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OPHELIA'S CHARACTER BETWEEN IMAGERY AND INTERACTION
An Intersemiotic Pragma-stylistic Analysis

CHIARA GHEZZI
UNIVERSITY OF NAPLES L'ORIENTALE

Abstract – With respect to her male counterpart, Shakespeare's Ophelia utters very few lines in *Hamlet* (1600-1601), opening an interpretative chiasm about her madness, her death and her very existence in the great scheme of the plot. Her character is elusive, entrenched with silence, absence and isolation (Fischer 1990). Therefore, her fleeting image has called for many representations – in poetry, music, painting, film – each one influencing the other in raising awareness about her role in the play. This study aims to analyse the points of contact and divergence across overlapping resources, seeking to highlight a consistency across the various semiotic modes through which Ophelia's character is constructed, thus taking into account her textual (the original play), filmed (Claire McCarthy's 2018 *Ophelia*) and painted (John Everett Millais and John William Waterhouse's 1851-1852 and 1910 works of art) identities. Moreover, it intends to show how it is possible to add multiple meanings to the character through the lenses of different perspectives and research methods. Focusing on the intersemiotic translation under which the methodologies of pragmatics, stylistics and multimodality operate, the study aims to show how similar effects are reached in the multilayered image of Ophelia, through the analysis of her broken turns, her overly polite and acquiescent language and through foregrounding, shading and modality in her multimodal representations. By giving importance to context and capturing more possible interpretative impressions from linguistic, paralinguistic and non-linguistic elements, the proposed multidisciplinary model allows for a greater understanding of the source text, while also providing new insights about one of its principal characters.

Keywords: Ophelia; Shakespeare; pragmatics; stylistics; multimodality.

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.

Sad Ophelia – a white spectre carried down
The long, black river for a thousand years.
For a thousand years her song of madness
Has bewitched the evening breeze.
(A. Rimbaud, "Ophélie", in Harding, Sturrock 2004)

1. Introduction

In *Hamlet* (1600-1601), Shakespeare gave a fine representation of power and (in)action: strategic hesitancy and lasting vengeance are embodied by its verbally restless protagonist. However, he also provided a plausible depiction of guiltless aphasia through Ophelia's character. Throughout the whole play, Ophelia is defined – through external eyes only and never by self-presentation – as the exact counterpoint to Hamlet: where he is palaverous, she is silent; where he is off-record and impolite, she is courteous and meek; where he fakes his madness, she truly loses her mind.[1] As in an inverted mirror, Ophelia only exists as a counterpart to Hamlet's famous verbosity: she is what he is not.

Over time, many representations of Ophelia have attempted to compensate for her lack of self-definition in the original play, adding layers of meaning to her muted self through portraits, films, adaptations, and retellings. This transmediality (the transformation of one signifying system into another)[2] has allowed new perspectives on Shakespearean plays, enriching their perception according to those political, ethical and cultural factors that determine the element of variation while adapting the original source. In particular, the adaptation of Ophelia's character depends on its contextualisation as a cultural and popular icon:

> This is due in part to the adaptogenic nature of the source text and the ambiguities accruing around Ophelia and, equally, to feminist intentions to liberate Ophelia from the romanticized but dutifully passive role prescribed for her. The Victorian legacy, perpetuated through male-centred criticism, awarded Ophelia pathos rather than agency. By the end of the twentieth century, however, Ophelia had been thoroughly reappropriated and reinvented. (Bickley and Stevens 2021, p. 119)

This paper proposes an example of character analysis based on an integrative model informed by stylistics, pragmatics and multimodality; this framework is further centred on the detection of (para)linguistic foregrounded features and functions. While entrenched on three different methodologies, the analysis proposes their confluence through the detection of certain recurring patterns, aligning to create an exhaustive and replicable method. This renders it possible to gather insights not only from language but also from other

[1] As pointed out by Wechsler, Ophelia's madness is her most noticeable trait, which was ubiquitous in many performances of the play: "'Distracted' and 'mad' were used synonymously by Elizabethan writers; Folio stage directions note that Ophelia 'enters distracted'" (2002, p. 205). Thus, madness is what was reflected and contextualised in various semiotic modes through time.

[2] For further information see Bickley and Stevens 2021.

modes of communication, highlighting a consistency in Ophelia's traits through various representations.

The purpose of the paper is thus to prove how the intersemiotic translation between multimodal aspects and discoursal elements can enhance characterisation and discern features from source and target texts, taking as premises biases of known schemata and the contexts of both creation and perception.

2. Methodology

Some interpretative techniques are common to stylistics, pragmatics and multimodality, which constitute the interdisciplinary basis of the following methodological framework. The aim of such a multifaceted framework is to render textual analyses exhaustive and scrupulous without neglecting the unique contribution of each joining methodology.

Stylistics studies the significant choices made to convey meaning through language. Stylistic markers can be frameworks of *modality*, i.e., "the means by which a speaker's attitude towards what they are saying is conveyed" (Simpson 1993, p. 35); *deixis*, i.e., a linguistic function employing locative words to indicate proximity and distance to the speaker/hearer within the narrative scheme (e.g., *here*, *there*, *this*, *that*); but also *foregrounding*, a technique concerning the psychological reception of a text. In foregrounding, the audience's attention is focused upon the speaker's point of view through the repetition, parallelism or deviation of pronouns, articles and other specific linguistic items.

The linguistic repetition of or deviation from expected patterns of knowledge serves the purpose of characterisation in fictional worlds. According to Culpeper (2001), these schemata of information are divided into three key groups linked through a network of reciprocity:

> *Social role*: e.g., kinship roles, occupational roles, relational roles
> *Group membership*: e.g., gender, race, class, age, nationality, religion
> *Personal*: e.g., preferences, interests, traits, goals, abilities. (Culpeper 2001, pp. 75-76)

Along with theorised schemata – which are deemed *top-down information* – characterisation depends on the ensuing language and behaviour – *bottom-up information*.[3] In this study, known information is focused upon through mechanisms of repetition and deviation in multiple semiotic sources.

