Summer 8-2014

A Document in Death and Madness: A Cultural and Interdisciplinary Study of Nineteenth-Century Art Song Settings on the Death of Opelia

Jennifer Leigh Tipton
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A DOCUMENT IN DEATH AND MADNESS:
A CULTURAL AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF
NINETEENTH-CENTURY ART SONG SETTINGS ON THE DEATH OF OPHELIA

by

Jennifer Leigh Tipton

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

August 2014
ABSTRACT

A DOCUMENT IN DEATH AND MADNESS:
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by Jennifer Leigh Tipton

August 2014

In the nineteenth century the character of Ophelia transformed from a minor role in *Hamlet* into one of the great muses of the Romantic period. Ophelia’s rise to an archetype of feminine madness was not a result of Shakespeare’s pen alone, but of the accumulation of interpretations of her character from actresses, artists, critics, writers, musicians, and social attitudes toward women. This paper focuses on nineteenth-century interpretations of her death, specifically art song.

A brief survey of the nineteenth-century European cultural and social climate pertaining to Ophelia is included in the paper:

- Shakespeare in France and Germany
- Nineteenth-Century Actresses in the Role of Ophelia
- The Death of Ophelia
- Ophelia in Art
- Ophelia as the Feminine Ideal
- Ophelia: A Pathetic or Tragic Character

The bulk of the paper focuses on four nineteenth-century art songs (three French and one German) that portray Ophelia’s death: “La mort d'Ophélie,” by Hector Berlioz; “Herzeleid,” by Robert Schumann; “La mort d'Ophélie,” by Camille Saint-Saëns; and
“Ophélia” from Poèmes d’automne by Gabriel Dupont. In addition to poetic and musical analysis, correlations are drawn between these songs and paintings depicting her passing: Sir John Everett Millais’s Ophelia, 1852; Arthur Hughes’s Ophelia, 1852; and Eugène Delacroix’s La mort d’Ophélia, 1853.

This paper serves as a cultural and interdisciplinary musical character study of Ophelia, exploring the various interpretations of her death as a heroic transcendence, final act of rebellion, unfortunate accident, or conscious surrender to sadness and death. The reader will take away a better understanding of Ophelia and the various interpretations of the enigmatic character, which will aid artists taking on the role.
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August 2014
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Ophelia is the daughter of Polonius, counselor to the king; sister of Laertes; and romantic interest of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Her role is minor; she appears in only five of the twenty scenes of the play. After her relationship with Hamlet is broken and he unintentionally kills her father, Ophelia goes mad and drowns in a stream. Shakespeare’s own view and literary purpose of Ophelia continues to be a focus of scholarly debate. She is “an inimitable sketch.”¹ A character “we rather feel than hear.”² Feminist critic, Lee Edwards claims that “we can imagine Hamlet’s story without Ophelia, but Ophelia literally has no story without Hamlet;” perhaps Ophelia’s story reaches beyond the pages of Shakespeare.³

Through artistic representations in visual arts and music, Ophelia has become an iconic Shakespearean figure and a prominent symbol of feminine madness that has developed along with and mirrored society and culture. Of the characters in *Hamlet*, she is “the most persistently presented in terms of symbolic meanings.”⁴ While she appears throughout history in various incarnations, she is “embedded or encoded with a specific

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set of distinguishing characteristics and meanings.”5 Ophelia is traditionally portrayed as young, pale, and beautiful. Her disheveled hair and lost gaze are signs of madness, stemming from Elizabethan stage convention. She is often pictured wearing a white dress, representative of her innocence, a quality which is sometimes juxtaposed by her dress slipping off her body and exposing her bare breast to indicate female sexuality. Additionally, she is commonly seen with flowers which represent nature, female sexuality, and possess their own specific meanings related to individual species. Many images of Ophelia depict her near or at the moment of her death in a picturesque landscape. Perhaps the most iconic images of Ophelia are those featuring a beautiful female corpse floating or submerged in water.

Ophelia’s rise to an archetype of feminine madness was not a result of Shakespeare’s pen alone, but of the accumulation of interpretations of her character from actresses, artists, critics, writers, poets, and musicians. She was the most represented literary character in British art, and she continues to be the muse of artists in fields all over the world. Many composers have written songs based on and inspired by Ophelia. This paper will focus on four nineteenth-century art songs (three French and one German) that portray Ophelia’s death: “La mort d'Ophélie,” by Hector Berlioz; “Herzeleid,” by Robert Schumann; “La mort d'Ophélie,” by Camille Saint-Saëns; and “Ophélia” from Poèmes d’automne by Gabriel Dupont. While Ophelia has inspired many other art songs, particularly songs focusing on her madness, these works are beyond the scope of this paper.

Understanding the cultural and historical significance behind a piece of music and the character being portrayed allows the performer (and in turn the audience) to shape an emotional connection and deeper understanding of our own humanity. In order to understand Ophelia in death we must first understand who she was in life, what her character represents to society, and why artists are continually impelled to recreate her death.

A brief survey of the nineteenth-century European cultural and social climate pertaining to Ophelia is included in Chapter II. The first section “Shakespeare in France and Germany” traces how the poet’s work came to the continent, was translated into French and German, and altered to accommodate social expectations. “Nineteenth-Century Actresses in the Role of Ophelia” looks at actresses such as Harriet Smithson and Ellen Terry whose performances of Ophelia influenced subsequent interpretations of the character. “The Death of Ophelia” examines the symbolic imagery in Gertrude’s monologue describing Ophelia’s death and addresses questions and mysteries surrounding her death. “Ophelia in Art” focuses on three paintings: John Everett Millais’s *Ophelia*, 1852; Arthur Hughes’s *Ophelia*, 1852; and Eugène Delacroix’s *La mort d’Ophélia*, 1853. These paintings all depict her death but differ in interpretations of her character and passing. “Ophelia as the Feminine Ideal” presents nineteenth-century literary criticisms of Ophelia and how her character influenced society. The final section, “Ophelia: A Pathetic or Tragic Character” discusses how Ophelia possesses qualities of both pathetic and tragic characters. How one chooses to view her character directly impacts an artistic interpretation of the role.
Chapter III “Songs of the Death of Ophelia” poetically and musically analyzes four nineteenth-century art songs: “La mort d'Ophélie,” by Hector Berlioz; “Herzeleid,” by Robert Schumann; “La mort d'Ophélie,” by Camille Saint-Saëns; and “Ophélia” from Poèmes d’automne by Gabriel Dupont. In addition to poetic and musical analysis, correlations are drawn between these songs and paintings depicting her passing: Sir John Everett Millais’s Ophelia, 1852; Arthur Hughes’s Ophelia, 1852; and Eugène Delacroix’s La mort d’Ophélia, 1853. In conclusion, chapter IV highlights musical similarities between the songs as well as a general summary of the major nineteenth-century interpretations of Ophelia.
CHAPTER II

OPHELIA

Shakespeare in France and Germany

The industrial revolution at the turn of the nineteenth century brought with it an abundance of cultural exchanges through printed texts and performing groups. Eighteenth-century French writers were familiar with Hamlet, but for them the play “was the chaotic invention of a deranged mind, produced by a barbaric genius, to amuse barbarians.” The earliest translations of Hamlet in French came from Voltaire who famously criticized Shakespeare and referred to Hamlet as “a gross and barbarous piece,” which the “lowest of the rabble in France or Italy would not tolerate.” Voltaire’s successor at the French Academy, Jean-François Ducis revered Shakespeare. He translated and adapted the story of Hamlet in 1769 for French tastes. His adaptation became the standard edition in France, Spain, Poland, and Russia.

On September 11, 1827, an English acting troupe featuring Charles Kemble as Hamlet and Harriet Smithson as Ophelia performed Hamlet (in English) at the Odéon Theatre in Paris. This performance shifted the general French opinion of Shakespeare. Many of the great French romantic artists were in attendance: Alfred de Musset, Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo, Louis Boulanger, Eugène Delacroix, Théophile Gautier, and Hector Berlioz. Even though the production was in a foreign language, the

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performance of the actors left a significant impact on the audience. Victor Hugo’s wife recounts her husband’s reaction:

Victor Hugo attended Miss Smithson’s debut-performances and, for the first time, saw Shakespeare acted. At that moment he was writing the Preface to *Cromwell* and he was inspired to write this commentary on the English master’s dramatic art: “[Shakespeare] this god of the theatre, in whom appear to be united the three great geniuses who characterize our theatre: Corneille, Molière, Beaumarchais.”

Alexander Dumas wrote:

For the first time … he had seen real passions on the stage, animating men and women of flesh and blood. He felt like a blind man who had just received his sight. He perceived that ‘in the theatrical worlds everything emanates from Shakespeare, just as in the real world everything emanates from the sun … I realised [sic] that, after God, Shakespeare had created more than any other human being.’

The performance was life changing for Hector Berlioz, “This sudden and unexpected revelation of Shakespeare overwhelmed me. The lightening-flash of his genius revealed the whole heaven of art to me, illuminating its remotest depths in a single flash. I recognized the meaning of real grandeur, real beauty, and real dramatic truth.”

Kemble’s troupe also performed *Romeo and Juliet*, but it was *Hamlet* that garnered the most attention and inspired romantic artists. *Hamlet* was performed 203 times in France from 1769 to 1851.

