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Rereading Shakespeare's *Ophelia*: Marcelo Marchioro's Performance Aesthetics

"Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night..."

(T. S. Eliot *The Waste Land*)

In a critical essay entitled "Shakespeare, Theatre Productions and Cultural Politics", published in *Shakespeare Survey* (1995: 13), John Russel Brown states that the bard's plays, with their "inherently flexible structure and openness of style", invite distinctive re-interpretations mainly in performance, when they can be readjusted at will, depending on the directors' intentions and conceptual choices, reinforced by designers for set, costumes, light and sound. He points out that "even at their most intense and sustained moments – perhaps especially then – the dialogue can support a wide variety of characterizations; Shylock, Hamlet, Falstaff, Prince Hal and Prospero have all served many purposes, taking shape and spirit from the actors and directors who have laid hands on the very same printed words." While ratifying the validity of the statement above, I propose to provide arguments for the extension of scope of Brown's assertion, by showing that Shakespeare's women characters have also been appropriated to serve many purposes, Ophelia being one of them.

In this essay, I intend to show that Marcelo Marchioro, one of the most creative stage-directors in Paraná, derived his performance aesthetics for the characterization of Ophelia, in his 1992 production of *Hamlet* in

Curitiba/Brazil, not only from Shakespeare's text, but also from the multiple textualizations¹ of the Shakespearean heroine, which have been changing in shape and hue within the vortex of time and imagination. To illustrate my point, I shall briefly discuss the issue that in any representation, be it in the visual, literary or performing arts, Ophelia "is a site of memory, fantasy, projection and desire" (Kiefer, 2001: 12).

Mythologized over time and appropriated by popular culture, Shakespeare's Ophelia has now attained the status of an archetypal model as well as a cult figure, being one of the most textualized of his heroines. Despite having been neglected by traditional Shakespearean scholarship, she has, since the Romantic period, exerted an extraordinary appeal on painters and poets, as the rich iconography and poetry portraying her figure attest. Since the mid 20th century, she has been rescued from critical invisibility not only by psychoanalytic studies that have established her as an icon of female sexual trauma, but also by feminist discourse that has tended to offer new perspectives on Ophelia's predicament: her madness has been seen as the result of sexual intimidation and female victimization in general, and the circumstances of her death by drowning have been interpreted as suicide,² a rebellious act of resistance against the fetters that enchained her.

As the cause of Ophelia's madness is unclear in Shakespeare's text, an ambiguity surely intended by the bard, a series of possibilities emerge from these unexpressed dimensions of his discourse, constituting a rich subtext³

¹ Robert Scholes (1982: 145), echoing the theoretical premises established by Derrida, Barthes and Eco, has reasserted, in his *Semiotics and Interpretation*, that all reality, as we see or interpret it, is textuality, and that every creative artist shapes his meanings not by reading reality, but by rereading whether consciously or not, his predecessors' ways of textualizing reality.

² According to feminist critics, this interpretation can be validated by the gravedigger's comment: "Is she to be buried in Christian burial that wilfully seeks her own salvation?" (V, i: 189). All references from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* are taken from the New Swan Shakespeare edition mentioned in the bibliography. Acts and scenes will be indicated by Roman numerals, followed by page numbers.

³ Marvin Rosenberg, in his article entitled "Subtext in Shakespeare" (Thompson, 1989: 80–90), states that Shakespeare, before Freud, was one of the most perceptive observers of life's subtext, making us aware of the veiled motivations behind the actions of the characters. Stanislawski, a theatre contemporary of Freud's, was similarly concerned with the "covert springs of our behaviour", the mystery that exists between "overt behaviour and masked motivation". The Russian stage-director developed the concept of *performance subtext*: the careful reading of text and subtext providing the actors with what he called "inner vision", making them sensitive to the background, impulses, powers and ideas that motivate character, which enables them to give dramatic expression to reactions, conscious or subconscious that lie beneath the words spoken. In his *Dictionary of the Theatre*, Patrice Pavis defines the notion of subtext as a performance strategy, as developed by Stanislawski: "Although it is in the nature of the subtext not to be entirely graspable, it can be compared to the notion of the discourse of the *mise-en-scène*: the subtext comments and controls the entire stage production, is imposed on the audience more or less clearly and affords a glimpse of a whole unexpressed dimension in the discourse, "a pressure behind the words" (1998: 373–4).

that invites questionings of traditional critical positions. Was it the result of rejected love, repressed desires, the death of her father, the absence of Hamlet or a combination of all of these? The circumstances of her death are also clouded in mystery. Was it accidental drowning, as reported by Gertrude, or was it suicide, as implied by the gravedigger? These ambiguities have fascinated stage directors, cinematographers and actresses as well, inviting them to fill in the gaps in the Ophelia narrative. As a result, Shakespeare's heroine has been the object of variation in representation in the various expressive media, each new creation shedding light as well as absorbing and exerting influence upon one another.