[3] Culpeper affirms that there are two principal sources of information about represented characters. Top-down information deals with prior knowledge, i.e., the interpreter's previous

Background knowledge is a key element of *pragmatics*, which studies language in context. Pragmatics is based on the assumption – pointed out by Austin (1962) and Searle (1976) – that utterances are *speech acts*, i.e., they are able to change reality the moment they are produced. Conversation – which is the primary field of study in pragmatics – should be based on a Cooperative Principle (Grice 1975) comprising four maxims: *quantity* (be brief), *quality* (be true), *relation* (be relevant) and *manner* (avoid ambiguity). When a maxim is flouted, the speaker creates an interpretable implicature, dependent on his/her intention.

Interpersonal pragmatics, in particular, studies face-work as revolving around both interactional cooperation and conflict and is based on the assumption that *face* is the self-image the speaker tries to protect and enhance at all costs while dealing with other interactants.[4] Participants in conversation are meant to hold a *positive face* – the desire to be approved – and a *negative face* – the desire not to be impeded (Brown, Levinson 1987). Pragmatics considers three sociological variables as fundamental premises to interaction: *power*, *distance* and *rank of imposition*. Along with the speaker's intention, these sociological variables dictate the respect or disregard for cooperation in interaction, thus leading to inferences of *politeness* and *impoliteness*, i.e., functions of language that can be used strategically in conversation.

Analytical tools such as foregrounding, deixis and modality can be easily detected in Kress and Van Leeuwen's "grammar" of images (2021). Multimodality attempts to bridge the gap between words and images by analysing the various semiotic modes used to create meaning. As an integration of discursive analysis, multimodality can confirm and add information about the paralinguistic visual and audio of a (moving) image. The nomenclature of a visual structure considers *participants*, which are portrayed as carrying out *processes* expressed by *vectors*, according to determinate *circumstances*.

The interpretation of meaning in images and moving images can be influenced by colours, costumes, movement and light, ranging from low modality/validity – e.g., black and white or maximum saturation – to high modality/validity, which corresponds to more natural colouring and light and can be compared to the stylistic concept of shading as the deliberate authorial choice of point of view. Moreover, production and performance elements add fundamental insights to analysis through a focus on the "*mise-en-scène*", i.e., the actual changes applied by the author/director to an adaptation (McIntyre 2008, p. 313).

long-term experience, or assumption. Bottom-up information refers to external data added in at a later stage. These processes together constitute the impression of a character. For further information see Culpeper 2001.

[4] For further information see Goffman 1967.

Being interdisciplinary in its nature, the analysis falls under the umbrella term of intersemiotic translation, which studies the formulation, transmission and reception of meaning across different forms of coded expression. This discipline involves syntax, semantics and pragmatics and refers to the transformation of meaning between a source domain and the precise linguistic and cultural target context that requires this semiotic change for the sake of meaning interpretation and feeling elicitation.[5]

3. Analysis

The following analysis shows the recurrence of certain identifying features in Ophelia's character, gathered across different modes through a hybrid methodology. In order to confirm that the same interpretative effects are produced despite the varying resources, Ophelia's linguistic, paralinguistic and non-linguistic traits are identified through unique but reciprocal semiotic techniques.

The analytical structure is centred around two main moments of the story where Ophelia figures as the protagonist: her confrontation with Hamlet – the famous nunnery scene – and the dramatic flare of her insanity. The analysis is thus divided into three parts: (3.1.) a pragmatic investigation of the two abovementioned scenes from the original play; (3.2.) a multimodal perspective on their cinematic adaptation (*Ophelia*, 2018); (3.3.) a focus upon two famous paintings showing different aspects of Ophelia's madness (Millais 1851-2; Waterhouse 1910). While the three sections appear divided, the same impressions and pragmatic inferences are deduced through repeated phenomena across the identified sources: foregrounding, point of view, and characterisation.

Whereas the analysis of face-work in problematic interactions is applied to the source text and Ophelia's nature is confirmed in her haunting portraits, the multimodal viewpoint applied to the film is linked to the full analytical picture through a relationship of pure dissonance. As a matter of fact, the foregrounded deviation from audience expectations and inferential reasoning elicited by her cinematic depiction makes Ophelia's original dramatic features and painted colours even bolder. Quite paradoxically, these alternative outlooks render Ophelia – the almost mythical, silenced nymph of a widespread imagery – truly visible despite her linguistic inconspicuousness.

[5] For further information see Morris (1938) and Pârlog (2019).

3.1. Discursive interaction in the play

The relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia is difficult to dissect from both a narrative and linguistic point of view. It appears feasible that the two of them behave like two parallel lines mirroring each other in inaction and malady and yet clashing when they find themselves together on stage.

In all her confrontations, Ophelia appears silent and silenced alternately by her relatives, her monarchs and the person she is in love with. She epitomises the frailty that lacks definition, being the acquiescent daughter who also respects her duty towards the state; a young woman who only exists in the circumscribed use men make of her:

> Ophelia has been shaped to conform to external demands, to reflect other's desires. […] she appears condemned to martyrdom on the altar of male fantasies and priorities. […] [She] is used, abused, confused – utterly manipulated by the men in her life: father, lover, brother, king. Scoffed at, ignored, suspected, disbelieved, commanded to distrust her own feelings, thoughts and desires, Ophelia is fragmented by contradictory messages. (Dane 1998, p. 406)

From a linguistic point of view, Shakespeare's Ophelia misses the intention that underlies an illocutionary speech act, i.e., she lacks the strategic pursuit of her own goals that derives from a sharp awareness of the context. She is helpless with respect to the cunning world surrounding her, "with her identity constructed always in reference to another, Ophelia is, in essence, nothing, an empty cypher patiently waiting to be infused with whatever meaning the particular mathematician should require" (Dane 1998, p. 410).