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Unlike Voltaire, Goethe championed the works of Shakespeare:

> The first page I read of him made me his own for the rest of my life, and as I finished the first play I stood like one who has been blind from birth being given the gift of sight by a miraculous hand. I understood, I felt in the liveliest way how my existence extended to infinity, everything was new to me, unknown, and the unaccustomed light hurt my eyes.\(^\text{13}\)

In the 1790s, German poet, critic, and translator, August Wilhelm Schlegel began translating the works of Shakespeare into German. Unlike Ducis, he sought to adhere faithfully the original text. After completing sixteen of the plays, he gave up the project. His work was then continued by Ludwig Tieck. The Schlegel/Tieck translations became the standard edition for German productions.\(^\text{14}\) Even though the Schlegel/Tieck translations follow Shakespeare’s work closely, they were not identical and often manipulated structure, characters, and plots to suit audiences and social practices. There was no defining Shakespearean performance in Germany as there was in France. His works were naturally assimilated into the romantic culture; “Shakespeare in Germany is a topic not simply of reception but of appropriation, an appropriation so thorough that in the course of the nineteenth century Shakespeare acquired a place alongside Goethe and Schiller as one of Germany’s three major writers.”\(^\text{15}\)

**Nineteenth-Century Actresses in the Role of Ophelia**

The role of Ophelia was originally played by a boy in the Elizabethan age. It was not until the second half of the seventeenth century that women began to perform on the stage. Female actresses brought new interpretations to the role of Ophelia, and their mere


\(^{14}\) Ibid., 150-51.

presence brought “new meanings and subversive tensions” to the role.¹⁶ Nineteenth-century actresses such as Sarah Siddons, Harriet Smithson, Mary Bolton, Helena Modjeska, Helena Faucit, Kate Terry, and Ellen Terry continued to develop and change interpretations of Ophelia, bringing their own ideas and experiences as women to the part.

Even though women were allowed to perform they were still bound to social expectations. Augustan ideals of female submission and modesty resulted in the censorship of Ophelia. The ideal woman, as described in 1831 was to exhibit

Chastity, perfect modesty, in word, deed, and even thought … without it, no female is fit to be a wife. It is not enough that a young woman abstain from everything approaching indecorum in her behavior towards men….she ought to appear not to understand it, and to receive from it no more impression than if she were a post.¹⁷

Because of censorship, many of Ophelia’s lines were cut, and stage actresses were passed over for singers, turning Ophelia’s mad scene into a mere musical interlude. When actresses such as Sarah Siddons (1755-1831) did perform the role, they were expected to play the mad scene with “stately and classical dignity.”¹⁸ At the turn of the nineteenth century, female madness was believed to be “part of female nature, less to be imitated by an actress than demonstrated by a deranged woman in a performance of her emotions.”¹⁹

¹⁶. Showalter, 80.

¹⁷. William Cobett, Advice to Young Men and (Incidentally) Young Women in the Middle and Upper Ranks of Life. In a Series of Letters Addressed to a Youth, a Bachelor, a Lover, a Husband, a Citizen or a Subject (New York: John Doyle, 1831), 79.

¹⁸. Showalter, 82-83.

¹⁹. Ibid., 82-83.
When *Hamlet* was initially introduced to European audiences in the nineteenth century, Ophelia was considered a secondary role, the lead female role being that of Queen Gertrude, Hamlet’s mother.\(^{20}\) Throughout the course of the century, Ophelia became a cult figure to romantic artists.\(^{21}\) Harriet Smithson’s performance at the Odéon captured the imagination of the romantic artists in the audience and acted as a catalyst to the rise of Ophelia’s popularity: “For Berlioz [who married Smithson, so captivated was he by her Ophelia], Hugo, and Delacroix, Ophelia swelled into a magic symbol of an erotic and aesthetic awakening that soared far beyond her ancillary role in Shakespeare’s play.”\(^{22}\)

Instead of relying on text or song, Harriet Smithson (1800-1854) used “her extensive command of mime to depict in precise gesture the state of Ophelia’s confused mind.”\(^{23}\) Smithson’s effective physical communication of Ophelia’s madness contributed to the non-English speaking audience’s ability to identify and sympathize with the character’s pathos: “The scene was judged to convey both poetry and reality; it was at once ‘heart-rendering and graceful, simple and sublime.’”\(^{24}\) Smithson’s use of a black veil and mime in the mad scene influenced the way actresses portrayed Ophelia for the


\(^{22}\) Ibid.


\(^{24}\) Ibid., 66-67.
next 150 years. A lithograph by Eugène Delacroix, *Ophelia’s Song*, 1834 (Figure 1), illustrates Smithson and her black veil in the mad scene.

*Figure 1. Eugène Delacroix’s, *Ophelia’s Song*, 1834: Smithson in the role of Ophelia.*

As the century progressed Ophelia retained her soft feminine nature, but actresses sought to bring more depth to the character. Helena Faucit (1817-1898), who played

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25. Showalter, 83.

Ophelia in the mid-nineteenth-century, was fascinated with the “mystery of her madness” and believed there was more dimension to Ophelia than commonly perceived:27

…[she], as I have pictured her, is so unlike what I hear and read about her, and have seen represented on the stage, that I can scarcely hope to make any one think of her as I do. It hurts me to hear her spoken of as she often is, as a weak creature, wanting in truthfulness, in purpose, in force of character, and only interesting when she loses the little wits she had.28

Advancements in mental health also influenced the way actresses researched and portrayed Ophelia. Women in mental asylums were often diagnosed by Victorian psychiatrists as “Ophelia Types.”29 Shakespeare’s work was so respected amongst the Victorians that his characters were considered accurate accounts of mental disorders. “Ophelia is the very type of a class of cases by no means uncommon. Every mental physician of moderately extensive experience must have seen many Ophelias.”30 Victorian psychiatrist John Conolly stated, “Never did poet’s pen draw so touching and so true a portrait of madness fallen on a delicate and affectionate girl.”31 He continues, “Our asylums for ruined minds now and then present remarkable illustrations of the fatal malady … so that even casual visitors recognize in the wards an Ophelia; the same young years, the same faded beauty, the same fantastic dress and interrupted song.”32

28. Ibid., 3-4.
29. Kiefer, 16.
32. Ibid., 177-178.
Actress Ellen Terry (1847-1928) went the asylums to research the role of Ophelia. Terry had a reputation of being “daring and unconventional” in life, and as an actress she “… led the way in acting Ophelia in feminist terms as a consistent psychological study in sexual intimidation, a girl terrified of her father, of her lover and of life itself.” She writes that at the asylum:

I was disheartened at first. There was no beauty, no nature, no pity in most of the lunatics. Strange as it may sound, they were too theatrical to teach me anything. Then, just as I was going away, I noticed a young girl gazing at the wall. I went between her and the wall to see her face. It was quite vacant, but the body expressed that she was waiting, waiting. Suddenly she threw up her hands and sped across the room like a swallow. I never forgot it. She was very thin, very pathetic, very young, and the movement was as poignant as it was beautiful.

Terry’s performances were praised for being “poetic and intellectual.” In spite of her feminist nature and intellectual curiosity, she believed that “[Ophelia’s] brain, her soul, and her body are all pathetically weak.”

Toward the turn of the twentieth century, interpretations of Ophelia, including feminist interpretations began to branch into divergent directions. While Terry saw Ophelia as weak, other actresses such as Helena Faucit and an anonymous actress who wrote the book *The True Ophelia* argued against this depiction of Ophelia as a submissive “insipid little creature.” The anonymous actress believed that as a woman Ophelia was underrepresented in a patriarchal society and that a character as strong as

33. Showalter, 88-89.
35. Showalter, 89.
Hamlet would not love a ‘pathetically weak’ Ophelia. The anonymous actress defends Ophelia’s innocence and naivety as something precious and rare instead of viewing these characteristics as weakness and/or ignorance.\(^{38}\)

### The Death of Ophelia

Throughout the play, in life and death, Ophelia is acted upon by external forces and characters and rarely speaks for herself. Her death takes place offstage. The story of her passing is delivered by Gertrude to Laertes and Claudius in Act IV, scene 7 (165-182).

There is a willow grows aslant a brook,  
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;  
There with fantastic garlands did she come  
Of crow-flowers, 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 pendent boughs her coronet 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 tunes;  
As one incapable of her own distress,  
Or like a creature native and indued  
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.\(^{39}\)

In Gertrude’s speech “we see and feel beauty in the awful reality of the troubled girl’s death.”\(^{40}\) However, the account of her death is filled with inconsistencies and raises

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 19.  
\(^{40}\) Kiefer, 11.
questions regarding the exact circumstances of Ophelia’s death. Was it suicide or an act of madness, chance, or fate? If there were witnesses to her death why did they not intervene and try to save her? When Ophelia exits during the mad scene, Claudius orders her to be followed. If his orders were obeyed why did no one attempt to rescue the drowning girl; was she murdered? If she was murdered, was it on the orders of the King? In spite of the questionable circumstances surrounding her death, Gertrude’s monologue, filled with pathos and symbolic imagery, turned her death into a work of art through which “Ophelia began to live an existence independent of the Shakespearean Hamlet.”

Romantic artists were particularly inspired by the symbolic imagery of Gertrude’s elegy. References to the feminine, nature, female sexuality, and of course death are strewn throughout the text. Words and phrases such as “long purples,” “dead men’s fingers,” “her clothes spread wide,” “mermaid-like,” and “death” can be interpreted as references to sexuality, which eroticizes her death. In Victorian society the act of female suicide “was linked to the life of the fallen woman, in art and literature” and seen as “a redemptive act.”


44. Kiefer, 25.
Because the act of suicide by drowning is passive, it is considered a feminine death, as opposed to a violent masculine suicide. Drowning is also seen as the “allegorical reabsorption” of the female into “her natural element.”