Although the range of Ophelia's speech is limited – she has only 169 lines, while Hamlet has more than 1500 – her utterance is impregnated with subtext throughout, which makes her one of the most intriguing characters of Shakespeare. In her lines, reduced to a minimum, she always tends to foreground Hamlet, rarely referring to herself, which makes her silence eloquent. It is her silence that has made possible myriad interpretations without violating the text.

The centre of the Ophelia myth is firmly grounded in Shakespeare. In the extensive first part of his book, which discusses the sources from which Shakespeare borrows to create his heroine, entitled *Naming the Rose: Ophelia's Continental Heritage*, James M. Vest (1989: 5–57) asserts that the maid is a hybrid figure inspired in various narratives, and that she is probably more closely related to François Belleforest's account in *The Hystorie of Hamlet*, in his *Histoires Tragiques* (first published around 1570 and translated into English by 1608), because the French author introduced ambiguities as he recounted in translation the twelfth century tale of *Amlethus, Prince of Jutland*, using as his source the Latin version of the story as it appeared in *Historia Danica* by Saxo Grammaticus, early in the thirteenth century. The subtextual elements in Belleforest's account must have appealed to the bard for obvious reasons. While in both narratives, she is used as a bait to sound Hamlet's secret, in Saxo there is no doubt that the pair copulated, while in Belleforest this is far less clear. Although suggesting that the prince and the maid could have enjoyed each other physically, Belleforest never states they did, thus keeping the relationship much more subtle through verbal ambiguity: he uses words that suggest an emotional attachment, transcending, but not necessarily excluding, sexual arousal. However, in both textualizations, Ophelia's character is only briefly sketched, since after having served the essential function of the temptress, she disappears altogether.

Shakespeare keeps the ambiguous sexual rapport between Hamlet and Ophelia encountered in Belleforest. However, from an isolated episode in the sources, the prescribed role of decoy, he creates a fully developed character of major importance for the development of the plot. Moreover,

he also incorporates into his text the structural parallels between the Brutus-Lucretia story and Amleth's adventures. The rape and suicide of Lucretia, retold by Ovid within the story of Lucius Junius Brutus, founder of the Roman Republic, was an episode the bard had already explored when writing his long narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece*. As James Vest (1989: 48–9) has aptly put it,

The traditions of Brutus and Amleth provided Shakespeare with two distinct but related models for Ophelia. The loyal temptress of Belleforest is clearly reflected in the Ophelia of the opening acts. The intimacy between her and Hamlet, her attachment to him, and her role of decoy are all inherited from the Amleth tales. The intense ambiguities of the 'nunnery', 'fishmonger', 'carrion', and other speeches relating to her virtue are also outgrowths of that tradition. So, too, are her revelations of Hamlet's 'madness' as evidenced in his letter, secret visit, and other contacts with her. The redemptive death of Ophelia appears, however, to be derived from the other model, that of Lucretia. As was the case with the Roman paragon of virtue, Ophelia's transformation from sullied to pure provides a symbolic foretaste of the social reform her funeral will unleash.

Like the prince, Ophelia is a conflation of contradictions. "She is the product of two narrative traditions, each of which involves a fusion of opposites" (p. 49). In Shakespeare's new hybrid, the faithful, sexually alluring siren and the violated saint combine: "the sexuality and attractiveness of the Saxonian maid are conjoined forever with the hurt, sacrifice, and resistant purity of Lucretia" (p. 53–4). The contradictory (but complementary) characteristics that Shakespeare borrowed from these literary prototypes, which he so perceptively amalgamated into polarities in his portrayal of Ophelia, are a perfect mirror of human nature, not only female nature, since sexuality and purity are not "irreconcilable opposites, but rather diverse aspects of humanity in its infinite variety" (p. 57), an insight that Shakespeare had probably gained from Montaigne,⁴ but which was not universally ratified among his contemporaries. Shakespeare's unconventional genius succeeds in making Ophelia much more than an amalgam of her various prototypes, she becomes a complex, three-dimensional, psychologically believable character in her own right.