As a matter of fact, Ophelia corresponds to the ideal of demure and submissive femininity of Shakespeare's time, by realising linguistically what might be called "discernment politeness": she does not exceed her subalternity, rather she corresponds to the expected good manners of Renaissance *curteisie* by forsaking her own free will.[6] That she is incapable of grasping mockery and implicatures is evident in the famous nunnery scene:

> HAMLET
> Ha! Ha! Are you honest?

[6] For further information see Jucker (2020). With respect to women, the employment of courteous manners meant being submitted to any male authority that stood on top of the many interconnected levels forming the Great Chain of Being. According to this widespread world-picture, kings, fathers and males in general were collocated in a corresponding hierarchical order with state, household and family as the only repositories of control against change. Par their overflowing and unruly nature, women were dangerous source of instability and thus kept under men's power.

OPHELIA
My lord?
HAMLET
Are you fair?
OPHELIA
What means your lordship?
HAMLET
That if you be honest and fair, you should admit
no discourse to your beauty.
OPHELIA
Could Beauty, my lord, have better commerce
than with Honesty?
HAMLET
Ay, truly. For the power of Beauty will sooner
transform Honesty from what it is to a bawd than the
force of Honesty can translate Beauty into his likeness.
This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it
proof. I did love you once.
OPHELIA
Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.
HAMLET
You should not have believed me. For virtue
cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of
it. I loved you not.
OPHELIA
I was the more deceived.
HAMLET
Get thee to a nunnery! Why wouldst thou be
a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest but
yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better
my mother had not borne me. I am very proud,
revengeful, ambitious, with more offenses at my beck
than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give
them shape, or time to act them in. What should such
fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We
are arrant knaves – believe none of us. Go thy ways to
a nunnery. Where's your father?
OPHELIA
At home, my lord.
HAMLET
Let the doors be shut upon him that he may
play the fool nowhere but in 's own house. Farewell.
OPHELIA [*aside*.]
O help him, you sweet heavens!
HAMLET
If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for
thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow,
thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery.
Farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool, for
wise men know well enough what monsters you make

of them. To a nunnery go, and quickly too. Farewell.
OPHELIA [*aside*.]
Heavenly powers restore him.
HAMLET
I have heard of your paintings well enough.
God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves
another. You jig and amble and you lisp, you
nickname God's creatures and make your wantonness
ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't. It hath made me
mad. I say we will have no more marriage. Those that
are married already – all but one – shall live. The rest
shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go! (3.1.102-148)

In this passage – if not for his last directives and positive impolite misogyny – Hamlet goes off-record, using ambiguity and metaphors as part of his ruse to craft his madness and find the truth about his father's murder through it. While being indirect, his concealed jabs and repetitions ("Farewell", "Get thee to a nunnery", "Go to", "To a nunnery, go") are at least as unsettling to poor Ophelia as when he questions her integrity (lines 106-107), when he reprimands her credulity (line 116) or when he is impolite towards all women (lines 138-148). Hamlet's off-recordness is modulated in a continuous change of topic and his shortening the distance with Ophelia, switching from *you* to *thou* as he becomes harsher.

All the inferences and taboo references, all the cryptic words Ophelia cannot interpret highlight her innocence in the face of impoliteness, how she is powerless and unable to properly confute others' attacks. Her hesitancies and steady questions to Hamlet's strange back-and-forth from directives to representatives to probing questions (e.g., "Ha! Ha! Are you honest?" line 102, "Get thee to a nunnery!" line 120) do not help to define her, rendering her "a muted structural pivot", linked to Hamlet and not existing otherwise (Fischer 1990, p. 1). Ophelia is not only repeatedly silenced, but she is also silencing herself, for she is not capable of employing any strategic language. Even her use of "I" is volatile and her politeness is just the "discernment" (Jucker 2010, p. 176), courteous politeness expected from a loyal daughter and sister to Polonius and Laertes, and a trusty subject to the King and Queen.

Ophelia patiently listens to her brother warning her about Hamlet; she accepts her father's proscriptions to not encourage Hamlet's affection; she is the silent participant in Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's plot to dissect Hamlet's motives; she even endures her brother, her father and her beloved talking rudely to her and about her.

However, a slight but notable switch happens in Ophelia's language when she is no longer herself – if she ever was someone to begin with. Once she becomes mad, she loses the filter of politeness, and while she flouts almost every cooperative maxim through the break between signifier and

signified, she becomes bolder, more marked, almost visible on stage for the first time:

OPHELIA
Where is the beauteous Majesty of Denmark?
QUEEN
How now, Ophelia?
OPHELIA (*Sings*.)
How should I your true love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff
And his sandal shoon.
QUEEN
Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?
OPHELIA
Say you? Nay, pray you, mark.
Sings.
He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone.
At his head a grass-green turf,
At his heels a stone.
O ho!
QUEEN
Nay, but Ophelia –
OPHELIA
Pray you mark.
[*Sings*.]
White his shroud as the mountain snow –

Enter KING.

QUEEN
Alas, look here, my lord.
OPHELIA (*Sings*.)
Larded all with sweet flowers
Which bewept to the ground did not go
With true-love showers.
KING
How do you, pretty lady?
OPHELIA
Well, good dild you. They say the owl was a
baker's daughter. Lord, we know what we are but know
not what we may be. God be at your table.
KING
Conceit upon her father –
OPHELIA
Pray, let's have no words of this, but when they
ask you what it means, say you this:
Sings.
Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's Day,

Lingue e Linguaggi

All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your valentine.
Then up he rose and donned his clothes
And dupped the chamber door –
Let in the maid, that out a maid
Never departed more.
KING
Pretty Ophelia –
OPHELIA
Indeed, without an oath, I'll make an end on't.
[*Sings*.]
By Gis and by Saint Charity,
Alack and fie for shame,
Young men will do't, if they come to't:
By Cock they are to blame.
Quoth she 'Before you tumbled me
You promised me to wed.'
He answers:
'So would I ha' done by yonder sun
An thou hadst not come to my bed.'
KING
How long hath she been thus?
OPHELIA
I hope all will be well. We must be patient. But
I cannot choose but weep to think they would lay him
i'th' cold ground. My brother shall know of it. And so
I thank you for your good counsel. Come, my coach!
Goodnight, ladies, goodnight. Sweet ladies, goodnight,
Goodnight. (4.5.21-73)