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, as her body is the repository of blood, amniotic fluid, and milk.

This return to the natural elements via water is in line with romantic notions of transcendence, which can be interpreted as either glorious or tragic. In a triumphant death, Ophelia escapes “the confinement of the male-dominated castle and court to the personal freedom traditionally granted to women by madness and nature.” However her drowning can also be seen as “… a reverse baptism: she sinks into the mud to ‘doubtful’ death and possible damnation, instead of rising from cleansing waters to incorporation with Christ and possible salvation.” Regardless of the view taken on Ophelia’s death, “Gertrude’s speech-like innumerable depictions in the nineteenth-century visual art – turns not only Ophelia’s madness, but also the image of her dead body, into something pretty and safe for contemplation.”

45. Kiefer, 25.
46. Showalter, 81.
47. Kiefer, 22.
Ophelia in Art

Visual images of Ophelia are captured in two different ways: performance and portrait. Performance works include works that recreate scenes from productions of *Hamlet*: such as the lithograph *Ophelia’s Song*, 1834 by Delacroix (Figure 1). They provide a vital source of research when studying performance practice and constructing a cultural identity of Ophelia. Portrait works, such as *Ophelia* by John Everett Millais painted in 1852, depict a story or scene of a character but are not tied to a specific theatrical performance. Entire books are devoted to the visual images of Ophelia, but I will focus on three monumental portraits that depict her death and correspond either directly or indirectly to the art songs discussed in this paper: Sir John Everett Millais’s *Ophelia*, 1852; Eugène Delacroix’s *La mort d’Ophélia*, 1853; and Arthur Hughes’s *Ophelia*, 1852. Although these paintings differ in style and interpretation they are all based on Gertrude’s Act IV, scene 7 monologue.

Sir John Everett Millais (1829-1896) was a painter and one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.\(^50\) His *Ophelia* (Figure 2) has become as recognizable and part of our cultural consciousness as Hamlet holding Yorick’s skull.\(^51\) In this painting, Ophelia is seen floating in the “glassy stream” peacefully suspended between life and

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50. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood sought to emulate “the art of late medieval and early Renaissance Europe until the time of Raphael” their art is “characterized by minute description of detail, a luminous palette of bright colors that recalls the tempera paint used by medieval artists, and subject matter of a noble, religious, or moralizing nature.” Jennifer Meagher, “The Pre-Raphaelites” The Metropolitan Museum of Art. http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/praf/hd_praf.htm (accessed June 2, 2014).

death. Millais sought to realistically capture nature and painted the landscape portion of
the work on the River Hogsmill in Surrey.  

![Image of Ophelia painting](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/millais-ophelia-n01506 (accessed June 1, 2014).)

**Figure 2.** John Everett Millais: *Ophelia*, 1852.  

Ophelia serenely rests amongst rich vegetation and brightly detailed flowers and
does not resist the forces that act upon her. Instead the image focuses on the moments
prior to her death and does not elude the violent reality of her impending doom. “Her
beautiful face has a calm, lost gaze, and her lips are slightly parted to emit the sounds of
her mad songs; her hands extend upward and outward with open palms, a gesture of

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Christopher John Murray (New York: Rutledge, 2004), 829.

saint-like submission to death.”

Millais strictly adhered to Gertrude’s depiction of Ophelia’s passing. He used specific symbolic flowers. She holds poppies in her right hand, which represent death. The daisies symbolize innocence, the roses signifying youth, and the pansies that surround her body represent unrequited love. Violets are draped around her neck for faithfulness and fritillaries float at her feet symbolizing sorrow.

While Millais depicts almost photographic realism in regards to nature, Ophelia’s body hovers in an unnatural position in uncommonly and unsettling still waters. She is not painted in the traditional white dress; instead the colors of her dress resemble the colors of her natural surroundings, which reinforces the idea of her reabsorption into the natural elements and contributes to her becoming part of the scene and not the focus: “The division of space between Ophelia and the natural details Millais had so painstakingly pursued reduces her to one more visual object; and the painting has such a hard surface, strangely flattened perspective, and brilliant light that it seems cruelly indifferent to the woman’s death.”

Prior to Millais’s painting, images of Ophelia’s death depicted her madness before she entered the water. These images were often sexually suggestive, but Millais’s Ophelia depicts death as sensuous. The sexualized female corpse became very fashionable in the nineteenth century: “Dead and dying women were notoriously seductive for nineteenth-century men. The bodies of such women, imaginary ones anyway, were felt to combine

54. Kiefer, 22.
55. Thomas, 829.
56. Kiefer, 22.
57. Showalter, 85.
the pliancy of flesh with the perfection of a sculpture, making death of women at once a form of art and form of sex.”

With her slightly opened mouth, serene body, and alabaster skin, Millais’s Ophelia was the first painting to fetishize her death, and it became the standard interpretation for subsequent artistic works. “[Ophelia] offers the artist the possibilities for depicting the female Other, with all its attendant erotic potential, in the most private of moments—death.”

Arthur Hughes’s 1852 Ophelia (Figure 3) was presented the same year as Millais’s Ophelia. While both were Pre-Raphaelite painters, their interpretations of the same Shakespearean text differ drastically.

Figure 3. Arthur Hughes: Ophelia, 1852.


59. Young, 284.

Hughes’s painting features a very young, child-like, “sort of ‘Tinker Bell’ Ophelia sitting by the brook.” Instead of the lush greenery found in the Millais, Hughes’s Ophelia sits amidst a swamp-like, hazy environment. His pre-pubescent Ophelia epitomizes innocence and dons a kind of crown of thorns made of straw, referencing Christian martyrdom. Her virginal white dress is juxtaposed with the murky, dirty water beneath her. The painting is domed and the text from Gertrude’s monologue is printed around the portrait. Hughes returned to the subject of Ophelia in 1865 (Figure 4), this time featuring a more mature, beautiful woman in a white dress by a tree, with no trace of murkiness or martyrdom.

Figure 4. Arthur Hughes, Ophelia (‘And Will He Not Come Back Again), 1865.

61. Showalter, 84.

Eugène Delacroix was present at Harriet Smithson’s 1827 performance of *Hamlet*. Delacroix produced several works on Ophelia including a series of lithographs recreating Smithson’s performance and three oil the paintings. *La mort d’Ophélia*, 1853 (Figure 5) is the first of the three paintings in which he “…painted her as a harbinger of Romantic transformations, bare-breasted like his personified female liberty, suspended between air and water as she is between humanity and divinity, reality and myth. In French Romantic revisions, Ophelia is reborn and redeemed as a symbol of revolutions in nature and art.”

*Figure 5.* Eugène Delacroix: *La mort d’Ophélia*, 1853.64

In the Delacroix, Ophelia does not passively submit to death but clings to the willow amidst rushing waters and the forces of death, implying that her death was more


accidental than suicidal. He sexualizes Ophelia. She is shown bare-breasted with her life and dress perilously slipping away from her.\textsuperscript{65} Even though he sexualizes Ophelia, his Ophelia is not sensual as is Millais’s. Baudelaire describes Delacroix’s heroines:

In general, he does not paint pretty women, at least not from society’s point of view. Almost all sickly they are resplendent with a certain inner beauty. He does not express strength through size of muscle, but through tension of the nerves. It is not suffering \textit{simpliciter} \textsuperscript{sic} that he best expresses, but –such is the prodigious mystery of his painting – moral affliction … it is plaintive and profound as a Weber melody.\textsuperscript{66}

In the act of clinging to the branch and tension in the body, Delacroix’s interpretation conveys a sense of inner torment and physical struggle to survive as opposed to the pathos of the Hughes or the transcendence in the Millais.

Ophelia as the Feminine Ideal

Through the words of Shakespeare interpreted by actresses, literary critics, and visual artists, society found in Ophelia the ideal woman: “How beautiful the sister—the daughter—and the lover preserved throughout. How winning and how gentle—how tender and how fond—how submissive, and how perfectly woman.”\textsuperscript{67} Both men and women viewed Ophelia as the feminine ideal. In the book, \textit{The Stratford Gallery; or the Shakespeare Sisterhood}, Henrietta Lee Palmre describes the women of Shakespeare. She speaks of “his sisterhood … as one woman may justly speak of another – judging them,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{65} Showalter, 84.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Charles Baudelaire, quoted in Gilles Nerèt, \textit{Eugène Delacroix, 1798-1863: The Prince of Romanticism} (New York: Taschen, 1999), 42.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Graves, 58.
\end{itemize}
not with sophisticated research nor oracular criticism, but simply, naturally
sympathetically, as she may regard her fellow-women whom she meets day to day.”

Ophelia is more ideal, a more purely imaginative creation than Juliet or Desdemona; with the story of her youth, her tender beauty, her hapless love which leads to insanity and a tragic death, we sympathize less painfully than with the sorrows of those more vividly depicted heroines; indeed the very tints, pale yet enduring, in which her shadowy outline is traced, constitute a touching appeal to the hand of a would-be “restorer,” one should be content to spare her retiring delicacy any sentiment of pity more impertinently familiar than a tender pathos.

A description of Ophelia, by Abner Otis Kellog, was included in a series of essays published in the *Journal of American Insanity* between 1859-64. The essays were later published in the book *Shakespeare’s Delineations of Insanity, Imbecility, and Suicide*. Kellog describes of Ophelia’s femininity

… of all Shakespeare’s female characters, Ophelia is, par excellence, the most feminine; and in her, it strikes us, we perceive a closer approximation to the “divine perfection of a woman,” than found in any other of the poet’s delineations. The daughter of a courtier, bred amid the vices, she escapes all contamination by the innate purity of her natural character, and to the end maintains that artless and childlike simplicity so essentially characteristic of the true woman.

