **Ophelia's description of Hamlet's appearance**

Hudson (ed. 1856): "Here it is evident that the penetrating Hamlet perceives, from the strange and forced manner of Ophelia, that the sweet girl was not acting a part of her own, but was a decoy; and his after speeches are not so much directed to her as to the listeners and spies . . . ."

CN 987: **perusal of my face**

Bradley (1904, rpt. 2007, p. 115, n. 20): This line "suggests doubt rather as to her 'honesty' or sincerity than as to her strength of mind. I cannot believe that he ever dreamed of confiding his secret to her."

Wilson (1935, p. 112) is among those who think that Hamlet fails to find what he seeks in her face, seeing there only her fear. . . . "Thus she has rejected his love, and proved unresponsive to an appeal of extreme need."

CN 1773-4 ***euocutat our old stock]***

Dowden (ED. 1899): "Used in the botanical sense, to graft by the insertion of a bud; virtue cannot so graft love in our old evil stock but that we shall have a flavour of this evil stock."

1776-1805 ***Get thee a Nunry . . . go]***

Pequigney (2008, personal communication to KLIMAN): "When Hamlet in a manic state disavows his love for Ophelia, he bids her, 'Get thee to a nunnery.' His idea is that she should immediately retire from the corruptive world and enter a convent, where she would take a vow of chastity. She would thereby avoid a maiden's danger of being seduced by an unscrupulous suitor such as himself, and escape the horrors he attributes to marriage, which he has come to abhor. The horrors cited include breeding sinners [1776-7], the maligning of innocent wives [1791-2], and the cuckolding of obtuse husbands [1794-5]. Editors in their glosses wrongly turn the word 'nunnery' (used here five times) into a bawdy pun or ambiguity by invoking its secondary meaning of 'brothel.' But nunneries are in no sense bawdy houses in Hamlet's obsessive diatribe, which aims to protect Ophelia from the sins of others as well as from potential griefs [children who are sinners] or sins of her own. The editorial gloss is neither relevant to nor compatible with his intent—or Shakespeare's: The presence of nunneries helps situate the imagined society of the drama in a past Catholic age."

CN 1785: **Where's your father?**

Dowden (ed. 1899): "Perhaps an arrow shot at venture . . . . It is to be considered as a possibility that Ophelia may not have been aware of her father's espionage."

Wilson (ed. 1934): "The question gives her one last chance; she answers with a lie, as it would seem to him, though she is of course only humouring one whom she takes to be mad."

Jenkins (ed. 1982): "The assumption that Hamlet knows that he is being spied on rests, I am confident, on a complete misinterpretation of the 'nunnery' scene (cf. III. i. 96 n.) based on a misunderstanding both of Hamlet's attitude to Ophelia . . .

and of Elizabethan dramatic convention. Dover Wilson supposed that Hamlet knew from the beginning of Polonius's spying . . . , others that he must have become aware of it at least by l. 103 (cf. Adams, p. 255), many more that he must detect it now. A stage tradition beginning early in the 19th century (see Sprague, *Shakespeare and the Actors*, pp. 152-4) made Polonius pop his head out at this point. . . . All such inferences are belied by the dramatic convention that a character's awareness of being overheard is normally made explicit in the dialogue. . . . And the sudden disconcerting question may find less superficial explanation. It is very much in Hamlet's 'antic' vein. Cf. esp. 'Have you a daughter?' (II. ii. 182) and l. 103 in this scene. It is true these other questions can be related, if obliquely, to what has just preceded them. Yet Hamlet's love for Ophelia has all along been entangled with her father. . . . On a different dramatic level the question is important not to suggest that Hamlet has discovered Polonius's presence but to remind the audience of it. The eavesdropper must now hear something to his disadvantage; but the effect of this depends not on Hamlet's knowing that he is being overheard, but on *our* knowing it."