In her excellent article "Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism" (Parker, Hartman 1985: 78), Elaine Showalter reports that, in the eighties and nineties, feminist criticism "has

⁴ See Montaigne's essay entitled "Of the Inconsistency of Our Actions" (Montaigne, 1965: 239–44), in which he describes the paradoxical nature of human beings. We are full of contradictions: chaste and lascivious, modest and arrogant, prodigal and avaricious, respectful and insolent, depending on circumstance, which will determine the choice of different masks according to convenience. It is known that Shakespeare was a dedicated reader of Montaigne. Many ideas and, sometimes, even the very words of the French philosopher reverberate in the bard's speeches.

allowed Ophelia to upstage Hamlet",⁵ by examining the feminine condition of Shakespeare's heroine, while foregrounding issues that constitute a serious theoretical debate about "the cultural links between femininity, female sexuality, insanity and representation." She demonstrates, through the history of Ophelia's representation, that there has been an intense and intricate traffic or exchange of ideas and concepts between literature, psychiatry, drama and art concentrating on her figure over the past two and a half centuries. The dialogue established through these multiple texts that constitute the Ophelia myth has invited a great number of contemporary rereadings and rewritings of her enigmatic persona.

Marcelo Marchioro's highly original reworking of the figure of the Shakespearean heroine in his 1992 *Hamlet*, reverberates with allusions from the rich literary, dramatic and artistic traditions. His rereading of the character's profile is the Ophelia that Shakespeare wrote, cross-fertilized by diverse textualizations of her persona, drawn, whether consciously or not, from different media. He conflates several traditions, since he intended his production to assume, at the same time, a contemporary and an atemporal character, an intention also expressed in the eclectic costumes that revealed a mixture of tendencies from several periods of history. This strategy opened up the possibility to convey both continuity and change of cultural assumptions.

Like Shakespeare, Marchioro also creates a composite image of the maiden, simultaneously traditional and innovative, drawing on iconography, psychoanalytic and feminist criticism and on contemporary *Hamlet* versions on stage and screen. To provide the audience with an insight into the deep layers of the complex character of Ophelia, he creates a theatrical *Doppelgänger*⁶ for the heroine, that displays the function of laying bare her psychic identity, dramatizing the conflict which exists between the idealistic socially constructed self and the repressed inner nature. He casts two actresses (who henceforth shall be referred to as Ophelia One and Two), to mirror the contradictory/complementary aspects of the same person, according to a psychoanalytic perspective. This Brechtian alienation device, employed by the director, enables him to highlight in a concrete fashion the identity crisis of Ophelia,

⁵ Although Ophelia appears in only five of the twenty scenes that constitute the play, today her importance within the plot has been reassessed by Shakespearean critics. According to H. R. Coursen, in his article "Ophelia in Performance in the Twentieth Century", her position has changed from a minor, secondary character to "a central player in Elsinore's game of espionage" (Kiefer, 2001: 53).

⁶ During the Romantic period, the word *Doppelgänger* (literally meaning "doublegoer") was coined by Jean-Paul Richter (1796) to convey the counterpart of a person, the "other I". It can also mean "double" or "alter-ego", a different aspect of a character's personality, hidden or veiled, which is responsible for certain actions or attitudes of the person. Thus, during Romanticism, we witness the inception of a new dramatic convention, namely the casting of a second actor to represent the double onstage (See Brunel, 1998: 261-2).

by showing both face and mask simultaneously. It also allows him to expand her role and reassess her importance within the plot, forcing the audience to renewed scrutiny on the issue of madness, since response to victimization varies considerably from time to time and from one creative artist to another.⁷

In psychoanalytic terms, the casting of the two actresses for a single role can be interpreted as a device that embodies the mental forces of the *ego* and the *id* of Ophelia. The *ego* is the conscious mind that interacts with the environment and other people in social situations. As the conscious, waking self, the *ego* is supposed to be the sane and mature aspect of Ophelia's mind, intent on mastering impulses and dealing effectively with the limitations imposed upon women by culture, in order to become socially acceptable. Conversely, the *id* is largely unconscious and comprises the basic drives, among them the libido or sex-drive and the drive beyond the pleasure principle that includes the death-wish and destructiveness. Freudian psychology destroys the notion that only the conscious self controls the person. There are also unconscious pressures, the libidinous and aggressive drives which the individual is forced to repress or sublimate, because society demands restraint, order and respectability.