As the archetype of the feminine ideal, Ophelia influenced nineteenth-century European culture. Women in society copied her fashion and frail appearance and the feminine death played a role in nationalism.

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69. Ibid., 32.


71. Ibid., 68-69.
After Smithson’s debut of Ophelia, lithographs of her in the role were displayed in shops throughout Paris. These images soon influenced Parisian fashion. In co-ordinance with Ophelia’s traditional image and conventional theatrical practice to show madness, Smithson wore her hair loose and disheveled. She also elected to wear a “black veil with wisps of straw tastefully interwoven amongst the hair.”\textsuperscript{72} This became known as “a coiffure à la Miss Smithson” (Figure 6) and became widely popular with fashionable women of the time.\textsuperscript{73}

\textit{Figure 6.} Unknown artist, lithograph: Harriet Smithson as Ophelia, “a coiffure à la Miss Smithson.”\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{72} Raby, 75.\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.\textsuperscript{74} Unknown Artist, lithograph, http://shakespeare.berkeley.edu/gallery2/main.php?g2_itemId=16973 (accessed June 1, 2014).
In addition to hairstyles, women also sought to copy Ophelia’s paleness and frailty. Paleness in Ophelia was derived from death, artistic representations (such as Millais’s *Ophelia*), and from the complexion of actresses in the role, such as Helena Faucit. Miss Faucit’s complexion was specifically praised in a review, “how pale she was already with her future death.” Cosmetic companies catered to women seeking the deathly complexion: “…around 1890 the Parisian cosmetics firm Houbigant sought to create interest in its latest facial powder by calling it ‘Poudre Ophelia.’ The new product was widely advertised as a true ‘talisman of beauty.’ It was said to create at least the outward appearance of being as decorously pale and fragile as any true Ophelia.” Pale, frail, and self-sacrificing women represented the ideal feminine and were associated with wealth, nobility, and sophistication. Sick women were dependent upon male support and affection and “only the richest men could afford the luxury of a sick wife.”

*L’Inconnue de la Seine* (the unknown woman of the Seine) (Figure 7) was a real life “Ophelia” who was pulled out of the Seine River in the late nineteenth century.


77. Romanska, 75.
One of the medical attendants was so taken by the beauty of her face that a death mask was taken:

A copy of this young girl’s immobile head, seemingly pure and calm – with her straight hair tucked in at the back of her neck so as to frame her face, her eyes peacefully closed and her lips fixed into a sweetly serene, enigmatic smile, which could signify the relief but also the ecstasy of death – adorned the rooms of countless young women.\(^{79}\)

The woman was never identified, but like Ophelia she represents a young beautiful girl who mysteriously and peacefully drowned and whose posthumous loveliness romanticized death.

Ophelia’s role as the ideal feminine coincided with Hamlet becoming the embodiment of masculinity. Definitive gender lines and identities directly correlated


with emerging nationalistic ideas of nineteenth-century Europe: “...nationalism can be seen as a powerful ideological expression of (and contributor to) modern definitions of ‘masculine/feminine.’” Masculinity cannot exist without femininity. Hamlet names Ophelia as “woman” and “frailty.” If to be a woman means to be frail, then to be a man means to be strong. Ophelia is the antipodes of Hamlet. She wears white, is innocent, thinks ‘nothing,’ and goes mad. He wears black, is worldly, ponders the meaning of life, and feigns madness.

In addition to gender, nationalism is also directly related to death: “Nationalism gives meaning to death and helps assuage anxieties about human mortality because the nation continues to live beyond the death of each individual; every life and death is connected to a higher national spirit or reality that seems to promise an endless future existence.” With the loss of support by her masculine figures, Polonius and Hamlet, Ophelia’s life forfeit. She then fulfills the feminine national ideal in her passivity and self-sacrificing death. Her innocent submissive death in the female element juxtaposes Hamlet’s pre-mediated, violent death avenging his father and thereby ensuring the dignity and posterity of Denmark.

Ophelia as a Pathetic or Tragic Character

Pathetic characters are victims of circumstance; they have little to no control over their situation, they are useless and while we feel pathos and pity for them, the “pathetic

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81. Shakespeare, 29.
82. Ibid., 143.
protagonist … exists below the line of equivalence to ‘ourselves.’”\textsuperscript{84} According to Aristotle, a tragic character or hero is similar to or “better than we are” and undeserving of their ill-fated destiny.\textsuperscript{85} Their downfall must bring about both pity and fear.\textsuperscript{86} While both kinds of characters suffer a misfortune which often leads to their death and evokes pity, tragic characters have high mimesis, whereas pathetic characters have low mimesis.\textsuperscript{87} Ophelia can be interpreted either way. How one views her character directly affects the symbolic meaning of her death.

As the feminine ideal of the nineteenth century, Ophelia is a pathetic character. She fits the definition of a pathetic character except that the delicate femininity and pathos she evokes make her superior to some critics and contributes to her cultural influence. The reverence to her character and cultural influence suggests high mimesis:

Far too soft, too good, too fair, to be cast among the breirs [sic] of this working-day world, and fall and bleed upon the thorns of life! What shall be said of her? For eloquence is lost before her! Like a strain of sad sweet music, which comes floating by us on the wings of the night and silence, and which we rather feel than hear like the exhalation of the violent dying even upon the sense it charms – like the snowflake, dissolved in air before it has caught a stain of earth – like the snow- from the billow, which a breath disperses – such is the character of Ophelia; so exquisitely delicate, it seems as if a touch would profane it; so sanctified it out thoughts by the last and worst of human woes, that we scarcely dare to consider it too deeply.\textsuperscript{88}


\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 53.

\textsuperscript{87} Scholes, 122.

\textsuperscript{88} Jameson, 176-9.
Other critics viewed Ophelia as a purely pathetic character; “a large number of readers feel a kind of personal irritation against Ophelia; they seem unable to forgive her for not having been a heroine.”

Ironically, if Ophelia had been a “heroine” her female heroisms would have diminished Hamlet’s masculinity.

Elaine Showalter suggests that the interpretation of Ophelia as a pathetic character was as a sexist belief of the “Victorian male tradition” perpetuated by A.C. Bradley.

However, interpretations of Ophelia were not clearly split along gender lines. Ellen Terry viewed her as weak, and the following criticism was written by a Victorian school girl:

Ophelia though pure and sweet was very weak and timid and although she had a loving nature, she was too fragile … to help anybody in such trouble as Hamlet was. We see how weak she was in Act I Scene III where she was so influenced by what Laertes and Polonius told her that she began to distrust her lover and to take her father’s part against him for they do not conceive that Hamlet may really be in love with Ophelia and the poison in her mind against [him].

In Act II Scene I we have another proof of her weakness for when Hamlet was undecided what steps to take about his father’s murder he naturally turned to Ophelia yet he thought in his inmost heart that she should not be strong enough to help him but he made a last attempt to disabuse himself of this impression but it was no good and he quitted her forever. Also she showed her weakness in the scene with Hamlet when she told the lie about the father, who she said was at home but was behind the arras spying on Hamlet. Ophelia loved Hamlet but it was not a love that would help him in his troubles.

Many critics today believe that Ophelia is the most tragic figure in *Hamlet*. Unlike the other doomed characters in the play, she is innocent:

Ophelia, repeatedly a victim of masculine manipulation, is patently and poignantly innocent; Hamlet’s verbal aggression (poison in the ear) helps to bring about her eventual derangement and death; her ecstasy of dementia is a protest

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90. Showalter, 89.

against the egoistic harshness of his feigned madness, while her self-destruction is a protest against his calumnious project.  

This idea was a minority point of view in the nineteenth century.

Author Mary Cowden Clarke (1809-1898), was a Victorian feminist who wrote a series of fictional essays in which she creates backstories for Shakespeare’s heroines. She created a childhood for Ophelia in which Ophelia was abandoned by her parents and left to defend herself against aggressive men. Clarke’s writings were an effort “to defend Ophelia,” and were “specifically addressed to the wrongs of women, and especially to the sexual double standard.” By giving Ophelia this backstory, she is no longer useless and pathetic, but a character who has spent her life fighting and her death becomes the final act of rebellion against a patriarchal society.

By definition of the tragic hero, Ophelia cannot be considered tragic unless her death evokes fear as well as pity. Veiled in the poetic imagery of Gertrude’s speech Ophelia’s death does not induce fear. The beauty in her description is seductive. The devil is often referred to as a wolf in sheep’s clothing, meaning that appearances can be deceiving. Ophelia’s character represents innocence, beauty, femininity, compassion, and vulnerability. Therefore her death represents the loss of innocence, beauty, femininity, compassion, and vulnerability. The loss of these qualities is, indeed, tragic and something to be feared.


93. Showalter, 87.
CHAPTER III

SONGS ON THE DEATH OF OPHELIA

The songs analyzed in this chapter describe Ophelia’s death; they are not told from Ophelia’s perspective (with the exception of the refrain section in Berlioz’s “La mort d’Ophélie”) instead seek to convey what she and her death symbolize.

