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[Notes: Text references are to the second edition of *The Riverside Shakespeare.* Edited by G. Blakemore Evans and J. R. R. Tobin, Houghton Mifflin, 1997. Other textual and film references are listed at the end. This paper was generated long before the "Me Too" movement and other sensibilities to the manner in which sexual humiliation affect spectator reception. Later film experiences of note are not here analyzed, but students have found excellent comparative contrast material in looking at the portrait of Ophelia as presented by Shakespeare. Of course, the title hints at Mary Pipher's *Re-Claiming Ophelia*, in light of then widely circulating Julia Stiles interpretation, where we repeatedly see her contemplating her suicide by drowning. My study elevates the Ophelia of LisaGay Hamilton in the Campbell Scott Hamlet, released the same year. The presentation featured video clips from this production.]

Marble fountains and urban waterfalls; fire hoses, straight-jackets and padded cells; aqua-clear penthouse lap pools; blood of a father's murder punctuating a mad scene and making too much sense: These are a few of the most recent depictions of Ophelia's inevitable fate. The words of the first clown (Gravedigger), paraphrased, "the water came to her" (5.1.17) apply especially to Julia Stiles in the film of *Hamlet 2000*. Each recent film production of Shakespeare, it seems, must throw in some clever gimmick, re-interpret the action to depict unscripted motivation or manufactured scene-scapes. There is a range of attitude and frailty, of maturity and eroticism, of flash forward foreshadowing (or wish fulfillment, or flash *back*), of inner and outer mental collapse, even of what it means to cast African Americans as Polonius' family unit, in the depictions of Ophelia's role on films that have recently been released. Sadly, there are also extremes in cutting of the text and in the ranges of verbal acuity permitted the female characters.

My examination includes the films starring as Hamlet: Richard Burton (filmed from a 1960s stage version, but only recently distributed), Mel Gibson, Kevin Kline, Kenneth Branagh, Ethan Hawke, and Campbell Scott. Their Ophelias are as strikingly different as their production styles

and title performances. Focus on this one role, often diminished from her already spare depiction by Shakespeare, will underscore why Hamlet the Movie deserves continual re-interpretation.

One of the critical questions these films have underscored brilliantly is who and what drives Ophelia mad. Is it Hamlet, with his treatment of her, or is it Polonius, in the ways he forbids Ophelia any association with Hamlet? Obviously, the full answer is that Ophelia disintegrates only after her father is killed by Polonius. The text leaves enough doubt as to whether Ophelia and the wider court know the full circumstances of Polonius' murder. Shakespeare deliberately keeps separate Ophelia's on-stage perceptions of her father's demise and any connection to her knowing Hamlet is his killer.

Productions have to make decisions as to how Hamlet treats Ophelia in their one intimate scene, 3.1, how much of Ophelia's reported contact with Hamlet is depicted, or what invented scenes are used to substitute for any second-hand exposition Shakespeare that provides about their previous association. There are the questions of what to show of Ophelia between her last scripted "sane" moments and the first of her insane. Kate Winslet, Branagh's Ophelia, and Helena Bonham Carter, Gibson's, show

the opposite ends of the spectrum. They also depict the contrasts between the history of the previous interest--and contacts--Hamlet and Ophelia have had with each other. Bonham-Carter takes abuse from Hamlet, perhaps most especially in the Mousetrap scene (3.2)—with many of the lines of the "nunnery" scene transposed to this public event. This, with his cruelly sneering "Farewell," is what drives her mad. And there seems never to have been much of a relationship. Winslet, by contrast, is thrown around by her Hamlet and director Branagh, but we know it is because they *have* been quite intimate. And now, he is furious at those who have set her up to cut off their affair and who might be lurking behind doors. In one of the more brilliantly staged depictions of Hamlet "catching on" to the probability of being overheard, he drags her with him as he opens each successive mirror-door, looking for the spies. And finally, at the end of this torture, the director/title-character permits this Ophelia her one soliloquy moment. (We probably should remind ourselves that Branagh did not really initiate the trend of mostly complete text filmed recordings of *Hamlet*, as is popularly acknowledged. Previous to his commercial release, The BBC *Hamlet* starring Derek Jacobi, the Kevin Kline *Hamlet* with Diane Venora as Ophelia (aired on PBS years before Gibson's but just this month [2001] released for commercial distribution), and the Richard Burton production recorded from a 1964 Broadway performance include the

Ophelia soliloquy and a generally full approach to the text. Gibson's and Olivier's, however, were the widely distributed films before Branagh, and they did not give Ophelia her soliloquy.)