Tannenbaum (n.d., pp.374-376): <p.374> "One of the difficult problems in *Hamlet* concerns the Prince's sudden and astounding question, addressed to Ophelia, 'Where's your father?' and his subsequent rantings about marriage and the married. . . . ."That Hamlet was aware of the presence of Polonious behind the arras is certain, not only from his general behavior, his malevolence, his cruelty to Ophelia, his threats with regard to the King, but even more so from his outburst: 'Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in's own house!' . . . . Ophelia, conscious that she is playing a role, that both she and the mad Prince are under surveillance, does not act like herself. . . .Hamlet is satisfied that she *is* playing a part. Thereupon he proceeds to 'rag' her till, thoroughly off her guard, he throws the pointed question at her: 'Where's your father?' Wholly unprepared for this question, the poor girl suddenly, almost reflexly, turns her head in the direction where the King and Polonius are hiding. The gesture is enough for Hamlet. . . .

CN1806: O what a noble mind is here orethrowne!

1806-17 Coleridge (ms. notes 1819 in AYSCOUGH, ed. 1807; rpt. COLERIDGE, 1998, 12.4:852): The soliloquy of Ophelia is the perfection of Love/ so exquisitely unselfish."</p. 852>

Halliwell (1869, p. 25): “Of her love for Hamlet there cannot be any doubt; with her the passion is a strong and holy one; she loved him with all the fervour of a woman’s love, with all the passion of a first love; and when Hamlet grows cool, denying the passages which occurred between them, her reason gets unstrung, the death of her father giving the finishing stroke to the evil commenced by the rejection of her love by Hamlet. She glows with pity, when she imagines Hamlet has lost his reason, being deceived by his assumption of madness, and her love displays itself in the brilliant description which she gives of her former love.”

MacDonald (ed. 1885): “To his cruel words Ophelia is impenetrable—from the conviction that not he but his madness speaks.”

Alexander (lecture 1953, published 1955, pp. 21-2): “ Ophelia provides the epilogue to the scene”—as Hamlet had provided the prologue. Alexander believes that because Ophelia thinks Hamlet mad, she is saddened but not overcome by his tirade. Alexander criticizes the Olivier film, which has her thrashing on the floor, weeping desperately.

CN 1835-7 How now Ophelia . . . heard it all]

MacDonald (1893, pp. 158-9): <p.158> “. . . did not Shakespeare intend the passionate soliloquy of Ophelia—a soliloquy which no maiden knowing that she was overheard would have uttered,—coupled with the words of her father: [quotes passage] to indicate that, weak as Ophelia was, she was not false enough to be accomplice in any plot for betraying Hamlet to her father and the King?”

CN 1964: mettle more attractiue

Wilson (ed. 1934): “Ham. sits by Oph. because she sits opposite the K. whom he must watch, and being there under the eye on Pol. he passes the time by playing the distraught lover. His first words seem to lend strong support to Pol.’s theory and precipitate (as I think) a whispered colloquy with the K.”

CN 1966: lie in your lap?

Wilson (ed. 1934): “Ham.’s obscenity would, he knew, be interpreted as the natural outbreak of a madman crazed for love (cf. Oph.’s song [(2790)] ff.); at the same time he enjoys insulting Woman in her person.”

CN1968-69 **<Ham. I meane, my Head vpon your Lap?>**
<Ophe. I my Lord.>

Steevens (ed.1778): "This speech and Ophelia's reply to it, are omitted in the quartos."

CN1978: **O God your onely Iigge-maker]**

Subbarau (ed. 1909): "The true import of Hamlet's words seems to be — 'O God, the only jig-maker for the world' — as much to say, in bitter irony, 'Yes, of course, I *am* merry, and God has provided the mirth for me!'"

CN 2115: **If I could see the puppets dallying.**

Elze (ed. 1882): "Hamlet means to say, that Ophelia's love is no better than a puppet-show and that he should be able to act as its interpreter, if he could see the puppets, i.e. Ophelia and her lover, dallying or making love.

CN 2116: **You are keene my lord, you are keene.**

Delius (ed. 1854): "Ophelia takes *keen,* meaning sharp, satirically. Hamlet gives an obscene connotation to this **sharpness** (*edge*) attributed to him."

CN 2119: **Still better and worse.**

Prowett (*N&Q*, 3rd series, XI, May 11, 1867, pp. 383-4): "Ophelia's words remind Hamlet of the marriage formula: 'I take thee for better for worse.' And the play on the word exactly suits his cynical melancholy mood: 'So you take husbands, and a grievous mistake it is'—he means to say." </p.384>

Kittredge (ed. 1939): "keener as to wit, but worse as to meaning. . . ."