OPHELIA (*Sings*.)
They bore him barefaced on the bier
And in his grave rained many a tear.
Fare you well, my dove.
LAERTES
Hadst thou thy wits and didst persuade revenge
It could not move thus.
OPHELIA
You must sing 'a-down a-down', and you call him
'a-down-a'. O how the wheel becomes it. It is the false
steward that stole his master's daughter.
LAERTES
This nothing's more than matter.
OPHELIA
There's rosemary: that's for remembrance.
Pray you, love, remember. And there is pansies: that's
for thoughts.
LAERTES
A document in madness – thoughts and remembrance

fitted!
OPHELIA
There's fennel for you, and columbines.
There's rue for you, and here's some for me. We may
call it herb of grace o'Sundays. You may wear your rue
with a difference. There's a daisy. I would give you
some violets, but they withered all when my father
died. They say 'a made a good end.
Sings.
For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy.
LAERTES
Thought and afflictions, passion, hell itself
She turns to favour and to prettiness.
OPHELIA (*Sings*.)
And will 'a not come again?
And will 'a not come again?
No, no, he is dead,
Go to thy deathbed.
He never will come again.
His beard was as white as snow,
Flaxen was his poll.
He is gone, he is gone,
And we cast away moan.
God a' mercy on his soul.
And of all Christians' souls. God buy you. (4.5.160-192)

Ophelia's presence – which would be signalled by long turns and unexpected interruptions – is a chimaera. The floral metaphors she uses in her tentative poem, her uncoordinated song of unrequited love as well as the obsessive repetition of expressive "Pray" are not classifiable as strategic, since she is truly mad and not simulating it. Even Ophelia's malady is seen and commented on by external eyes, as if she were not there in the foreground, as if she were forgettable. At the beginning and end of the play, Ophelia is silent. This silence does not represent communication, because it is both imposed and self-imposed and because it renders Ophelia a pseudo-presence on stage: the unlucky woman who only exists to serve the purpose of Hamlet's definition, but not her own. Nevertheless, madness also means freedom from the duty of coerced communication, it "releases Ophelia from the enforced repressions of obedience, chastity, patience, liberates her from the prescribed roles of daughter, sister, lover, subject" (Dane 1998, p. 412).

According to Camden (1964), a certain frailty of character is expected from Ophelia, since the Elizabethan audience was accustomed to young women suffering for rejected or unrequited love. Thus, he links Ophelia's madness (which is still uncertain in its origin) to the phenomenon of "passio hysterica brought on by erotomania", i.e., the "erotic melancholy" of which Ophelia shows the most common symptoms:

> She is mad, cries "hem" to clear her throat because of a feeling of choking or suffocation, beats her heart to relieve the sensation of oppression around it, weeps, prattles constantly, sings snatches of old songs, is distracted and has a depraved imagination, and ends her life by drowning. It is possible that the drowning may not have been deliberate, but at least Ophelia made no attempt to save her life. (Camden 1964, p. 254)

On this last note, the possibility of Ophelia's agency collapses. She does not act, her reactions in madness are like those of a body hit by a reflex hammer: instinctive and without premeditation. Her final rambling is characterised by rhetorical questions – since she is not really expecting answers – and uncanny representatives or even directives with no addresses and obsessively repeated to focus attention on them, e.g., "Nay, pray you, mark" (line 28, 35), but also frequent deviations from one topic to another for the same reason, mimicking Hamlet's style in his carefully planned disjointed speech. Ophelia interrupting both the King and the Queen (lines 35, 46, 57) would be concerning if she was in her right state of mind and while the King, the Queen and Laertes talk like she was not really present on scene, Ophelia goes on with her rhymes, recalling flowers and symbols of what could have been the cause which broke her sanity, i.e., her father's death and/or Hamlet's abandonment. In this passage, Ophelia's lack of face renders the impoliteness of her interruptions not strategic, thus not perceived: she stays linguistically undefined until the very end.

Fischer (1990) applied to Ophelia's last attempt at speech Luce Irigaray's categories for feminine subjectivity,[7] deeming it characterised by a broken syntax, repetitive or cumulative rather than linear structures, open endings and double or multiple voices:

> Ophelia's utterances are never allowed free, natural flow; her truncated responses, her uncertain assertions, her conflicting loyalties irrevocably tied to a self-image that tries to accommodate her closest males' expectations – all are determined by external pressure. (Fischer 1990, pp. 2-3)

While Hamlet's isolation is fake and he is always communicating something even when alone, Ophelia's metaphorical absence or pseudo-presence on stage is marked by a lack of internal point of view, as if she were only a shell interpreted and exploited from the outside.

Her lines and personality appear empty. When in Act 5 she desperately tries to communicate, she does not know how; she is the mouth agape upon her own unhappiness: "She is listened but still not heard. Her sole rhetorical

[7] For further information see Jones 1980, p. 88.

remedy is elliptical, a hermeneutics based on silence, absence, and ambiguity" (Fischer 1990, p. 7).

3.2. A multimodal perspective on the film[8]

The necessary premise to the analysis of the following scenes and shots from *Ophelia* (2018) is well expressed by Kress and van Leeuwen through their definition of *adaptation*:

> In the case of adaptation there is still an original semiotic object or event to be recoded, and often an attempt at faithfulness to that original. But a need for adaptation to another context – another length, another format, another medium, another type of audience – is also recognised, and this requires transformation, whether it is the jungle adapted to the sensitivities of urban listeners, spoken dialogue adapted to the written novel, or an encyclopaedia adapted to the CD-ROM format. (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001, p. 102)

The context in which a source – and a 1600s play-text at that – is transposed determines the changes it must undergo to be more comprehensible and alluring, to better use the interaction between the source language and the target image to elicit and manipulate emotion in the audience. The recipients being the final goal of a successful adaptation, their observation points are to be steered through salience and well-planned deictic shifts in the transposition, i.e., the way through which the camera changes angle, rendering the character more or less close to the audience's sympathy through identifying locative devices.