Julia Stiles, in *Hamlet 2000,* has, instead of "Oh what a noble mind is here o'erthrown," only a bicycle scene. She has ripped off her body microphone and tried to stuff the big stack of "remembrances" back into her square box of a pocketbook with its pinwheel design. As she speeds off on her bicycle, we know she feels hurt, violated. But, in repeat use of the technique for both of his female characters, director Almereyda permits only a pictorial icon to shorthand what Shakespeare provides. Since the Ophelia soliloquy and the interaction with Hamlet in Act 3 Scene 2 are the only official opportunities to provide a foretaste of Ophelia's later mental disintegration, it is hard to justify its cutting. (I remember distinctly that Diane Venora's Ophelia soliloquy in Kevin Kline's film was my first perception that yes, if delivered appropriately, we can see the start here of a disheveling that will become more extreme later.) Yet this *Hamlet 2000* is a production that uses the presence of an Ophelia almost as grossly as Polonius himself abuses the idea of daughter to carry out his own manipulative plot. Director Almereyda has colluded with one of Shakespeare's many harshly domineering fathers to stifle a daughter's

empathy for Hamlet. She is burning her photos of Hamlet with a lighter and gazing at the charred remains in her sink when Hamlet's disembodied voice comes through her answering machine to finalize their estrangement. Almereyda has stifled his one brilliantly photogenic presence as much as Polonius' plot to wire her with a body mike implicates her uncontrovertibly in his entrapment scheme.

The mature Ophelia of LisaGay Hamilton in Campbell Scott's unheralded, made-for-TV version is the extreme to Stiles not only in depicting the fullness of the role, but also in showing us the most deeply resonant of many recent Ophelias. (This version aired on the tenth of December 2000 and so is dubbed "Hamlet 2000/II" in the Internet Movie Data Base records, where it has to this date received very thin commentary.)

LisaGay Hamilton is not only allowed the full text of Ophelia's soliloquy, but is given a discretely expanded role. She is there at the opening court scene (1.2), at a banquet table. In fact, it as if through her eyes we first identify Hamlet. Other well-composed shots give her added glances at Hamlet, to show her caring and concern—even one during Hamlet's first soliloquy which shows her framed by the window, out on the lawn, looking back to worry he might not be well. Moreover, this Ophelia

affects the latter action in more original ways than almost any other recorded version.

Hamilton actually initiates intimacy with Hamlet in the scene that her father and the king are so closely overhearing. She tries to save the self-denying Hamlet with an aggressive kiss; his first response is to reciprocate. But this fully realized romance is only for an instant, as the events of the play mandate. Yet not only does this version perform the complete role of Ophelia; her presence is added to the end of the act four scene three exchange in which Hamlet discloses the whereabouts of Polonius' body. Just behind the speaking characters she and we catch sight of men coming upon the stowed body; it is in same cupboard where Polonius and Claudius had hidden for the first part of the "nunnery" scene. Ophelia gets a long look directly at Hamlet with his blood-dripped hands. This is an Ophelia who not only has deep empathy for Hamlet but also cannot excuse him for her father's death. She reappears for her mad scenes draped in her father's black formal cutaway tuxedo coat, his blood now staining her white frock in the same place that Polonius has bled into his white shirt. Her songs and disorientation are effective because they are about as lucid—and accusatory--as any sane person' s behavior in a state of extreme grief. In fact, with her little clutch of blades of grass

substituting for flowers, she is as much indicting this court as she hallucinating.