Ophelia Two may be said to be an objective correlative⁸ for the unconscious desires of the heroine, her inner state of being is made concrete onstage. However, desire must not be reduced to sexual desire only, since Ophelia is much more than an incarnation of erotomania or any other reported female disease,⁹ since her trauma has to do with centuries of general abuse women have been subjected to under patriarchal rule. Completely circumscribed by male power, she is forced to repress not only her sexuality, but also to efface her identity, constructed exclusively in reference to others, being, therefore, prevented from healthy spiritual growth and maturation as an individual. Her psychic identity collapses under the excessive strain she has been submitted to, resulting in the loss of her sense of reality.

⁷ There are endless possibilities of looking at Shakespeare's heroine, which vary between the two extremes: victim of the patriarchal ideology and rebellious heroine that defies the status-quo. However, what is striking among all the representations is the iconic expression of femininity and madness that is always present.

⁸ The Brazilian director has found an objective equivalent for the complex emotions of Ophelia. The concept of the 'objective correlative' was developed by T. S. Eliot, in his essay "Hamlet and his Problems" (Eliot, 1960: 95).

⁹ According to Sander Gilman, quoted in Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady* (1985: 126), the word madness is problematic, imprecise and gendered. It is inextricably linked with femininity and there are different cultural assumptions attached to the term in different epochs: "the changing representations of Ophelia over the centuries do chronicle the shifting definitions of female insanity, from the erotomania of the Elizabethans and the hysteria of the nineteenth century to the unconscious incestuous conflicts of the Freudians and the schizophrenic double bind of the Laingians."

The characterization of Ophelia One, according to Marchioro's conception of the maiden, follows the traditional coding of the conventional stereotype, as exemplified in film by Jean Simmons in Lawrence Olivier's 1940 version of *Hamlet*, the fragile 'rose of May' (IV, v: 171), a projection of male and misogynistic attitudes, idealized and romanticized: the pure, innocent girl, with downcast eyes; the proper, fully-clothed, lady-like figure of restraint and decorum, bereft of sexuality, self-effacing, self-sacrificing, the very 'ideal' of proper femininity, refinement and conformism, as she had been painted by the Pre-Raphaelites, who equated her with Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott* (Dijkstra 1986: 36–43). It is Ophelia One who speaks the lines in the domestic scene of sexual intimidation in Act I, scene iii (25–33), when she is manipulated by both her father and brother, commanded to distrust her deepest feelings and desires. Her mind becomes fragmented with contradictory messages: she is used, abused and confused by the men in her life: father, brother and, later on, lover. Laertes aspires to put her on a pedestal, as an aesthetic object, his ideal of chaste womanhood, while her father wants her to be an automaton, willing to acquiesce to his every command, a commodity to be disposed of, ideally at the greatest profit to himself. However, her subservient and conformist attitude is, in this intimidation scene, contradicted by the presence of the double, who is onstage throughout, representing the rebellious, non-conformist side and the secret desires of the heroine. Ophelia Two is visibly distressed at her father's and brother's total lack of concern of her needs: although she remains 'silent', her revolt is literalized on stage by means of body language and facial expression. The director introduced this functional alter-ego to unmask or mirror the heroine's troubled inner state of mind. Through the constant presence of the second actress onstage, from the start the audience is able to perceive signs of the persona's incipient madness.

The outward appearance of Ophelia Two closely resembled the iconographic production that stresses the more bawdy aspects of the heroine's character: a lewd, bare-breasted Ophelia, with a lost, frenzied, trance-like gaze. She wore a long, loose dress, with lateral and front openings, highlighting her womanhood, mainly her thighs. Barefooted, the wild eyes framed by her long, loose, dishevelled hair, lent her an emotional, neurotic, uncontrolled appearance, revealing her latent sexuality and distracted condition from the very moment she appears onstage. Images from the tradition established by Delacroix, Madeleine Lemaire, Ernest Hébert and Georg Richard Falkenburg,¹⁰ among others, painters that have tended to emphasize her

¹⁰ In Delacroix's oil paintings, we get an emotional vision of Ophelia; her physical attractiveness is stressed and her breasts are uncovered as "she is shown entering the water, her hand firmly gripping a good-sized branch. The strong diagonal of Ophelia's stout arm as it holds the branch, the powerful fist with which she grasps it, the characteristic buoyancy of her pose

sensuality and eroticism, seem to have influenced the director's creative process. His fusion and superimposition of pictoric references makes Ophelia Two emerge as a powerful figure. Therefore, this production did not produce the shock of more traditional versions since, through the alter-ego, the audience perceives the gradual drifting of Ophelia into madness.