In order to create an analysis of the character across her varying representations, the multimodal elements derived from the film are compared to the background information about Ophelia's imagery derived from the original play. Hence, characterisation follows bottom-up negative information – what Ophelia is *not* – considering all the differences emerging in the film.

Ophelia (2018) is a historical drama telling the story of *Hamlet* from Ophelia's point of view. The structure of the film comprises scenes spanning Ophelia's childhood and her youth, from her introduction to the court as one of Queen Gertrude's damsels to her falling in love with Prince Hamlet and from her first rebellious acts to the tragic fall of the Danish court.

While the overlapping elements between the original play and the film prove the linguistic and semiotic contents to be similar in both texts, there are new factors that change the entire narrative. First of all, Ophelia's POV is a

[8] The transcription of the following scenes is based on the original screenplay written by Semi Chellas (August 10, 2014). While the stage directions have been kept unvaried, some lines have been adapted to what the actors modified during the actual performance.

novelty in itself, expressed through a recurring voice-over and the filter of her gaze upon every portrayed situation; as a consequence, many scenes of the play where Ophelia was not originally present are cut short, e.g., Hamlet confronting the ghost and plotting his uncle's demise, Polonius' murder, Hamlet challenging Laertes over Ophelia's grave. Moreover, while the alleged love between Ophelia and Hamlet constitutes a never-solved conundrum of Shakespeare's play, in the film there is no doubt about their relationship, as they secretly marry and also share intimacy. Another difference is represented by the introduction of Mechtild, Gertrude's witch sister and the reason why Ophelia does not really die but feigns her death and survives her lover.

Once these changes have been listed, it is clearer how the construction of a new Ophelia – braver, more linguistically performative and even impolite – can be justified. The film appears not as an exact adaptation, but rather an intermedial and appropriative resemiotisation, i.e., it is concerned with both the transaction into another semiotic system and the change of the original patriarchal ideology that makes Ophelia the passive mirror of others' identities.[9] However, the deviation serves as a better focus on the source play, giving insights about Ophelia's role in the original text while at the same time opening a debate about contemporary expectations, female condition and classical perception.

> [Context scene 1 – "the nunnery": At this stage of the film, Ophelia and Hamlet are already secretly married. After his father's death and his mother's marriage to Claudius, Hamlet is acting strangely. Thus, Ophelia is placed in the great hall by Claudius and Polonius as bait for Hamlet, with the purpose of proving his madness is love-induced. Thus, they remain hidden and watching.
>
> Shot (1) – 1:01:20: Close shot of Ophelia getting close to Hamlet so as not to be heard and thus secretly communicate with him].[10]

		Hamlet strolls into the hall, still dressed entirely in black, haggard, reading aloud to himself from a small book, muttering to himself. He sees Ophelia standing there in the open.
1.	Hamlet:	Nymph! Where is your water?
2.	Ophelia:	My lord, there is much I need to tell you. *He tries to kiss her. She holds*

[9] For further information see Lanier in Henderson, O'Neill 2022, pp. 38-55.

[10] In the DVD version of the film released by IFC Films, scene 1 – "the nunnery" – runs from 1:00:57 to 1:03:02.

		him off.
3.	Hamlet:	What way is that to greet your husband?
4.	Ophelia:	None.
5.	Hamlet:	Are you not my wife?
6.	Ophelia:	These games you play. Nothing is what it seems. *She tries to indicate subtly that they are being watched. In the shadow of the arch are Claudius and Polonius.*
7.	Ophelia:	(*Loudly*) I have a remembrance I want to return to you.
8.	Hamlet:	I gave you nothing. I took. *She draws the ring from the ribbon around her neck.*
9.	Ophelia:	(*Whispers*) Your father was poisoned, it is true. I once saw your uncle in the woods at a place where poisons are made. I did not recognize him then, but I saw him again on the ramparts disguised the very day your father, the king, was stung.
10.	Hamlet:	(*Whispers*) So it… So it was no snake, but Claudius.
11.	Ophelia:	(*Loudly*) I must repulse your attentions, my lord. They have been forbidden. *His eyes flicker to where her father and Claudius are hidden.*
12.	Hamlet:	(*Whispers*) Are you sure what you say is true?
13.	Ophelia:	(*Whispers*) I found the poison in his cloak this very morning.
14.	Hamlet:	(*Whispers*) Then he has stolen my crown from me.
15.	Ophelia:	(*Whispers*) You said you did not want the crown. You foreswore it when you married me.
16.	Hamlet:	(*Whispers*) I did not know it had been stolen. *He grabs her suddenly.*
17.	Hamlet:	(*Whispers*) Cry out as if I frighten you.
18.	Ophelia:	God help me! Merciful lord!

19.	Hamlet:	They say I am mad.
20.	Ophelia:	Mad with love, they say, of me.
21.	Hamlet:	Then I will be mad! (*Whispers*) And they will not see me coming. *She stares at him. She has all but forgotten their audience.*
22.	Ophelia:	I don't understand your meaning.
23.	Hamlet:	(*Loud*) You should not know what I mean. Remain innocent as snow. (*Whispers*) Cry out. Cry out.
24.	Ophelia:	God help you, sir! *He shoves her away. Ophelia is fighting tears. She thrusts the ring at him. Now he takes it, whispering --*
25.	Hamlet:	(*Whispers*) The danger for you is very great. We must get you away from here. There is a convent in St. Émilion where my mother lived as a girl. You will be safe among the nuns.
26.	Ophelia:	(*Whispers*) Hamlet, you cannot do this! *She doesn't move. He shoves her away.*
27.	Hamlet:	Go to the nunnery. Go!