CN 2145 ***Quee.* I will not speake with her.**

Beckerman (1979, p. 141): "Shakespeare is a master in concretizing backboards for the actor . . . . [For example]. in *Hamlet* (4.5 [TLN 2745, IV.v.3]) Gertrude enters, speaking the line 'I will not speak with her,' we immediately feel both the Gentleman's offstage request and Gertrude's refusal to see Ophelia -- that is, both the action and the reaction. In the course of his career, Shakespeare comes to rely less and less on the flat statements and more and more upon the energy caught in mid-sentence to galvanize a scene into action."

Spencer (ed. 1980): "The Queen is reluctant to see her son's beloved, the daughter of the man he has **murdered**."

Thompson & Taylor (ed. 2006): " Ophelia is not named before her appearance in Q2 or F, though she is in Q1, where the Queen explicitly attributes her madness to her father's death."

CN2145-7: **{*Gent.*} <*Hor.*> Shee is importunat, | Indeede distract, her moode | will needes be pittied.**

Thompson & Taylor (ed. 2006): "This courtier is sometimes a woman in modern performances. F gives the Gentleman's speeches to Horatio and his reply (14-16 [2759-61]) to the Queen. Edwards, who follows Q2's attributions, remarks that F 'greatly coarsens the way Ophelia's madness is introduced'; Hibbard, who follows F, claims that it 'cuts out an unnecessary part.' Horatio does not speak again in this scene after 16 [2761] in Q2 (13 [2759] in F); many editors and directors take him off at 2174 . He is not present at all in Q1' scene, which avoids the problem of why he has apparently not mentioned Ophelia's madness to Hamlet when they encounter her funeral in 5.1; instead, he has his own unique scene with the Queen immediately after this."

CN 2751: **enuiously**

Clark and Wright (ed. 1872): "'Envy frequently means 'hatred,' 'malice' as in *MV* [4.1.10 (1914)] . . . In Ophelia's distraction she conceives hatred of the most trivial and innocent things."

CN 2766: **{*Enter Ophelia.*}**

Reynolds (*apud* ed. 1826): "'There is no part of this play in its representation on the stage more pathetic than this scene; which, I suppose, proceeds from the utter insensibility Ophelia has to her own misfortunes."

Collier (ed. 1843): "The stage-direction in the quarto, 1603, is curiously minute: 'Enter **Ophelia**, playing on a lute, and her hair hanging down, singing.' She therefore accompanied herself in her fragments of ballads."

CN 2767: **Where is the beautious Maiestie of Denmarke?**

Kellogg (1864, p. 12): "The language used is almost identical with what is heard daily in the wards of all asylums. Coherence and incoherence are here strangely,

but most truthfully intermingled; yet throughout the whole, the truthfulness, gentleness, and loving kindness of her nature, is manifested. We perceive this in the first words which she utters in this state: [line quoted]. These words, and those which follow, fall upon the ear with a sad, melodious sweetness, than which nothing in the whole range of dramatic literature is more pathetic; and, but for the utter unconsciousness of her own great misfortunes manifested, and which to the mind of the beholder is a sort of relief, would be altogether too painful for dramatic effect."

Thompson & Taylor (ed. 2006): "These words most obviously relate to the Queen, but, since Ophelia has just been admitted to her presence, she may be asking for the King, anticipating the gender confusion of *Sweet ladies* at 72 (2809). It is not clear how far she recognizes (or half-recognizes) the other characters throughout her two appearances in this scene; performers have explored a range of options (see Rosenberg; Hapgood)."

CN 2769-70: ***Oph.*** **How should I your true loue know**

Knight (ed. [1839] nd): "The music, still sung in the character of **Ophelia**, to the fragments of songs in 4.5, is supposed to be the same, or nearly so, that was used in Shakspere's time, and thence transmitted to us by tradition. . . ."