Kate Winslet's performance had initiated the idea of an Ophelia who catches a glimpse of the dead Polonius. Her reaction was to hurl herself against an iron-barred opening as Polonius' body was carried past—a shot that takes place during one of only two out of sequence voice-overs Branagh's script allows, the post-intermission meditation by Claudius, the 4.5 speech that is supposed to follow Ophelia's first mad appearance and includes, "O Gertrude, Gertrude, / When sorrows come" (78-9). Hamilton's role integrates that scenic connectedness to the dead father with a fuller sense of an Ophelia whose disintegration matters to others. When Campbell Scott's version gives us an Ophelia who directly encounters Hamlet after the murder of Polonius, it is more textually honest, I think, than Branagh's Ophelia's screaming-against-the-grate scene. LisaGay Hamilton's stature in her role repeatedly enhances the potential for cathartic response. I submit that this is an important element, especially when Campbell Scott himself presents his Hamlet as one of the more unappealing I have witnessed. With excruciatingly uncomfortable presence, perhaps at times nearest in tone to Nicol Williamson's close-on setting for his filmed version, Scott's Hamlet has wonderful nuances in specific textual renderings, but in feeling can be excessively un-

empathetic. When he breaks the lenses to his reading glasses in one soliloquy, we are supposed to see that extreme mental disorientation results. But then he takes this too far; he whines and cringes in anguish. Long shots catch him dancing in a frenzy on the lawn. Once the actors arrive, he seems doomed. He dons their makeup. Then, on top of severely painted eyelashes and lips, his costume collects the grunge and blood of his later excesses, Polonius' stabbing and the stowing of his body.

When I first saw Branagh's film, with his use of at least one bed-located intercourse scene between Hamlet and Ophelia and several remembered reconstructions of it, I wanted the explicit visual to be Ophelia's fantasy, an intimacy not yet realized. After all, sex before marriage is un-period, even in the late 19th century that Branagh chose for the setting. (And Branagh makes one parallel suggestion that the making love scenes might be future fantasy, when he "projects" Hamlet's stabbing of Claudius in the ear, while he tries to ask for forgiveness in the confessional, then takes the moment back). But in Branagh's shooting script, and the accompanying film diary by Russell Jackson, the director/screenwriter/ title character makes clear that the jump cuts to Hamlet and Ophelia in bed underscore that the Ophelia intercourse has happened; it is not her wishful fantasizing. Although ultimately a violation of the text, there is one way that this makes sense, in that the Ophelia

who is terrorized by a father's iron discipline has the chance to heighten the naturalism of her character, torn between allegiances.

Sometimes an actor's or a director's choice redefines a role forever. This Ophelia in the Branagh film might have been that influential. But prior sexual intimacy seems not to be a pre-condition for later interpretations of the play. This fact is made all the more effective when director Michael Almereyda gives us an adolescent Ophelia whose crush on Hamlet--and his on her--is still at the stage when a kiss with all their clothes on is daring. Her closeness to him and his to her appears only in their photographing of each other in post-modern poses. The couple are clearly only beginning a relationship. Its interruption makes a stronger impact than any Winslet and Branagh concoct. First, Polonius' simple arrival causes Hamlet to flee in panic. Later, when Hamlet discovers that the woman he needs to embrace is planted with a "wire," his sense of betrayal is a sickening anger, not a rage.

When they are first together, at the end of 1.2, Hamlet gives Ophelia a peck on the cheek as Claudius queries Laertes about his travels in France. There is a silly and sexual dance in the foreground; Claudius and Gertrude are showing off their public intimacy in flagrant misbehavior. A subtle dance of position in the background counterpoints this. Polonius tries to keep Hamlet from Ophelia, but must address Claudius; Laertes

steps back to keep her from Hamlet when Polonius comes forward to speak with the king of the Denmark Corporation. If we look closely, we see Hamlet's surreptitious kiss, and then the donning of his knitted hat with ear flaps.