For Mallarmé and Rimbaud she was the “blanche Ophélie.”94 Rimbaud described her as a “fantôme blanc” and Mallarmé “made her a blank page to be written over.”95 As a white phantom and blank page, Ophelia’s death is no longer just the story of Ophelia. It has become our story, the nameless third-person narrator – the helpless witness to the loss of innocence. Ophelia has become the symbol that embodies our own heartbreak, suicidal thoughts, and desire to give into madness and succumb to death. She is our goodness, naivety, light, and purity that inevitably struggles against, falls victim, or is willfully sacrificed to the harshness of the world. Her beautifully romanticized death encompasses our voyeuristic fascination with our own weaknesses and mortality. If we feel pathos or grief at Ophelia’s death, it is not Ophelia for whom we mourn for, for we knew her not. We grieve for the loss of that part of ourselves she represents.

94. Showalter, 89.
95. Ibid.
“La mort d’Ophélie” by Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

La mort d’Ophélie

Auprès d’un torrent Ophélie
Cueillait, tout en suivant le bord,
Dans sa douce et tendre folie,
Des pervenches, des boutons d’or,
Des iris aux couleurs d’opale,
Et de ces fleurs d’un rose pale
Qu’on appelle des doigts de mort.

Puis, élevant sur ses mains blanches
Les riants trésors du matin,
Elle les suspendait aux branches,
Aux branches d’un saule voisin.
Mais trop faible le rameau plie,
Se brise, et la pauvre Ophélie
Tombe, sa guirlande à la main.

Quelques instants sa robe enflée
La tint encor sur le courant
Et, comme une voile gonflée,
Elle flottait toujours chantant,
Chantant quelque vieille ballade,
Chantant ainsi qu’une naïade
Née au milieu de ce torrent.

Mais cette étrange mélodie
Passa, rapide comme un son.
Par les flots la robe alourdie
Bientôt dans l’abîme profond
Entraîna la pauvre insensée,
Laissant à peine commencée
Sa mélodieux chanson.

- Ernest Legouvé

The Death of Ophelia

Beside a brook, Ophelia
gathered along the water’s edge,
in her sweet and tender madness,
periwinkles, buttercups,
iris the color of opals
and those flowers of pale purple
called the fingers of death.

Then, raising up in her white hands
the treasures of the morning laughing
she hung them on the branches,
the branches of a nearby willow.
But too fragile, the bough bends,
breaks, and poor Ophelia
falls, the garland in her hand.

Her dress, spread instantly wide,
bore her on the water awhile,
and like an outstretched sail
she floated, still singing,
singing some old ballad,
singing like a naiad
born amidst the stream.

But this strange melody,
passed, fast as sound.
her garment, heavy with water,
soon into the deep abyss
dragged the poor distracted girl,
leaving as just begun
her melodic song.

- Translated by Jennifer Tipton

On September 11, 1827, Hector Berlioz encountered the two great inspirations of his life: the work of William Shakespeare and the actress Harriet Smithson. In his memoirs he writes of Miss Smithson:

I have now come to the grand drama of my life; …I was present at the first performance of Hamlet, and there, in the part of Ophelia, I saw Miss Smithson,
whom I married five years afterwards. I can only compare the effect produced by her wonderful talent, or rather her dramatic genius, on my imagination and heart, with the convulsion produced on my mind by the work of the great poet whom she interpreted. It is impossible to say more.  

Berlioz’s personal life was intertwined with his music and he described himself as the “authority of personal experience.” This idea came to its greatest fruition in Symphonie fantastique. Much has been written about how Berlioz’s love for Miss Smithson influenced the five-movement symphony and accompanying program “Episode in an Artist’s Life.” However, the death of their relationship influenced another work: “La mort d'Ophélie.”

Because Berlioz fell in love with Miss Smithson and the work of Shakespeare simultaneously, his mind associated the two together. Throughout his memoirs he often refers to Harriet as Ophelia, “For more than two years I had heard nothing of the fair Ophelia; whether she were [sic] in England, Scotland, or America.” The first music he wrote after seeing Hamlet was his Mélodies irlandaises in which he quotes Ophelia’s lines as inspiration for the romances on the title page of the music, leading David Cairns to declare, “He had written the music for Harriet Smithson.” Cairns goes on to state that “… to Berlioz … Harriet is “Ophelia” (or “Oph”), “Juliet,” Shakespeare’s representative on earth, she is also very much a woman of flesh and blood.”


98. Berlioz, 189.


100. Cairns, 15.
belief, Comini writes “Berlioz superimposed his Ophelia on Harriet Smithson. ... And in his mind they were linked.”

Poet and friend of Berlioz, Ernest Legouvé, witnessed the life cycle of Berlioz and Smithson’s relationship. During the decline of their marriage, Legouvé wrote the poem La mort d’Ophélie. Both Legouvé and Berlioz loved Shakespeare, but the inspiration for La mort d’Ophélie came from Legouvé’s observation of his friend’s failed marriage. By 1842, the same year he composed “La mort d’Ophélie,” Berlioz and Smithson had drifted apart and eventually separated.

At no point in his memoirs does Berlioz explicitly state the inspiration of the song, but scholars have attempted to deduce the source of the inspiration. Musicologist, Annegret Fauser states that “La mort d’Ophélie” was written as a commercial venture, but the song was not published until six years later. Frits Noske credits a performance of Hamlet which Berlioz attended in Riga, as the impetus for the piece, but that performance was in 1847, five years after the original had been composed. Cairns believes the song marks, if not the actual, then the symbolic end of their marriage. The elegiac significance of this infinitely sad mélodie would be hard to miss even without the unmistakable reference in the voice part’s first nine notes to the idée fixe of the


104. Fauser, 112.

Fantastic Symphony – Harriet’s theme, now heard in the context of drowning Ophelia. Its meaning is as clear as if he had told us.\textsuperscript{106}

Before Berlioz composed \textit{Symphonie fantastique}, he used the \textit{idée fixe} (Example 1) in the second aria, “Arrête! Arrête! Cher Tancrède” in \textit{Herminie}. Because the music of \textit{Symphonie fantastique}, particularly the \textit{idée fixe}, was composed before the program, scholars caution listeners not to take the program literally. Cairns argues that the \textit{idée fixe} was always “…associated with Harriet Smithson and his unrequited passion for her and waiting for a time when it might be developed in a full-scale work; meanwhile he used it to express the lover’s exalted yearning for a beloved who is both unresponsive and physically distant.”\textsuperscript{107} Herminie, the artist portrayed in the \textit{Symphonie fantastique} program, and Ophelia (Example 2) are all “…yearning for a beloved who is both unresponsive and physically distant.”\textsuperscript{108}

\begin{center}
\textsuperscript{106} Cairns, \textit{Berlioz} (II), 231.
\textsuperscript{107} Cairns, \textit{Berlioz} (I), 288.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\end{center}
Example 1. H. Berlioz, *idée fixe*, excerpt *Symphonie fantastique*, mm. 72-74.

Example 2. H. Berlioz, “La mort d’Ophélie,” mm. 2-6, *idée fixe* quote.

Berlioz had a vivid imagination, was incredibly romantic and susceptible to his passions, but he was also a harsh music critic and serious composer. Cairns notes

The mixture of sharp calculation and naïve spontaneity is one of the most disconcerting things about Berlioz. It is not that there aren’t [sic] thousands of people who experience life and suffer with an equal intensity of emotion. But they don’t [sic] usually feel free to talk about it, nor do they often combine it with the capacity for detaching themselves from their emotions and observing them with the objectivity of a scientist examining a specimen under a microscope.¹⁰⁹

As previously stated, Berlioz saw himself as “the authority of personal experience.”¹¹⁰

While his music may have been occasionally inspired by his personal life, he marketed himself in such a manner that recognized and exploited this aspect of his personality.

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“La mort d’Ophélie” was first written as a song for soprano or tenor with piano accompaniment. In 1847 Berlioz expanded it to chorus and orchestra and then included it as part of a collection of works, *Tristia* No. 18. *Tristia* is a collection of three pieces “Méditation religieuse,” “La mort d'Ophélie,” and “Marche funèbre pour la dernière scène d'Hamlet.” With Shakespeare as his inspirational blueprint Berlioz also composed “La mort de Cléopâtre” (1829), *Ouverture de La Tempête* (1830), *Grande Ouverture du Roi Lear* (1831), and *Romeo et Juliette symphony* (1839). These compositions combine Shakespearean characters and plots with Berlioz’s romantic aesthetics, particularly Ophelia.

Heather Hadlock, citing Legouvé’s poem, believes the beauty associated with Ophelia’s death rather than her victimization is the source of her appeal. Hadlock uses Legouvé’s poem as an example of how artists focus on Ophelia’s beautiful madness and not her grim fate:

The story of Ophelia’s death no longer includes its ‘aftermath’ in the graveyard scene: Legouvé’s text, like so many nineteenth-century paintings of the drowned Ophelia, washes away the images of mud, earth, bones, and burial that accumulate around her after death. In keeping with this aestheticizing [*sic*] project he amplifies the image of Ophelia singing as she floats, to which Shakespeare had only briefly alluded with the statement that the mad girl “chanted snatches of old lauds” and the penultimate reference to ‘her melodious lay.”

Like Legouvé’s poem, Berlioz’s setting of “La mort d'Ophélie” romanticizes her death as a beautifully melancholy scene, in which her “snatches of old lauds” continue to live despite her death.

“La mort d’Ophélie” is in varied strophic form. Two personas are portrayed in the piece: a narrator describing the scene and Ophelia’s voice singing a fragmented melody.

111. Hadlock, 142.
The stream in which she died is depicted with constant sixteenth-note broken chords found throughout the piano accompaniment. Berlioz evokes the movement of water in the piano accompaniment but moves the narrator’s vocal line floats slowly above the water figures.