Assuming that a film is a fixed record that can be analysed with a certain rigour, McIntyre (2008) states that the production and performance elements of a film can be integrated with the dramatic texts for the interpretation of meaning. In particular, the *mise-en-scène*, i.e., the non-linguistic features including setting, costume and make-up, lighting and staging, along with the contextual information provided by both the premised knowledge – Shakespeare's Ophelia – and the visual world-building components of the scene help to achieve an even level of detail in adaptations. In this case, the meaningful stage directions, along with acting and facial expressions in the staging of the scene, lead to a precise interpretation of purpose and power dynamics.

While in the original text Hamlet reprimands a powerless Ophelia, using lengthy, ambiguous turns, here the two of them carry on a double-level conversation: one where Hamlet is still harsh and commanding, and another where he and Ophelia whisper to each other the structure of the pantomime they agree to stage in front of Claudius and Polonius. The intention of the

latter neutralises the shape of the former.

With respect to the play, the movie scene also shows inverted roles: it is Ophelia who steals Hamlet's original line, speaking of fact and appearance in turn 6; again, it is she who finds out Claudius poisoned Hamlet's father (turn 9). Hence, Ophelia's agency surpasses Hamlet's abilities to intuit the truth, thus rendering her more powerful and assertive rather than lost and questioning.

Shot (1) portrays a speech process, an interactive transaction between the social actors: Ophelia – in a close shot at the forefront – and Hamlet – in an eye-level angle with his back turned to the camera – are thus respectively the Actor and the Goal. Viewers' proximity to the character calls for a direct involvement and a privileged position in the second-level conversation dimension between Hamlet and Ophelia, whispering truths to each other. The eye-line vector linking Ophelia to Hamlet is even more evident through her expression: she grits her teeth, communicating meaningful urgency in letting him know about Claudius' nefarious deeds.

While the setting, lighting and costumes remain as faithful as possible to the original atmospheres of the play, Hamlet and Ophelia's proximity, their invading each other's personal space, and even the intimacy embodied by her calling him not only "my lord" but also by his name, represent a foregrounded deviation from literary expectations. These changes are kept steady and recurring through the consecutive shots that form the scene, which alternate between long shots where they appear close and close shots of their almost touching faces.

> [Context scene 2 – "madness": Ophelia has escaped Claudius' attempt to imprison her. She feigns madness to appear inoffensive and thus try to reunite with Hamlet. After entering the throne room while a banquet is taking place, she begins dancing, singing and distributing flowers to the astounded attendants.
>
> Shot (2) – 1.21.29: Close shot of Ophelia looking at Claudius with a smile after she threw flowers at him during her mad rampage.][11]

> *Musicians play. A banquet. The entire court is present. Claudius and Gertrude are dining. Horatio is at the king's right hand, grim, unable to leave.*
> *Claudius is speaking to Laertes* --

[11] In the DVD version of the film released by IFC Films, scene 2 – "madness" – runs from 1:19:03 to 1:21:59, considering only the part where characters speak and Ophelia is present.

1.	Claudius:	He was a good man, your father. But you are twice him, I think -- *A hush falls over the court and they all look up to see –* *Ophelia in the archway, her torn dress coming off her, and her hair in knots. She carries an armful of flowers.* *Claudius can't understand why she is not locked up.* *Ophelia strews the flowers as she stumbles towards them.* *She looks mad indeed.*
2.	Ophelia:	Sing with me, Laertes. (*Sings*).
3.	Laertes:	My sweet sister, come. Sit, be still. *Ophelia's eyes meet Claudius's. He half-rises. But he hesitates before he can call the guards to take her –* *And she laughs, trillingly, and rushes through the crowd right up to the throne.* *She twirls and giggles, like Hamlet or Yorick, pretending to be out of her mind. Claudius moves to stop her, but Ophelia turns to Gertrude.*
4.	Ophelia:	Here's rosemary, for remembrance. I hope you remember. Pansies for your thoughts. Rue for your regrets and your sisters. And some for me and mine. *Gertrude's face is dumb with shame. She reaches slowly to take the rue. The whole court watches in stunned silence.*
5.	Ophelia:	Daisies. The day's eye. All-seeing. Someone sees you. I'd give you some violets but they all withered when my father died (*To Horatio*) Faithful Horatio, will you visit my grave?
6.	Horatio:	Ophelia…
7.	Ophelia:	Visit me before I am cold. *She looks at him meaningfully. He tries to read sanity in her*

		face.
8.	Ophelia:	Be sure to dig me up and I promise you will get an excellent anatomy lesson. *Horatio is struck by the reversal of what she said once. Ophelia goes up to Claudius. Looks him right in the eye, daring him to do something to her in front of all assembled.*
9.	Ophelia:	Here's fennel, for you. And columbines, for flattery. You'll miss it now my father's gone. Claudius looks hard at her, eyes blazing with humiliation.
10.	Claudius:	Take her. *But the guards look at him, unsure. The court is watching.*
11.	Claudius:	Take her! *A guard puts a tentative hand on Ophelia. There's a rippling murmur of protest through the assembled lords and ladies.* *Laertes rises, hand on the hilt of his sword.* *Claudius rises too. The guard holds onto Ophelia, unsure.* *The courtiers press forwards, a rebellion fomenting as they watch the helpless girl accosted.*
12.	Laertes:	Unhand her! *Gertrude speaks suddenly and firmly.*
13.	Gertrude:	Let her be! The poor thing has gone mad! (*To Claudius*) Let her be! *Claudius is surprised at her rebellion. She stares him down.*
14.	Claudius:	(*Defeated*) Get her out of my sight.[12]

[12] Unlike the screenplay, in the final cut the part where Ophelia sings before she exits the room has been deleted. Her lines would have mirrored the singing of her last lines in the original play: *Will he not come again? Will he not come again? No, no, he is dead, go to thy death-bed, he will never come again* compared to *And will 'a not come again? | And will 'a not come again? | No, no, he is dead, | Go to thy deathbed. | He never will come again* (*Hamlet*, 4.5.182-186).