Julia Stiles, as Almereyda's or Ethan Hawke's Hamlet's Ophelia, seems, of the several performances under review, the only one echoing the problems of modern adolescence that are underscored in Mary Pipher's 1994 study, *Reviving Ophelia*. Although the poses and cynical looks are appropriate to a contemporizing of her character, this film does not give Stiles's Ophelia much to say. Instead, she has many different fountain and swimming pool shots. All of these--indeed, the entirety of the film--are shot on location in New York City, and I think are supposed to show us as many different examples of sculptured "falling water" as the modernist architecture of the city affords. If these fixations on water do not point the anticipation in the right direction, Almereyda even gives us, just when Polonius is reporting the letter he has intercepted, a flash forward of Ophelia's plunge into a swimming pool, which he takes back, a second later, much like Branagh took back Hamlet's action of stabbing Claudius in the ear while he is at prayer. Ophelia's plunge here is only fantasy. But the pre-announcement of her fate, this early in the action might strike those who know the play as downright ludicrous. Unfortunately, Gertrude's very

truncated announcement of Ophelia's death is followed by a shot of her laying face up in an outdoor wading pool that has no more than six inches of water in it. Apparently, we have to accept that this is enough water when one so wills her self-destruction. As a guard wades into the pool to pick out the body, we see too much detail of how ludicrously shallow is Ophelia's watery grave. All that seething rebellion and histrionic acting-out has come to this. If a film *must* show Ophelia immersed, "mermaid-like" (4.7. 177), at least give us some scenic re-enactment of Rossetti's tableau, as Franco Zeffirelli attempted, with Helena Bonham-Carter.

Stiles's mad scenes are blended into one big display of out of control screaming. The setting for her mad scenes is the iconic Guggenheim Museum Gallery. There, a scream over the rail of the circular, ramp-elevated balcony, is in itself dramatic. Then her flinging of polaroid snapshots as a way to point to her differently named flowers is effective, but at first viewing may seem incongruous to a young woman who has an apartment seemingly away from her father's position with Claudius and Gertrude for the purpose of developing photographs in her dark room. It is here, to the apartment, where Hamlet had come to deliver his "celestial" and "beautified" epistle. We have even seen him attempting to compose it, sitting over coffee in a late-night diner. When Hamlet delivers his missive to Ophelia at her Bohemian walk-up apartment where she is working in

her darkroom, Polonius walks in on their furtive embrace, sending Hamlet cowering in flight. Clearly, this means to be a production where the adults are in control, the youngsters dysfunctional because of it. In post-Monica, post-Linda Tripp and Lucy Anne Goldberg New York, it is not that clever that this Polonius forces Ophelia to spy by "wiring" her body--he gropes up inside her dress to strap the device on her. She is the uncooperative but un-objecting, numbed more than resentful or scared.

It is easy in this film to be attracted to the female roles because they do so much with so little. I digress from Ophelia a moment to consider the performance of just one Gertrude, by an actress who is also on record for her Ophelia, a decade earlier. Diane Venora's Gertrude in *Hamlet 2000* even rushes to drink the poison, knowing it is poison, either trying to warn and save Hamlet or willing her own destruction, or both. One mark of an interesting take on all the ultra-modern communication gimmicks is that Hamlet's two confrontation scenes, the first with Ophelia, the second with Gertrude, are concluded by Hamlet's absent voice. He delivers his last lines to Ophelia as two separate voice messages that she hears when she is back in her apartment. When he is lugging the body of Polonius through the bottom corridors of Hotel Elsinore, he stops near a pay phone, takes a coin out of his pocket, calls his Mom to give her his "Not this [. . .] that I bid you do" set of instructions (3.4.188). This last

one works. Gertrude is heavily drunk in a later scene when she says farewell to Hamlet at the airport. She gets back into the limo to deliver an accusatory glance at Claudius. Diane Venora can play a distanced adult as successfully as Stiles the distant adolescent. When all the male characters only mumble their lines, the achievement of having a noteworthy part in this film—even if it is constructed mostly of memorable visuals-- is to their credit. Most striking, of course, is Venora's Gertrude's willful drinking of the poison. In just an instant, she has caught on to the plot of the poisoned cup, drinks in order to prevent Hamlet from doing so and to warn him. Most of the lines of the duel are cut. The foils are abandoned for a pistol, which Laertes thrusts into Hamlet, then into himself. There should not be enough strength in Hamlet, shot at close range by Laertes, to be helped to his feet to attack Claudius with the same gun. But there is. Once again, extremes of shock-value scenic events replace any attempt to interpret full textual richness.