The song begins in the key of B-flat major and 6/8 time. The major key and compound duple meter evoke a rocking lullaby quality creating a sweet, safe atmosphere and contribute to the Romanization of her death. Simple chord progressions occur as the narrator describes Ophelia singing by the brook and gathering flowers until the end of the first verse. In m. 20, Berlioz begins modulating as the narrator describes a certain pale purple flower. By m. 23, Berlioz has fully modulated into the key of F minor as the narrator states the flowers picked are called “des doigts de mort” (the fingers of death). The first verse comes to a close in m. 25.

Berlioz follows each verse with musical material that represents Ophelia’s “étrange mélodie” (strange melody) and functions like a refrain; a vocalise (Example 3) on “Ah!” However, the material varies slightly to illustrate the text and cannot be defined as a true refrain. In this analysis this section will be referred to as Ophelia’s theme.
Example 3. H. Berlioz, “La mort d’Ophélie,” mm. 27-28, Ophelia’s theme.

The theme, unlike the verses, moves directly with piano, associating Ophelia with the water.

When Harriet portrayed Ophelia, Ophelia’s songs “were sung not as vocal display pieces, as was the English custom, but in snatches, she would break off in mid-phrase.”

In “La mort d’Ophélie,” Berlioz varies the phrase length of her theme and cuts the phrase short in m. 34 with a rest and fermata in both the piano and voice. Although the exact length of each phrase varies, each time a new phrase begins, it is lower in pitch and volume to mimic Ophelia’s submersion into the stream and/or decent into madness. A *smorzando* is marked in the piano accompaniment to further illustrate the fading away quality. In addition to text, texture, and phrase length and shape, Ophelia’s theme is marked *pianissimo* while the preceding verse is marked piano, which also helps to establish a character distinction between Ophelia and the narrator. At the completion of Ophelia’s first phrase in mm. 29-30, Berlioz returns to the opening key of B-flat major.

Piano material without water figuration is introduced in mm. 43-46 and separates verses one and two. The thin texture and weak harmonic cadence of a $V_5$ chord moving

to a root position I chord suggest the fragility and innocence often associated with Ophelia (Example 4). This material returns to close the song.

*Example 4.* H. Berlioz, “La mort d’Ophélie,” mm. 43-46, Weak cadence in variation of Ophelia’s theme.

Verse two begins in m. 47 with similar vocal material and slightly varied accompaniment material of repetitive descending arpeggios in the right hand that correspond with Ophelia. At this time the narrator states she is suspended from a branch. The accompaniment continues to text paint Ophelia’s actions in verse three beginning in m. 67. As her fate hangs on the willow branch the calm water figures are replaced by repeated blocked chords to build tension in the right hand and sparse arpeggios in the left hand. As Ophelia’s fate precariously hangs on the weak branch, so does the exact tonality in mm. 67-73. These measures build to a climax with crescendi in both the voice and piano to the word *Tombe* (falls). A V7 chord in the key of D minor appears under the word *Tombe* (Example 5). The sudden introduction of a new key and *sfzorando* portray the branch snapping, dropping Ophelia into the water.
Example 5. H. Berlioz, “La mort d’Ophélie,” mm. 73-74, Text painting and establishment of the key of D minor.

Fermatas are marked in both m. 77 and m. 78 (Example 6). The first fermata is followed by the first two notes of Ophelia’s theme and then another fermata.

Example 6. H. Berlioz, “La mort d’Ophélie,” mm. 77-78, Fermatas used for text painting.

These fermatas build suspense as the audience waits to see if Ophelia survived the fall. In m. 79 Ophelia’s theme returns in the original B-flat major key but the voice is absent.

The fourth and final verse begins in m. 86 with the narrator announcing that Ophelia was seen floating and singing on the water. The right hand imitates her floating
down the stream, and inevitably underwater with syncopated broken octaves that travel
down in half steps. Delusional and unaware of danger, Ophelia’s last moments are
happily spent. Vocal and piano material from the first verse reappears in mm. 98-106
suggesting that Ophelia feels just as safe now as she did picking flowers. A crescendo
and decrescendo occurs in mm. 104-106, while the narrator describes her as singing like a
naiad. Musical material for this phrase previously occurred in the piece; however, this is
the only time it is marked with specific dynamics. The addition of the dynamics suggests
that Ophelia is triumphant and proud in her present position.

As Ophelia begins to sink, her theme reappears in the piano during the verse;
Ophelia is becoming part of the water. The song comes to a climax as Ophelia drowns in
mm. 126-129. Fermatas in the voice and piano follow the climatic phrase. In m. 129 the
narrator and piano confirm her death in a recitative fashion. At this point, Berlioz departs
from his beloved Shakespeare.

Although text of the Legouvé’s poem ends in m. 129, Berlioz brings back
Ophelia’s voice once again and “...invites us not to believe the finality of endings in La
mort d’Ophélie; indeed, La mort d’Ophélie proposes that Ophelia’s death results not in
silence but the amplification of her song....Berlioz’s ‘counter-narrative’ overturns the
poem’s conclusion by representing Death as a state of resounding super-presence, rather
than absence.”¹¹³ Unlike the previous times Ophelia’s final theme is polyphonic and no
longer bound to previous constraints. In m. 147 the voice sings a slowly descending scale
marked *perdendo* (fading away). Material from the second verse (Example 4) appears in
m. 155, and the song peacefully fades away.

¹¹³ Hadlock, 151-152.
“Herzeleid” by Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

**Herzeleid**

_Herzeleid_  
Die Weiden lassen matt  
die Zweige hangen,  
Und traurig ziehn die Wasser hin:  
_Sie schaute starr hinab mit  
bleichen Wangen,  
_Die unglückselge Träumerin._

**Heart’s Sorrow**

_Heart’s Sorrow_  
The willows trail  
their weary branches,  
and the waters drift sadly by:  
the poor white-faced wretch stared  
blindly down,  
in an unhappy dream.

Und ihr entfiel ein Strauss von Immortellen,  
_Er war so schwer von Tränen ja,  
Und leise warnend lispelten  
die Wellen: Ophelia, Ophelia!  
-T. Ullrich_  

And she let fall a wreath of immortal flowers,  
already heavy with tears, yes,  
while the waves whispered in a soft warning: Ophelia, Ophelia!  
-Translated by Jennifer Tipton

As the son of a bookseller, Robert Schumann was raised in a rich literary environment which influenced his compositions throughout his life. The first reference to Shakespeare appears in Schumann’s diary on October 25, 1828, when he saw a performance of _Hamlet_ at the age of eighteen. After the performance, he became an avid reader of Shakespeare’s works. While he never wrote an opera, he often considered Shakespeare’s plays (_Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet_, and _The Tempest_) as potential operatic subjects, sketched “Sinfonia per il Hamlet” in 1831-32, and wrote a concert overture based on Shakespeare’s _Julius Caesar_ in 1851.114

Schumann’s compositional gifts were best suited to smaller settings. His songs are known to treat the piano and voice as equal partners, often giving the piano motivic elements to further illuminate poetic meanings. The majority of his popular songs come

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from his most prolific period, the “Liederjahr” of 1840. Because of his literary background, he often chose to set texts from the most accomplished romantic poets of the day such as Heine, Eichendorff, Rückert, and Goethe.115

“Herzeleid” is the first song of *Sechs Gesänge* Op. 107, written in Düsseldorf in 1851-52.116 *Sechs Gesänge* includes texts from various poets: T. Ulrich, E. Mörike, P. Heyse, W. Müller, and G. Kinkel. Titus Ulrich (1813-1891) wrote the poetry for the first two songs in the set: “Herzeleid” and “Die Fensterscheibe.”117 Schumann met Ulrich while touring Berlin with Clara in 1847. A few years after their initial meeting, Schumann discovered Ulrich’s poem in the *Deutscher Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1851.*

Ulrich’s text is a variation on Queen Gertrude’s description of Ophelia’s death in Act IV, scene 7. The poem describes the sad Ophelia by the stream, lost in her madness. Ulrich’s short poem deviates from the plot in that his tale concludes with the waters calling Ophelia’s name, instead of describing Ophelia singing in the water and being pulled to her “muddy death.”118

“Herzeleid” is a short song in varied strophic form: AA’. The vocal line is in a declamatory style, in 3/8 time, with a limited range of a major seventh (d#4-d5), in E minor. Schumann chose his keys carefully, just as a painter chooses his colors. He believed major keys were masculine and active, while minor keys were passive and


118. Shakespeare, 235.
represented suffering and the feminine. The more complex the emotion, the more complicated the key.\textsuperscript{119} E minor, consisting of one accidental is not a complicated key; this may represent Ophelia’s femininity, innocence, and simplicity.

The prelude (mm. 1-2) introduces the recurrent accompaniment motive of descending arpeggios in sixteenth notes (Example 7). This accompaniment figure is reminiscent of “Schumannian [sic] lament topos, encountered in such earlier songs as “Hör’ ich ein Leidchen klingen” or its major-mode counterpart in Dichterleibe, “Am leuchten dem Sommermorgen.”\textsuperscript{120}

\begin{example}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example7.png}
\caption{R. Schumann, “Herzeleid,” mm. 1-2, prelude with descending water motive.}
\end{example}

No first-hand evidence from Schumann exists that this figure is specifically related to water, madness, or death; however, scholars associate it as a water motive because of the context of the poetry. “The close intervallic texture portrays the helplessness and despondency of quiet madness, and the incessant water motif, prefiguring drowning,


\textsuperscript{120} Finson, 247.
reinforces the mood.”  