Thompson & Taylor (ED. 2006): "This song is a version of a popular ballad much quoted elsewhere (see Jenkins). Its theme of the woman bereft of her lover seems to indicate that her father's death is not the only cause of Ophelia's distress; in fact she alternates between lover and father. Jenkins argues that Q1's lute would be incongruous as an accompaniment to this and Ophelia's other songs but Hibbard claims that this is an argument for her using it, since 'only a mad woman would think of doing so'. The incongruity is probably lost on modern audiences precisely because of their familiarity with the lute's appearance in this scene."

CN2770: **By his cockle hat and staffe, and his Sendall shone**.

Warburton (ed. 1747): "This is the description of a pilgrim. While this kind of devotion was in fashion, love-intrigues were carried under that mask. Hence the old ballads and novels make pilgrimages the subjects of their plots. The cockle-shell hat was one of the essential badges of this vocation: for the chief places of devotion beyond the sea, or on the coasts, the pilgrims were accustomed to put

cockle-shells upon their hats to denote intention or performance of their devotion."

CN2774: **at his heeles a stone.**

Andrews (ed. 1993): "Gravestone. The placement of the marker at the feet, rather than the head, of the deceased anticipates other irregularities to be dwelled on later in the ballad, and then later in the play. *Stone* can also mean 'testicle'; see *Rom.* [1.3.53 (401)], and *MV* [2.8.24 (1079)]. In this song the word is a reminder that **Ophelia** laments both the death of her father and the loss of her 'True-love' (Hamlet)."

CN2783: **pretty lady**

Thompson & Taylor (ed. 2006): "See *Pretty* Ophelia at 56; in Q1 the King calls Ofelia 'A pretty wretch'. Presumably he means to express sympathy, though his tone seems deprecating."

CN2784-5: **Well.. they say the Owle was | a Bakers daugh-ter.]**

Wilson (ed. 1934): "i.e. Well, thank you; I am transformed, but not into an owl like the baker's daughter. The allusion is to a folk-tale, acc. to Douce current in Gloucestershire, in which Jesus asks for bread at a shop, and is given short weight by the baker's daughter, for which she is changed into an owl. For a recent treatment of the story in verse, v. *The Fleeting* by Walter de la Mare."

CN 2790: **To morrow is S. Valentines day, {*Song.*}**

Bevington (ed. 1988): "(This song alludes to the belief that the first girl seen on the morning of this day was his valentine or true love)."

CN2791: **Valentine**

Wilkes (ed. 1984): "*Valentine* sweetheart (as the first person of the opposite sex seen on St Valentine's day) The second song is on the 'seduced and abandoned' theme

CN2796: **Gis**

Thompson & Taylor (ed. 2006): "Jesus." **Saint Charity**] "The capital 'S' in Q2 and F (but not in Q1) implies that *Charity* is the name of a saint, but there was no such person and the expression could just mean 'holy charity', as in Chaucer's 'Knight's Tale', 1721: 'But sle me first, for seinte cheritee.'"

CN2802: He answers

Klein (ed. 1984): “Wilson (*MSH*, pp.261, 348) merely registers the omission in F1 (and Q1); Parrott/Craig boldly speculate: "It is characteristic that Shakespeare retained in his ms. the phrase he must have heard when this old song was sung". The sense of *He answers* corresponds to [4.5.62 (2800)] *Quoth she*, but it is not integrated into the metre of the verse. Perhaps Ophelia momentarily changes over to speech and offers this as a gloss to her audience.”

CN2808-9: Come my Coach

Malone (1780, p. 382): “In Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*, 1591, Zabina in her frenzy uses the same expression: ‘Hell *make ready my coach*, my chair, my jewels. I *come*, I *come*.’ MALONE.”

CN2809: Ladies . . . Sweet Ladyes

Spencer (ed. 1980): “The only female present is the Queen (unless she has attendants).”

Thompson & Taylor (ed. 2006): “Unless there are more courtiers present, the Queen is the only other *lady* onstage; if Ophelia addresses the King and/or other male courtiers here, her confusion or conflation of genders echoes that of Hamlet at 4.3.48-50 [2715-17]. Her ominous repetition of *goodnight* also echoes Hamlet’s exit at the end of 3.4 -- and is itself echoed at the end of section 2 of T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922), though he does not record the parallel in his notes.”