Some critics believe that Hamlet's sudden appearance in Ophelia's sewing room, as she reports it to Polonius had, in fact, never occurred. In Marchioro's production, her fanciful account is delivered twice, first by Ophelia One, and then by Ophelia Two, hinting at the possibility of an imaginative reverie or a dream, that has to do to with Ophelia's secret desires. First, Ophelia One enters, and in state of shock, very much afraid and startled, in filial obedience, communicates Hamlet's visitation to her father. Immediately after, Ophelia Two steps center stage and delivers the same speech in its entirety, adopting a completely different attitude. She seems very excited and overjoyed with the encounter, exultant over the physical contact it had provided to her. As she reports, Hamlet had taken her "by the wrist" and held her hard, and gazed into her face so intently as if he were going to "draw it" (II, i: 57). Her body gestures, facial expression and hallucinating eyes reveal desire and physical pleasure. This strategy of baring to the audience the conflicting faces of the self casts doubt on whether Ophelia's story is true or a figment of her imagination. Her strained narrative might be read as the first symptom of her insanity.¹¹

– everything in these pictures points to the critical moment where a robust woman prepares to make a decision between life and death" (Vest, 1989: 153). Madelaine Lemaire, one of the most remarkable woman painters of all times, depicted her among her customary environment of reeds and flowers beside the brook, but made her "leer with the glowering light of a vampire in her eyes, thus emphasizing the sexual origin of her madness – an aspect further accentuated by the very undecorous fashion in which her dress has slipped off her shoulders to reveal her breasts", suggesting the sexually frustrated mad Ophelia (Dijkstra, 1986: 44). Ernest Hébert's Ophelia is charged with latent sexuality. The dark, hollow eyes stare defiantly at the viewer and suggest a pain and betrayal beyond her ability to cope, "truly that helplessly abandoned ideal creature, whose hallucinating eyes see nothing more than what is within, and who, hair loosened and streaming down, will in a few moments enter into the stream which will carry her" (Dijkstra, 1986: 43). His stark portrayal of madness and sensuality is among the most striking of the various pictures of Shakespeare's heroine. And Georg Richard Falkenberg's Ophelia, described by the author as a "depiction of a modern woman wracked with nervous self-doubt and obsessive introspection" (Dijkstra, 1986: 44), displays deeply circled eyes and the mindless, slack-jawed expression that reveal a woman at the end of her tether.

¹¹ In Marchioro's production, the audience perceives signs of Ophelia's madness early in Act II, scene i, while in the written text the first signs of insanity are acknowledged in Act IV, scene ii, when Claudius says to Horatio: "Follow her close, give her good watch, I pray you" (165).

In the nunnery scene (III, i: 97–103), where Polonius forces her to accept the decoy part, manipulating both her mind and her body to gratify his love for power, Ophelia Two gradually begins to take over the role. The scene initiates with Hamlet and Ophelia One, but when the prince starts his violent outburst, assaulting her verbally and even physically, expressing his savage anger against women, based on his neurotic perception of his mother's conduct, he abuses her, directing all his fury and anxiety about his mother's betrayal onto Ophelia Two. He aggressively throws her to the ground, offending her with bawdy words and confusing her with schizophrenic mind games and paradoxes. Like her father and brother, Hamlet also disregards her psychical needs in favour of his own interests. The final speech by Ophelia in this scene, a desperate account of Hamlet's lamentable change, is spoken alternately by mask and self, depending on the dramatic emphasis and meaning of the words.

When we come to the mad-scenes (IV, v: 163–5/171–3), Ophelia Two takes over the role completely, while Ophelia One starts lingering like a lost sheep onstage. Madness finally releases her from her socially constructed mask and provides her with an opportunity to voice her concerns that had been silenced. As madness ignores temporal authority, Ophelia Two, speaking ambiguously, but with "method in't" (III, ii: 71), now starts to undermine authority and the cultural expectations of femininity, providing a discourse of multiple connotations. Through pun, allusion and riddle, she talks about seduction and betrayal, indicting Gertrude, Claudius, Hamlet, Polonius and Laertes, showing that she had deeply internalized both Hamlet's treatment of her as a whore and the fears of male lascivious desire that were put into her head by her father and brother. Through her madness, Ophelia finally demands to speak on her own behalf, expressing her frustrations and protesting her wrongs. Yet, she seems not to have found her own voice, since she expresses herself through the discourse of popular ballads and traditional legends. This scene, played both as extreme in its neurosis and detailed in its naturalism, is deeply distressing. It is fully explored, with no cuts, retaining all the bawdy allusions and sexual innuendos. She sings her songs as a protest rally, articulating wisdom that transcended the platitudes of the courtiers, flaunting her martyrdom against the murderous power of the patriarchal system. Her insanity incorporates a clarity that can be attributed to madness.¹² Convincing as an alien driven into her own psyche through isolation, a verbalizer of the kingdom's rottenness, she is plausible in the contemporary setting, since the production attempted to