The key to understanding the meaning of this scene and the selected shot (2) lies in both the detailed stage directions and in the pragmatic inferences derived from the overall context of the consecutive shots that structure the scene. As a matter of fact, before entering the great hall, Ophelia braces herself to find the courage to stage her farce. In contrast to Shakespeare's play, here her floral metaphors do have a strategic undertone and illocutionary force that means to offend Gertrude and Claudius, while her indications to Horatio to visit her grave – and dig it up to save her – are meaningful directives. The setting of the scene contains some pivotal elements: there is an ongoing banquet which is disrupted by Ophelia; Claudius is enraged and calls for his guards; Horatio is directly addressed and Laertes is seated to watch the whole scene – differently from the play, where he enters at a later stage.

Shot (2) once again depicts a close shot of Ophelia, who is engaged in an interactive transaction with Claudius – who stands at an eye-level angle with his back turned to the camera. Hence, Ophelia is the Actor trying to subtly offer her disregard to a mute Goal/Claudius. She wears a daring smile which clashes with her allegedly helpless condition. In point of fact, Ophelia's gaze lingers with purpose on Claudius more than the others and her deliberate facial expressions combine with her language – the fennel and columbines delivered to Claudius as symbols of flattery and infidelity[13] – to realise her strategic, off-record offence to his face. Ophelia's expression is thus both offering and demanding: she is offering flowers and also surreptitiously demanding that Claudius understand how much she hates him.

It appears evident that the focus is not on Ophelia's unrequited love or vulnerability in being controlled by others, but on her point of view – expressed by her *gaze* – and on the power she claims to make her own decisions, thus highlighting this as the one lacking element in the source text. The silence that characterises Shakespeare's Ophelia at the beginning and end of the play is thus inverted and substituted by a wilful, self-presenting voice-over also placed at the beginning and end of the film. This part is created through poetic licence; it represents an alternative version to what Hamlet recommends Horatio to tell before he dies and is marked by a repetition of the personal pronoun "I", which so often deserts Ophelia in her traditional form:

> You may think you know my story. Many have told it. It has long passed into history, into myth. I have seen more of Heaven and Hell than most people dream of. But I was always a willful girl, and followed my heart, and spoke my mind. And it is high time I should tell you my story myself.

[13] For further information about the meaning of Ophelia's flowers, see Quealy 2017.

> You may think you know my story. You've heard it ends in madness, hearts broken, a kingdom lost. That is a story. But it is not mine. I did not lose my way. I did not lose myself to vengeance. Instead, I found my way to hope that one day I would tell my own story. As one day you, my love, you will tell yours[14].

3.3. Painting perception

Shakespeare's play and its 2018 adaptation find their meeting point in Ophelia's Pre-Raphaelite paintings, which respond to the atavistic need to dissect all the features of very well-known characters of popular imagination to try and fix them in time. The analytical focus on "salience, materiality and modality" of the images not only highlights Ophelia's commonly known characteristics, but also bridges the gap between the different methodologies used to underline the validity of these same traits, whether in interaction or imagery (Beville 2020, p. 50). Kress and van Leeuwen's list of validity markers – colour saturation, differentiation, modulation; contextualization; representation of detail; depth; illumination; brightness[15] – is taken into account and related to the stylistic phenomenon of modality, i.e., the perceptible ways through which the author/speaker conveys his/her thoughts, feelings and involvement through the text.

Since the Pre-Raphaelites celebrated perfection and colours, with a strong focus on the symbolism of nature and literature, Ophelia's portraits are bold and detailed.

[14] The voice-over of the final version of the film has been simplified with respect to the screenplay, where Ophelia also tells the story of how the Danish court falls as an extradiegetic narrator.
[15] For further information see Kress, van Leeuwen 2021, pp. 156-159.

Figure 1
Millais, J. E. 1851-52, *Ophelia*. London: Tate Britain. Oil on canvas.

Millais' famous 1851-1852 painting (Figure 1) represents a dying Ophelia in the foreground, surrounded by the symbols usually associated with her and faithfully echoing Gertrude's description of Ophelia in *Hamlet*:[16] she is floating in the water, flowers are in her hand, on her dress, on her face and neck and she is dressed in the fair gown that epitomises her guiltless candour.

As per Pre-Raphaelite tradition, the colours are bright, intense and saturated – thus signalling a high modality and realism – modulated in a diversified range. The meticulously painted natural background enhances the validity of the image, contextualising it in a precise, recognisable location – the lake – and time – Ophelia's death. The perspective is centred on the figure in the forefront of the piece, thus calling for the highest involvement. Illumination varies in scale: while the angles seem duller, the centre where Ophelia lies is also the main source of light, which emanates from both

[16] "Therewith fantastic garlands did she make | Of crownflowers, 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 crownet weeds | Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke, | When down her weedy trophies and herself | Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide | And mermaid-like awhile they bore her up, | Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds | As one incapable of her own distress, | Or like a creature native and endued | Unto that element. But long it could not be | Till her garments, heavy with their drink, | Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay | To muddy death" (4.7.166-181).

Ophelia's fair skin and dress. Following Kress and Van Leeuwen's markers, the painting can be deemed highly naturalistic.

As for its style, a comparison between play, film and Millais' painting is rendered possible through the idea of foregrounding and shading. Millais' clear intent and bold interpretation of Ophelia's predicament through precise choices of light, colour and setting can be compared to what Simpson calls *positive shading*, a stylistic procedure through which deontic and boulomaic systems are prominent, i.e., in which the narrator's psychological point of view influences audience perception (2004, p. 125). The same scene of Ophelia's death in the painting, the film (shot 0:01:11) and the play (4.7.166-181) shows a focus on the pureness, unfairness and sadness of the event, whether Ophelia is actually present or her downfall is recalled.

Figure 2
Waterhouse, J. W. 1910, *Ophelia*. London: Andrew Lloyd Webber Collection. Oil on canvas.