CN 2904-06: ***Enter*** Ophelia **{*Laer*. Let her come in.}**

Coleridge (ms. notes 1819 in AYSCOUGH, ed. 1807; rpt. COLERIDGE, 1998, 12.4:857): <p. 857>“Shakespeare evidently wishes as much as possible to spare the character of Laertes, to break the extreme turpitude of his consent to become an Agent and Accomplice of the King’s treacherous—and to this end works the re-introduction of Ophelia—”</p. 857>

CN 2906: <*Laer*.> How now, what noyse is that?

Hibbard (ed. 1987): “All three early texts agree in not having Laertes speak until *after* Ophelia has come in. Moreover, in neither F nor Q2 are his first words addressed directly to her, thus making it clear that on first sight he completely

fails to recognize her. This subtle and highly dramatic effect, endorsed by Q1's 'Who's this *Ofelia*?', has been obscured for centuries by Theobald's shifting of the stage direction for Ophelia's entry to make it follow Laertes' line, instead of preceding it."

How. . . that] **Thompson & Taylor** (ed. 2006): "In Q1, Laertes' first line is 'Who's this, *Ofelia*?', perhaps implying that she is so changed he can scarcely recognize her."

CN3157: Oh where?

Spencer (1980): "Presumably these words represent a numbed reaction to the deeply felt calamity. Or Laertes may SPEAK as if about to run to her." Edwards (ed. 1985): "This much-ridiculed response, looking so much like a clumsy cue for Gertrude's aria, presents an almost impossible task to the actor. Perhaps Laertes is meant to express not so much shock and grief as incredulity and amazement. He has just seen her alive. 'Drowned? Where could she be drowned?' Such disbelief invites us to approve F's 'a brook' rather than Q2's 'the brook'. The queen explains that even in an unconsidered brook a girl who didn't want to live might drown."

CN 3158-75: There is a willow . . . to muddy death.

DODD (1752, pp. 254-5): <p. 254> "The character of the [sic] jailor's daughter is as beautiful, and every way comparable to this of Ophelia : it may be no disagreeable entertainment to any reader to compare them together:

Gentleman (1770, I : 27): <p. 27> "There is a degree of detestation mingled with contempt, and that disagreeable feeling both these characters raise; the Queen's account of Ophelia's mournful end is justly admired; and tho' the lady while in her senses, said very little to affect us, yet here the poet teaches us to feel for the event which has deprived her of life." </p. 27>

Seymour (1805, 2:197-8) : <p. 197>"As the queen seems to give this description from ocular knowledge, it may be asked, why, apprised as she was, of Ophelia's distraction, she did not take steps to prevent the fatal catastrophe of this amiable young woman, especially when there was so fair an opportunity of saving her

while she was, by her cloaths, borne 'mermaid-like-up,' and the queen was at leisure to hear her 'chaunting old tunes.'"

Farren (1824, pp. 191-2): <p. 191>"If anything could heighten our admiration of the Immortal Bard, after a careful examination of the life of the unfortunate Ophelia, it would be the exquisite contrivance of her death: [cites 3156-75]</p. 191> <p. 192>
There is something so exquisitely affecting in this draught of sorrow, that it is impossible not to drain the cup to the very *dregs*. [cites 3178-81]" </p. 192>

Strachey (1848, p. 87): <p. 87>That Laertes might be excused in some degree for not cooling, the Act concludes with the affecting death of Ophelia,—who in the beginning lay like a little projection of land into a lake or stream, covered with spray-flowers quietly reflected in the quiet waters, but at length is undermined or loosened, and becomes a faery isle, and after a brief vagrancy sinks almost without an eddy! [cites 3158-75]." </p. 87>

Hudson (ed. 1856): "This exquisite passage is deservedly celebrated. Nothing could better illustrate the Poet's power to make the description of a thing better than the thing itself, by giving us his eyes to see it with."