Ulrich’s poem portrays Ophelia’s madness in her ability to hear the water calling her name. Schumann weaves vocal material into the water figures, which often resolves vocal phrases in the piano with descending minor second “melancholic appoggiaturas” (Example 8). This gives the piano (water motives) a voice or consciousness capable of calling to Ophelia.

Example 8. R. Schumann, “Herzeleid,” mm. 7-9, Interweaving of piano and vocal lines.

While the “Herzeleid” is clearly written in E minor, Schumann does not state the tonic until the last two measures of the postlude (Example 9). The repetitive descending water motive organically pulls to the statement of the tonic in the low register of the piano, creating an atmosphere of inevitable finality: “[Schumann] postpones the arrival at the tonic e-minor until Ophelia and the listener alike drown in the final measure. We hear the


123. Finson, 247.
precise moment of death.”124 Miller further expands on this point, stating that the descent “into the low-middle registers may be “associated with Ophelia’s watery death.”125


The minor key, slow tempo, sparse texture, descending lines, and the delayed resolution to tonic create a passive and melancholic mood. “Herzeleid” resembles Arthur Hughes’s “Ophelia,” 1852, portraying an unhappy dreamer staring at the waters amidst a dreary environment.

“La mort d’Ophélie” by Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)

Camille Saint-Saëns is best known as an instrumental composer, even though he wrote prolifically for the voice. His songs never achieved as much success as his instrumental compositions and are not part of the standard concert repertoire. Like his instrumental music, his songs are well crafted, illustrate technical ability, and create


125. Miller, 201.
atmospheric settings. However, the songs are thought to fall short of the poetic sensitivity found in the great Lieder composers like Schubert and Schumann.126

Even though Saint-Saëns was French, he idolized the works of Schubert and Schumann and was familiar with them before they were well-known in France. Two of his early songs, “Ruhethal” and “Antwort,” were set to German texts and specifically modeled on the Lied tradition. Unlike his German role models, Saint-Saëns was interested in eclectic poetry of varying subjects: opium highs, seraglio dancers, meditative wisdom, French gaiety, Spanish colors, and orientalism; rather than love songs or powerful emotions.127 Frits Noske states, “He is more interested in the characters for the atmosphere they evoke than for themselves.”128 The atmosphere he does create is rooted in Classicism through logic, lyricism, balance, and elegance.129 Little information of the history of “La mort d’Ophélie” exists because Saint-Saëns’s songs were not appreciated during his life and remain relatively obscure. “La mort d’Ophélie” was composed in 1857 when Saint-Saëns was 22 years-old and working as an organist at the Church of St. Merry.

Like Delacroix’s painting of “The Death of Ophelia,” Saint-Saëns’s interpretation of “La mort d’Ophélie” captures a sense of anxiety, tension, and rushing waters. He adheres closely to Legouve’s original text, with the exception of changing the first word from “aupres” (near) to “aubord” (edge). The vivace tempo and water motive consisting

126. Noske, 221.
127. Ibid., 230.
128. Ibid., 225.
of repetitive sixteenth-note quintuplets create a sense of urgency that suggests the events are unfolding throughout the song as opposed to recounting past events, as the original news of Ophelia’s death is delivered in Hamlet. “La mort d’Ophélie” is set in 4/4 time in the key of F-sharp minor; the minor key adds an ominous atmosphere.

In addition to creating a sense of urgency, the quintuplets which first appear in the right hand represent the brook where Ophelia dies (Example 10). This water figure appears throughout the piece and repeats without change in the first verse, mm. 1-16. Ophelia’s theme is initially presented in the voice in mm. 2-4 and doubled in the left hand of the piano.

Example 10. C. Saint-Saëns, “La mort d’Ophélie,” mm. 2-4, Ophelia’s motive.

New musical material first appears in m. 16, on the word “mort” (death) which foreshadows the coming events. The water figures descend as a sequence in mm. 16-18. Verse two begins in m.18 where the water figures continue on the same pitches in which they were previously heard, only an octave lower. Instead of accompanying the voice, the left hand now functions independently.

As the text describes Ophelia hanging from the branch of a willow, the water figures expand to broken octaves in the right hand and a pedal tone in the left hand. New
vocal material is introduced in m. 26. A *sforzando* and dotted rhythm expresses the narrator’s surprise and exigency as the branch bends and threatens to break. The piano accompaniment reiterates the vocal *sforzando* in the downbeat of m. 27. This idea repeats in the subsequent phrase, mm. 28-29.

Ophelia falls in mm. 31-32. Text painting is used to describe her fall on “Tombe” (fall). Decrescendos are marked in both the voice and piano. The vocal line descends a major seventh, and the left hand of the piano descends four chromatic steps. The water, being indifferent to the situation, does not change. Even though the water figures do not change during Ophelia’s fall, they briefly pause in mm. 33-34, leaving the music to be sustained in the vocal line.

The second verse comes to a close on a rolled C-sharp major chord in m. 35. Once again the water figures descend as a sequence to introduce the next verse; both hands briefly play the figures together (Example 11). This transition also modulates the music to the key of D major.

*Example 11.* C. Saint-Saëns, “La mort d’Ophélie,” mm. 35-37, transition into the second verse and key of D major.
The third verse of “La mort d’Ophélie” represents Ophelia’s swan song she blissfully sings before succumbing to the current. Both the voice and piano are marked *sotto voce*. Soft dynamics, major tonality, and the established quick tempo create excitement and anticipation. Ophelia’s reaction to her fall and inevitable doom is indifferent. She does not flail or fight the current. Tension builds in mm. 41-48. The voice and piano pass back and forth a melodic idea as the narrator and audience await to find out Ophelia’s fate. Saint-Saëns expands the anticipation by repeating the words “*Elle flotait*” (she floated) twice; the line is stated only once in the original poem.

Finally the tension is released as the song climaxes in m. 49. Now in the key of G-sharp major, Saint-Saëns musically creates the iconic image of Ophelia, her dress spread wide, floating down the stream. Her melodic material found in the opening phrase of the song repeats in mm. 49-52, as the narrator describes her singing old ballads like a naiad. Shakespeare and Legouvé both describe Ophelia’s song as fleeting and fast as sound. Saint-Saëns quickly brings the verse to a close in mm. 55-56.

Just as before, parallel descending water figures transition into the next verse, returning the song to the original key of F-sharp minor. However, this transition is longer, and Ophelia’s melodic motive is heard in the right hand of the accompaniment, mm. 57-59. This is the first time the motive has appeared without the voice, signifying that Ophelia is now part of the water. The piano restates Ophelia’s motive again in mm. 61-63 as a response to the narrator’s mention of Ophelia’s strange melody (Example 12).
Example 12. C. Saint-Saëns, “La mort d’Ophélie,” mm. 63-64, Ophelia’s motive as part of the water figures.

In m. 72, the water figures end and the piano has four measures of rest as the narrator uses the melodic motive to conclude the text, “…Leaving as just begun, her melodious song.” The piano returns for seven more measures, playing a deconstructed version of Ophelia’s motive as if it was dissolving into the water (Example 13).
Example 13. C. Saint-Saëns, “La mort d’Ophélie,” mm. 79-85, the deconstruction of Ophelia’s motive.
“Ophélia,” from Poèmes d’automne by Gabriel Dupont (1878-1914)

**Ophélia**

Sur l’onde calme et noire où  
Dorment les étoiles  
La blanche Ophélia flotte comme  
un grand lys,  
Flotte très lentement, couchée en ses longs voiles...

-- On entend dans les bois lointains des hallalis.

Voici plus de mille ans que  
la triste Ophélie  
Passe, fantôme blanc,  
sur le long fleuve noir;  
Voici plus de mille ans que sa  
douce folie  
Murmure sa romance à la brise du soir.

Le vent baise ses seins et déploie en corolle  
Ses grands voiles bercés mollement par les eaux;  
Les saules frissonnants pleurent sur son épaule,  
Sur son grand front rêveur s’inclinent les roseaux.

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Ophelia

On the calm black water where  
Sleeps the stars  
the white Ophelia floats like  
a great lily;  
floats very slowly, lying in her long veils...

- In the far-off woods you can hear them sound hunting cries.

For more than a thousand years  
the sad Ophelia,  
has passed, a white phantom,  
down the long black river.  
For more than a thousand years  
her sweet madness  
has murmured its ballad to the evening breeze.

The wind kisses her breasts and unfolds in a wreath  
her great veils softly cradle her on the water;  
The shivering willows weep on her shoulder,  
on her dreaming forehead the reeds bow.

On the calm black water where  
sleeps the stars  
the white Ophelia floats like  
a great lily

-Arthur Rimbaud

-Translated by Jennifer Tipton
Symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud (1865-1891) wrote a three-part poem on Ophelia in 1870. Composer Gabriel Dupont set the first three stanzas of part one of Rimbaud’s three-part poem, *Ophélia*. Dupont’s “Ophélia,” is the second of eight songs in the collection *Poèmes d’automne* published in 1904. Both Rimbaud and Dupont lived brief lives. Of the two, Rimbaud’s work is the most influential, while Dupont’s compositions remain arguably underrepresented and underappreciated.

*Ophélia*, written at the age of fifteen as part of a homework assignment, is one of Rimbaud’s most well-known works. Rimbaud’s *Ophélia* focuses not on the action of or motivations leading up to her death but on the moments she spent floating on the water with “her clothes spread wide.” Part one of *Ophélia*, set by Dupont, is a descriptive narrative depicting Ophelia suspended on the water and between the moments of life and death. His poem is often compared to and thought to be influenced by Millais’s painting, “Ophelia.” The poem deviates from the traditional pathos of Ophelia and conveys a sense of freedom.