When selecting a Hamlet to teach or to recommend, I am torn. For years, my philosophy has been that comparative production analysis is a constructive way to approach the potential of the text. I think the preservation of the Burton *Hamlet* is especially significant for our understanding of how a production flows, of where audience reaction is. Linda Marsh's Ophelia, especially in her nunnery scene with Burton, is

memorable for the how the small gestures add up. Her "remembrances" are a single locket on a chain; his rage at her is not what topples her; but her prostrate position at his exit (with applause for Burton's controlled build to an explosive finale) and the reserve of compassion she taps make her soliloquy memorable.

Although I prefer uncut performances of *Hamlet*, I have no doubt a whole new generation of students will "know" *Hamlet* through the post-modernist "essence" of Hamlet presented in the Ethan Hawke, Almereyda-directed film. For those who know the rest of Hamlet and want to connect this pre-programmed Ophelia with what goes on in adolescence, the images Julia Stiles creates make a start. It is hardly a performance of the role, however. For a profound and moving experience, full of many emotions, yet rich with both visual and verbal acuteness, give me LisaGay Hamilton's bold and daring Ophelia. She of course performs the victim's role; how can one not; but her Ophelia shows us a female that is caring, almost maternal in places, not afraid to express her sexuality, and ultimately caught between grief for her father and incomprehension that the Hamlet she so cares about could destroy him. The steady, fierce grieving seems to use the bloodstains of her father and the few tears she cannot hold back for the liquid in which she drowns. We do not need straight-jackets, nor fire-hose scenes, nor padded cells, nor a key secreted

in Ophelia's mouth (as used in Branagh's version) to mark a moving disintegration.

In the past, I have sub-titled versions of my comparative analysis of Shakespearean productions with a line from Hamlet's directive to Gertrude, "Look here, upon this picture, and on this" (speaking of the portraits of the two kings, 3.4.54). We have to recognize that in some more *avant garde* re-adaptations, there are only pictures to go by; but that does not diminish our need to respond to their different takes on Shakespeare.

References

Performer playing Ophelia with actor playing Hamlet and date of film:

Carter, Helena Bonham. Mel Gibson's *Hamlet*, 1990.

Hamilton, LisaGay. Campbell Scott's *Hamlet*, 2000.

Marsh, Linda. Richard Burton's Hamlet, 1964,

Simmons, Jean. Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet*, 1948.

Stiles, Julia. Ethan Hawke's *Hamlet*, 2000.

Venora, Diane. Kevin Kline's *Hamlet*. 1990.

Ward, Lalla. Derek Jacobi's *Hamlet* (BBC), 1984.

Winslet, Kate. Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet*. 1996.

Jackson, Russell. "Film Diary." In *Hamlet / by William Shakespeare; Screenplay and Introduction by Kenneth Branagh; Film diary by Russell Jackson; Photographs by Rolf Konow and Peter Mountain.* W. W. Norton, 1986.

Pipher, Mary. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. New York: Putnam, 1994. A Twenty-fifth anniversary version has also been released. Students interested in her work should seek out related titles.

Most viewers of *Hamlet* know of the John Everett Millais painting of Ophelia and may want to explore the wider use of artist's depiction of the character in opera and popular culture. Wikipedia has extensive coverage. Here are just a few highlights: the 19th century French opera by Ambroise Thomas has been released on DVD and features a revised act four where a solo Ophélie carries the entire act. In Season One of *Slings & Arrows,* the actress cast as Gertrude, played by Martha Burns, questions her director (played by real life partner Paul Gross) as to whether or not her lines actually announce that Ophelia's death is a suicide, an apt topic of some critics of the play, as Gertrude is careful to say that the weighted garlands caused her drowning. The filmed version of Lisa Klein's novel *Ophelia* also manipulates our knowledge of the well-known Millais image as more than a visual anchor. Daisy Ridley stars in the role.