Jenkins (ed. 1982, Longer Notes, 546): <p. 546>. It is a very limited notion of drama which regards as 'lyrical rather than dramatic' ((KITTREDGE)), and even awkwardly 'fulsome' ((*N&Q*, CCXXVI, 134)), a speech designed in all its details to provide the Ophelia we have seen with her most appropriate end. And though the Queen does not speak in character, it is an essentially dramatic conception which makes her, who has in large part caused Hamlet's revulsion from love and marriage, the messenger of Ophelia's lovelorn death from love and marriage, the messenger of Ophelia's lovelorn death (cf. *HO*[[Jenkins's *Hamlet and Ophelia*, p. 148))]. Her account of it, reaching chorus-like beyond the dialogue, the play expects us to accept. So with the breaking of the branch [3165] the dramatist refutes in advance the suspicions of suicide which will nevertheless be allowed to determine the manner of Ophelia's funeral ((5.1.1-29, 211-31 (0000))). . . ."

CN3167: Fell in the weeping Brooke, her clothes spred wide,

Travers (ed. 1929): "When Sh. was 15, one Katharine Hamlet had been found drowned in the Avon, within the jurisdiction of the Stratford coroner ((p. 206 n.11

[3193])); and the verdict, in English law Latin, had been: 'per infortunium lapsit et cecidit,' by mischance she slipt and fell."

CN3169: **Which time she chaunted snatches of old {laudes} <tunes>**

Sisson (1956, 2:226): <p. 226>"Folio and Q1 read *tunes* for *laudes*, followed by most editors. *New Cambridge* and ALEXANDER, however, read *lauds*. There is no evidence of the popularity of *lauds* in England. The picture of Ophelia dying in songs of praise to God is not consistent with what we see in *Hamlet*, or hear from her in 4.5. The very next line describes her as 'incapable of her own distress', i.e. unaware or innocent of her plight. She did *not* 'make a good ending'. *tunes* could well be misread as *lauds*."

CN 3090-91: **Is shee to be buried in Christian buriall, {when she} <that>| willfully seekes her owne saluation?**
<Laer.> How now, what noyse is that?

Clark & Wright (ed. 1872): ". . . the clowns here use words conveying the opposite meaning to that intended, as Launcelot, Mrs. Quickly, Dogberry and Verges, &c., do."

CN 3211: Crowners quest law

Guernsey (1885, p. 8): <p. 8>"<p. 24> "By the canon law, whether Ophelia was sane or insane, if she deliberately caused her own death, she was not entitled to the burial rites of the church, for churchmen contended then as now that in all cases of suicide the deceased should be denied the burial rites of the church, and the clergy ought not to be bound by the decision of the Coroner's jury in such cases.*

CN 3252-55: **Gravedigger's song: In youth. . . meet]**

Jenkins (ed. 1982, Longer Notes, 548-9): <p. 548>"The *verses sung by the grave-digger* continue motifs from **Ophelia**'s songs in IV.v. Apt to the singer's occupation and, with their variation on the theme of the death of love, to the grave he is now digging, they have also a poignant irony in that sentiments appropriate to age are here offered to the grave of youth.

CN 3404: ***SD***] ***{Enter K. Q. }***

Delius (ed. 1854): The stage direction is modern and implies a stately procession, except perhaps it is compatible with the *maimed rites* [See n. 3408], the mutilated funeral rites, over which Hamlet wonders. From the old editor, Q.A[Q1] has an exact stage direction: *Enter King and Queen, Laertes and other lords, with a Priest after the Coffin.* The priest becomes in the quartos a *Doctor*, although he will be addressed there with *Churlish priest* .[See n. 3431]]

Simpson (*apud Sh. Eng*, 1916: 2:271): <p. 271>"A fine effect intended by Shakespeare is similarly marred in the setting of Ophelia's funeral (*Ham.* 5.1.239 (3404-08]). The [Q2] has the significant direction: [citesQ2]. Where in the modern rearrangement of editors and actors are the 'maimed rites' of which Hamlet expressly speaks?— [cites F1]. The stern and solitary figure of Shakspeare's text, cutting short the last rites with 'the bringing home of bell and burial', deepens the pathos of Ophelia's fate. The 'Priests, &c'—'&c.' means a crucifix, incense, and a choir of mutes—are clumsy intruders whom mere ignorance has foisted into the text." </p. 271>

Hibbard (ed. 1987): "Neither the direction in Q2 nor that in F is adequate, since both omit the *Priest* or, as he is called in his speech prefixes in Q2, *Doct.*, standing, presumably, for 'Doctor of Divinity'. Q1 is far more satisfactory because it provides all the essential information, with a single exception: it does not make clear whether the *Priest* is of the Roman Catholic or of the Protestant persuasion. Not that it matters much which church Shakespeare had in mind, since he clearly intended the funeral to be shockingly bare of ceremony. Hamlet notices at once that the rites are *maimèd*; and Laertes is outraged by the truncated nature of the proceedings."