Previous to Rimbaud’s treatment of the Ophelia motif, a girl’s drowning represented the final act of a tragic existence. But Rimbaud’s influence and the glorification of the then popular figure “Inconnue de la Seine” … mark a turning point. The girl’s corpse is no longer symbolically reminiscent of a previous life but exists solely in the present.

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131. Shakespeare, 235.

132. Kiefer, 22.

While he references specific imagery from Gertrude’s speech such as Ophelia’s madness, the water, her clothes spread wide, and the willow, Rimbaud takes liberties with the scenery and expands the time. He places a lily-white Ophelia floating on a long black river beneath the sleeping stars. Time is suspended with references to Ophelia as a phantom whose madness and song has existed for more than a thousand years. For with Rimbaud: “The [Ophelia] motif represents the loss of belief in the rationality of human existence and the decay of the self which completely lacks the power to resist. Thus the poignant death of Shakespeare’s heroine becomes the source of elemental disintegration.”

As a late nineteenth-century French composer, Dupont’s music possesses elements of impressionism, such as his choice of symbolist poets and musical harmonic language. But unlike purely impressionistic composers such as Debussy, Dupont’s songs often retain a clear formal structure and melodic line. “Ophélia” is written in modified strophic form and includes a codetta. Each of Rimbaud’s stanzas is set to a verse. The end of each verse is marked by a brief Lent section which contains sparser contrasting accompaniment texture than the verses. Dupont did not set the final stanza of Rimbaud’s poem, but chose to repeat the first two lines of the opening stanza. This repeat of text from mm. 53-64 comprises the codetta.

“Ophélia” opens with arpeggios in sixteenth notes outlining four descending vii 4/2 chords which make up the water motive (Example 14). This motive spans two measures and is repeated five times in the first verse. The chords do not establish tonic (which according to the key signature would be either C Major or A minor), but are used

134. Grimm and Schmidt, 74.
in the impressionistic technique of planing to create coloristic harmonies. While the
harmonies of the water motive vary throughout the song, the basic structure repeats in all
the verses. As the vii 4/2 chords repeat in an ostinato pattern, the voice enters, moving at
a slower rhythmic mensuration.

Example 14. G. Dupont, “Ophélia” from Poèmes d’automne, mm. 3-4, water motive and
vocal entrance.

The first Lent section begins in m. 14. The verse begins to come to a close, and the water
motive ceases (Example 15). The last line of the stanza: “- - On entend dans les bois
lointains des hallalis” (--- In the far-off woods you can hear them sound hunting cries) is
the first time in the text when the poet is not describing a romanticized visual image, but
hearing hunting calls from reality. The dream-like atmosphere of the water motive is
replaced with rhythmically driven “horn calls” defined with tenuto markings in the right
hand of the piano.
Example 15. G. Dupont, “Ophélie,” from Poèmes d’automne mm. 14-15 horn calls in the accompaniment

A C major tonic chord appears for the first time at the beginning of the second verse in m. 17. The chord is rolled in the low register of the piano and is heard in combination with the return of the original water motive which continues until m. 26. Here the time signature changes from common time to 2/4 time for one measure, which happens again in m. 32. The harmonic structure of the water motive changes as the Rimbaud describes the presence of Ophelia’s ghost existing for more than a thousand years. Dupont’s use of meter change acts as book ends to Rimbaud’s picture of timelessness.

The Lent section of verse two starts in m. 33. This text describes the murmur of Ophelia’s ballad on the evening breeze. Again the water motive ends, this time the accompaniment texture changes to blocked diatonic chords, as the voice lyrically continues the melodic line (Example 16). In m. 36 the Lent section concludes with a D major resolution. D major functions as V of A minor, which is established at the beginning of verse three, m. 37.
Example 16. G. Dupont, “Ophélia,” from Poèmes d’automne mm. 35-37 blocked diatonic chords and modulation to A minor.

The climax of the song is in the third verse. In m. 41, the water motive changes from two chords per measure to one sweeping arpeggio per measure. Dupont’s expansion of the water motive text paints Ophelia’s clothes enveloping around her. Additionally, the accompaniment echoes the vocal line in the right hand. Prior to this section, the accompaniment contained no vocal material. Two, four-measure phrases comprise this section. The first phrase forms over an A pedal, and the second phrase over a G pedal. Another Lent concludes verse three (mm. 49-51) and transitions into the codetta and the reestablishment of C major.

Opening material (mm. 1-9) repeats as part of the codetta in mm. 52-60. In the last two beats of m. 60, the water motive changes from sixteenth notes to eighth-note triplets leading into one measure of 2/4 meter. Dupont concludes the song with a Lent section (mm. 62-64) moving the voice and piano in opposing directions (Example 17). The vocal line “comme un grand lys” (like a grand lily) ascends to G5. The piano firmly restates C major in the low register, with the final gesture being a grace note on C1.

Dupont uses repetitive accompaniment figures, ambiguous tonality, and hemiolas (between the voice and the piano) to capture the sense of timeless suspension found in Rimbaud’s poem and Millais’s painting. The water motive, while interrupted in the Lent sections, creates a sense of forward motion. His use of planing, coloristic harmonies, withholding of tonic, and lack of pull to tonic keep the listener aurally suspended. The deviation between C major and A minor and conclusion in C major arguably reflect the glorification of Ophelia’s death. Even though the accompaniment ends on a C1, which may represent the reality of her “muddy death,” the voice’s final statement is one of ascension. This interpretation of Ophelia lacks the pathos found in other settings and magnifies the idea triumphant transcendence.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The songs discussed in this dissertation are all an interpretation of interpretations. *Hamlet* came to France and Germany primarily through the translations of Voltaire, Ducis, Goethe, and Schlegel/Tieck. Each of these poets varied Shakespeare’s original text to suit their culture and audience. Poets Legouvé, Ulrich, and Rimbaud based their poetry on the translations of others, performances of the play, artistic representations of Ophelia, and her general popularity and influence over society. Additionally, Berlioz, Schumann, Saint-Saëns, and Dupont interpreted the text through their own personal experiences and compositional styles. While each song is unique in its interpretation of Ophelia’s final moments, it also possesses similarities beyond subject matter such as gentleness, melancholy, water motives, and the musical portrayal of her death.

Each song begins with a two measure statement of a water motive followed by the primary melody which floats above the water at a slower mensuration.


The repetitive motion of the water motives combined with diatonic melodies in the songs result in a gentle almost lullaby-like atmosphere, embodying Ophelia’s softness and simplicity. All the songs use minor keys to create a melancholic mood. The Berlioz, Saint-Saëns, and Dupont settings allude to the bittersweet portrayal of her death by making shifts between major and minor tonalities.

The songs also musically depict Ophelia being pulled into the water by incorporating vocal material into the accompaniment as the songs progress. Additionally, the accompaniments descend to lower registers in the piano and occupy the lowest tessituras in the postludes.
Example 19a. Final descent into the low register of the piano: H. Berlioz, “La mort d’Ophélie,” mm. 147-160.

Example 19c. Final descent into the low register of the piano: C. Saint-Saëns, “La mort d’Ophélie,” mm. 79-85.

Showalter states, “There is no ‘true’ Ophelia … perhaps only a Cubist Ophelia of multiple perspectives, more than the sum of her parts.”

For Berlioz, Ophelia was not only a representative of his beloved Shakespeare, but also his wife whom he supported (even after the divorce), and watched pass away. Schumann had a deep love of literature and like Ophelia, battled his own madness. Both Schumann and Hughes interpreted Ophelia as a beautifully weak, and her death represents a loss of innocence. Saint-Saëns’s setting tells the story of her death through a nameless third-person narrator who is helpless to the events unfolding in a picturesque landscape. The quick tempo is akin to the rushing waters in Delacroix’s La mort d’Ophélia. Both Saint-Saëns and Delacroix depict her death as a tragic accident. Dupont’s setting uses Rimbaud’s words to find freedom and hope in a tragic tale. Like the Millais painting, Ophelia’s death is a serene, passive act of transcendence. There is no definitive interpretation of Ophelia or of her death. However, the “Cubist” view of her, reminds us that there are multiple sides, layers, and interpretations to every character and situation. Ultimately, Ophelia is just as

135. Showalter, 92.
Rimbaud and Marllarmé described her: the “fantôme blanc” and “blank page.” She and her death are whatever we make them to be.
APPENDIX

ART SONG SETTINGS OF OPHELIA

Alphabetical Order According to Composer

- Amram, David Werner: “Ophelia’s Song” from *Four Shakespeare Songs*, no. 4
- Anonymous setting, (Traditional) “The Airs as Sung by Ophelia”
- Berlioz, Hector: “La mort d’Ophélie”
- Brahms, Johannes: *Fünf Ophelia-Lieder*
- Dupont, Gabriel: “Ophélie” from *Poèmes d'automne*, 1902
- Heggie, Jake: *Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia*
- Pasatieri, Thomas: “Ophelia’s Lament”
- Saint-Saëns, Camille: “La mort d’Ophélie”
- Schumann, Robert: “Herzelied”
- Shostakovich, Dimitri “Pesnja Ofelii” from *Seven Verses by Alexander Blok*, Op. 127, no. 1
- Strilko, Anthony: “Ophelia”
- White, Maude Valerie: “Ophelia’s Song”
- Zumsteeg, Johann Rudolf: “Ophelia” from *Kleine Balladen und Lieder*, Heft IV, no. 2
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