Waterhouse's 1910 painting (Figure 2) is the third instalment of a triad which spans a chronological succession in the character's story. In each of the canvases, Ophelia is alive and surrounded by natural elements, but while in the first two she appears younger and dressed in white robes symbolising innocence and virtue, the 1910 portrait depicts a different Ophelia, more mature in her bolder colours, darker dress, reddened cheeks, wide neckline

and crimson underskirt. However, the narrative thread is continued through the recurrence of flowers.

While Millais' Ophelia was muted but highly symbolic, Waterhouse's engages the viewers in an interactive reactional structure, where she is the Reacter creating an eye-line vector with the external Phenomenon through direct gaze. Her position in central perspective and her eyes enhance both her salience and audience involvement, delivering a meaningful message that calls for interpretation.

Due to the use of different techniques, Waterhouse's colours are less vibrant, but still intense and diversified. The natural background is precise and enriched by two more figures watching Ophelia from afar. Once again, light seems to come from the centre of the canvas – from Ophelia herself. Whereas Waterhouse's painting appears realistic, ensuring a high modality, the moment portrayed represents a figment of the artist's imagination, i.e., a hopeless Ophelia who calls for help by gazing at the viewers while already in the coils of her malady. In this case, the direct relationship with the audience worsens the elicited feeling of anguish.

Although absent in the play, a mention of an almost identical moment in the 2018 film (shot 1:22:40) allows a comparison between the author of the painting and the director of the film's points of view. In both cases, the need to steer the audience's attention towards Ophelia's difficulties calls for a positive shaded modality, communicating with heightened intention a relocated focus from the main male character of the homonymous story to the forgettable female one.

The fixed image of death (a) and despair (b) in the paintings confirm the disorientation which was originally rendered in interaction through Ophelia's continuous questioning, discernment politeness and lack of illocutionary force. However, they also add to the characterisation the new element of Ophelia's deictic proximity in an attempt to change the cards by introducing a new point of view on her feelings, amplified by the display of her body calling for outside help in (b) and offering surrender through half-closed lids and mouth in (a). Both her poses have the purpose of eliciting melancholy and indignation in the audience. The unfairness of Ophelia's condition has inspired many representations either displaying her facets – which were dismissed in the play – or imagining some missing traits drawing from the common iconography, or changing narrative and perspective, as per the 2018 film.

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this paper has been to show how a hybrid methodology can be applied to different semiotic resources to obtain the same interpretative

effects in the matter of characterisation. While the object of analysis is Ophelia as a multifaceted figure of collective imagination whose many representations try to fill the void left by her language, the abovementioned framework can be successfully applied to other interactions and other images, thereby confirming or refuting their widespread schemata of knowledge. As pointed out by McIntyre (2008), the use of multimodality on performances – and images in general – does not affect the rigour of linguistic methodologies, as it also investigates stable productions and fixed impressions. As in Ophelia's case, the linguistic elements of an adaptation should be integrated by the study of paralinguistic and non-linguistic features to both add to or change character perception.

From the analysis of her dramatic, cinematic and painted versions, it appears that Ophelia represents the frustration of someone who has never been given – or able to grasp – the possibility to delve into herself. However, Ophelia's greater power is also what she is unaware of: she is not proficient at language, but her shadowy, even forgettable presence among the other characters allows the plot to move forward, giving her, if not linguistic, surely theatrical significance.

Despite her fleeting nature, her lack of self-presentation and her tentative language, many representations of Ophelia through time have tried to bridge the gap between the character and her interpretation through the means of intersemiotic translation, which is always aware of the need for adaptation between modes and sources through time. The top-down information – Ophelia's frail disposition – is thus layered by bottom-up additions and varying insights. Both the parallelism – Ophelia is quiet and polite – and the deviation – Ophelia is communicative and/or impolite – from the source experienced through different textual sources serve to spotlight a character whose perception is still fundamentally subjective and erratic.

The intersemiotic analysis proposed for both the film and the paintings has combined multimodality, pragmatics, and stylistics to add information to well-known schemata of identification, either confirming – the paintings – or deviating from – the film – her traits, keeping them visible despite the centralising chaos of Hamlet's gargantuan personality.

There are many other representations of Ophelia that this paper could not take into account, but that would provide further insights, new points of view and different modes of characterisation. What is certain is that all of these semiotic resources would serve the purpose of that definition that seems to desert Ophelia in her original Shakespearean version. Through interlayered texts, the chasm of interpretation concerning her undecisive language can be filled with possibilities. Eventually, if the overall framework is not yet enough, another – bolder, vivid, moving – could be painted and given voice.

Bionote: Chiara Ghezzi is Adjunct Professor of English Language and Translation at the University of Naples L'Orientale, where she earned her PhD in *Literary, Linguistic and Comparative Studies*. Her research interests include pragmatics, stylistics, argumentation, literary and historical linguistics in general. Since 2021, she has been a member of the administrative staff for the Argo Research Centre (*Interuniversity Research Centre for the Study of Argumentation, Pragmatics and Stylistics*). She is currently working on pragmatics and argumentation in Early Modern English literary and non-literary texts and on (im)politeness in cinema and tv series. She recently published her monograph *The Pragmatics of Queenship in Shakespeare's Drama* with Palgrave Macmillan (2026). Her other works focus on taboo and (im)politeness ("Compliments, insults, and broken taboos in Richard III's quest for power", in *Taboo Language and (Im)politeness in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Fabio Ciambella, 21-50, 2024), on religious discourse ("Religion, Science, and Reasonable Doubts: Persuading into (Un)faith", in *Anglistica AION. An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 27.1.2023, 79-98) and on political discourse ("Promises to keep against climate change: a rhetorical analysis of Iran, China and Brazil's statements at COP26", in *Eco-Speak: Language and Style in Ecological Discourse*, eds. Esterino Adami and Aoife Beville, 169-209, 2025).

Authors' addresses: chiara.ghezzi@unior.it

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