¹² In his article entitled "Ophelia in Performance in the Twentieth Century", H. R. Coursen states that Ophelia takes on Hamlet's role as Denmark's jester after his departure to England (Kiefer, 2001: 53).

provide a context of modernity by placing big original *Petrobrás* barrels of oil, that stood for the walls of the castle of Elsinore, painted green, yellow, white and blue, the colours of the Brazilian flag, a solution the director found to recontextualize the action from Denmark to Brazil. Furthermore, the stage is drowned with mud and stains of blood, littered with trash, suggesting a wasteland. Thus, the use of rusty tin flowers, that stood for the herbs she distributes, is poignant, since the spectators are able to understand that in Brazil's "unweeded garden" (I, ii: 19), even the flowers have been corrupted by rust.

Shakespeare chose not to show the drowning or death of Ophelia to leave it shrouded in mystery. This offstage event, recounted by Gertrude and aestheticised by the queen as a fluid apotheosis, is explicitly shown in Marchioro's production as a poignant dance of death, in which the two selves of the troubled girl are finally reconciled, being one of the most beautiful and poetic moments of the production. Both actresses, completely stripped off their clothes, an index of liberation, but still bearing the marks caused by centuries of trauma and oppression, objectified by the device of several leather straps tied around their bodies, a reference to Heiner Müller's Ophelia in *Hamletmachine*,¹³ are voluntarily immersed in the stagnant, muddy waterpool that had been built onstage, after their *danse macabre* of slow, choreographed movements, which culminate in their merging and fusing into one in death. In choosing to render the actual drowning the way he does, as a suicidal ritual, a rebellious gesture of freedom, the director emphasizes the idea of female martyrdom,¹⁴ drawing upon feminist criticism and, perhaps, on the drowning scene in Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 film *Vertigo*, where the suicidal, enigmatic Madeleine also floats on dirty water. Furthermore, the traditional images, most of which already inscribed in the Ophelia narrative by Shakespeare, derived from myth, art and literature that link the woman with water and the feminine with fluidity were also evoked in this production.

At the close of the second section of *The Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot borrows from *Hamlet* (IV, v: 165), the last words of Ophelia's mad speech

¹³ Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* stresses the horrific victimization to which Ophelia and women in general have been subjected throughout the ages. At the end of the play, while the actress/character delivers her final lines, she is immobilized in a wheelchair, as men wrap gauze around her, leaving her virtually tied up from bottom to top (See Walsh, 2001: 30–33).

¹⁴ According to James M. Vest, Ophelia's gesture of rebellion can also be seen as a form of self-immolation. "In death she approaches the legendary apotheosis of myth: her "weedy coronet" suggests both an impoverished funeral wreath and a crown of thorns. Like Jesus's death and like Lucretia's, Ophelia's passing appears as a form of surrender rather than self-destruction" (1989: 56).

before her death, which are reproduced in the epigraph of this essay, to reinforce the sense of failed or betrayed love that is the main theme of the section, throwing into relief the spiritual sickness of the contemporary age that results from the perverted rhythms of life, a situation which mirrors an identical malady that had also characterized the life and times of Shakespeare, as apparent in *Hamlet*. This strategy permits him to open up several meanings, setting into motion a network of associations, memories and fantasies. Like Eliot, Marchioro also weaves together allusions and images from different textualizations to reinvent the Shakespearean heroine in his 1992 stage-production, aiming at providing at the same time a contemporary Ophelia as well as a stratification of female experience throughout the ages. Tradition and innovation are inextricably bound in his creative process, as he deployed an imaginative power sufficient to transform Ophelia's role as the incarnation of the feminine condition within the endless possibilities of textual constructs. By establishing a dialogical relationship between painting, psychoanalytic/feminist theory and performance criticism, the director has succeeded in foregrounding significant gender and sexuality issues within the cultural context of misogyny throughout the ages. He both remakes and fortifies the Ophelia myth which, according to Heiner Müller, is an "aggregate", constituted by the sum of its different variables, of which Shakespeare's Ophelia, like Sophocles' Oedipus, remains the centre, the point of departure and of eternal return.

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