CN3408: **And with such maimed rites? this doth betoken, {*the corse.*} corse**]

Dessen & Thomson(1999) find that this alternative to *body* is rarely used in SDs and found primarily in funerals and related ceremonies. See within speeches in Q2 and F1 (287); Q1 CLN 219 (332); Q2, F1, and Q1 CLN 441 (637); Q2, F1, and Q1 CLN 1980 (3355); and in a SD, Q2 (3408), the latter referring appropriately to a funeral (Ophelia's). The more common alternative, *body,* appears in the SD for the Dumb Show, Q2 and F1 (2001); in the SD for Hamlet's exit from his mother's closet, Q1 CLN 1601 (2585); and frequently in all the texts (for Polonius's body, for example)."

CN 3415: {Doct**.} <*Priest.*> Her obsequies haue been as farre inlarg'd 3415**

190 funerall] **Dessen & Thomson**(1999) say that SDs for funerals call for "a public procession involving a hearse/bier, mourning figures, and appropriate accouterments and music." Hamlet's father had such a funeral, which Horatio came to see (364), but Polonius Q2 (2964) and **Ophelia** (3415) have "obscure funerals."

CN 3416: warrantie]

Clark & Wright (*apud* **Furness**, ed. 1877): "This suggestion of Whalley's receives support from the conversation of the Clowns at the beginning of the scene, but is scarcely consistent with what follows in the next line, where 'great command' evidently refers to the influence of the king, which had been exercised so as to interfere with the usual proceedings."

CN **3416: doubtfull]**

MacDonald (ed. 1885): "This casts discredit on the queen's story."

Jenkins (ed. 1982) **warrantie**]: "This must refer to the Church's sanction of its own offices, as distinct from the coroner's warrant for burial ((3193-4])). The prohibition of the burial service for suicide . . . became explicit in the Prayerbook of 1662. Discretion was allowed in *doubtful* cases ((which are provided for in the Roman *Codex Iuris Canonici*, 1240 §2))."

CN 3434: *Ham.* What, the faire Ophelia.

Knight (ed. [1841]): "Of Hamlet's violence at the grave of **Ophelia** we think. . . that it was a real aberration, and not a simulated frenzy. His apparently cold expression, 'What the faire **Ophelia**!' appears to us to have been an effort of restraint, which for the moment overmastered his reason . . . ."

Stewart (1914, pp. 223-4): <p. 223>"It must be remembered that not the least source of Hamlet's inner pain was memory, the recollection of what he had formerly been. More than by his father's ghost, Hamlet was haunted by his dead self. Such an occasion as this, besides outfacing him in the present, was calculated to work on him in that way. He had loved Ophelia, a most poignant memory . . . . Whichever way he turned he was faced by a mother guilty of incest and easy in her love; an uncle who was a murderer and a hypocrite; a love that proved a disappointment . . . . If Ophelia had turned out to meet his essential ideals of a

woman (apart from any ability of hers to take part in his stern business in life) his tragedy would not have been unmitigated."

Edwards (ed. 1985, Introduction, 56): <p. 56>"Not until the funeral procession arrives does Hamlet learn that the grave is for Ophelia . . . . Many people feel that in Hamlet's reflections over the empty grave on the vanity of life and the inevitability of death there is a mature and sober wisdom. But the presentation of this wisdom is entirely ironic. His [Hamlet's] truths are based on a chasm of ignorance. He speaks his words over a grave which he does not know is intended for a woman whose madness and death he is responsible for. . . . The fact of the dead girl punctuates his philosophy."