

## Ophelia Transformed: Revisioning Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

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### ABSTRACT

The critical literature on Ophelia has been constrained to the scope of her characterization within *Hamlet* and to the corpus of literary criticism that has drawn upon the Shakespearean play to portray the contours of her personality. She is often regarded as the mirror of fragility and frustration; she is lascivious and prone to promiscuity; she has no significance in the structural design of the Shakespeare's play except to serve as an object of pleasure for Hamlet. Despite all this, Ophelia, within the domain of revisioning literature, has obtained new dimensions which stand in stark contradiction to her traditional figure. This article intends to address the new aspects of her character within the scope of three twenty-first century novels, namely *Ophelia*, *The Prince of Denmark*, and *The Dead Fathers Club*, which have transformed the Shakespearean play. Though Ophelia's sensuality is emphasized in all these novels, she is endowed with agency, voice, and a skeptical cast of mind. She is defiant of patriarchal and divine authority; and she at times serves as a haven for the young Hamlet. It is argued that these new dimensions of Ophelia's characterization should be construed not only as a response to the Shakespearean text but as a reaction to the bulk of literature which has yielded to the predominantly male-oriented readings of Ophelia.

**Keywords:** Ophelia; revisioning; sexuality; agency; mobility

### INTRODUCTION

*Hamlet* provides a relatively limited scope for Ophelia's characterization, albeit critical attempts which have been made to liberate her image from numerous essentially male-oriented readings. The text of *Hamlet*, Levin (2002) observes, marginalizes Ophelia and even alleviates the poignancy of the moment which is meant to be devoted to her burial, for the audience's attention—and most probably their sense of commiseration—is suddenly riveted to Laertes and Hamlet's leaping into the grave, their proclamation of their love for Ophelia, their altercation, and finally their gratuitous grappling. *Hamlet's* Ophelia, Romanska (2005) remarks, is often conceived as *femme fragile*, for she manifests the frustration and fragility of women in radically patriarchal societies; contrarily, she is also lauded, at least, since the Romantic period, as a cult figure that has enkindled the rise of necro-aesthetics as illustrated in numerous paintings of her corpse which depict her vibrant sensuality. The eroticization of Ophelia's corpse is an effect of her sexuality which has transcendently resisted against the limits of the Shakespearean play. Sexuality, of both carnal and transcendental nature, has been associated with

Ophelia's figure. Showalter (1985) deplors that Ophelia cannot be sequestered from the bulk of literary criticism on her arousing carnality to the extent that her offering flowers, during the moments of her insanity in Act 4, Scene 5, has been interpreted as a self-deflowering incident. Along with her fragility and victimization, the discourse on sexuality constitutes a considerable portion of criticism on Ophelia's characterization in *Hamlet* and it is reflected, though with new facets, in the revisioning works of the Shakespearean play. Regardless of the authorial intentions, any revisioning project, according to Bloom (1973), consists of two major stages: compliance with, and, correction of, a precursor or a previous text. Bloom (1982) quotes T. S. Eliot who avers that any writer develops his profession through two major phases: imitation of an admired precursor and the subsequent hatred of being indebted to that figure. Though to confine Klein's (2006) intentions to Eliot or Bloom's conception of revisioning may not do justice to the novelist's purport of revising the story of *Hamlet*, one may discern, in Klein's (2006) interview which is appended to her novel, the vestiges of ambivalence toward both Shakespeare and his play; she admires the play as a *chef d'oeuvre*, and yet she underscores her disappointment with Ophelia's submissiveness to patriarchal authority. Such a medley of opposing sentiments, in the novels under discussion in this article, is not always expressed, yet the final product of revisioning literature is an amalgam of compliances and contradictions: figures, elements, and motifs which a revisionist author borrows from the precursor, and those ideas and themes which he develops from a different, sometimes, antithetical perspective. To adopt such a stance toward Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is not without precedence. For instance, Lillie Wyman, in her 1924 novel *Gertrude of Denmark*, addresses the female issues in the play. The novelist, according to Rozett (1994), creates a close affinity between Gertrude and Ophelia, and depicts how the lives of the two women are afflicted by "Hamlet's egotistical selfishness" (p. 84). Not all revisioning works or appropriations of *Hamlet* subvert the patriarchal attitudes toward Ophelia. For instance, Rutter (1998) mentions that some popular adaptations of *Hamlet*, such as Sir Laurence Olivier's version in 1947 and Franco Zeffirelli's in 1990 portray Ophelia through Hamlet's perspective with the prince and his masculinity in the highlight and with Ophelia even overshadowed during her burial scene which otherwise may cast dubiety on the actions of a brother and a lover who claim they adore Ophelia.

This article intends to investigate certain aspects of Ophelia's character in three revisioning works of *Hamlet*: Lisa Klein's *Ophelia* (2006), Graham Holderness's *The Prince of Denmark* (2002), and Matt Haig's *The Dead Fathers Club* (2006). Each of these novels possesses its own milieu. *Ophelia* occurs in late sixteenth century Europe with numerous characters created and added to the dramatis personae of *Hamlet*. *The Dead Fathers Club* draws on the original plot of *Hamlet* and is, despite its seemingly parodic tone, a sorrowful account of life ruined by the continued zeal for revenge. *The Prince of Denmark* is situated in the eleventh century Denmark; the novel is interlarded with medieval texts, for instance, the chronicles of Ansgar, and with anachronistic references to the Reformation period in Europe. The three revisionings of *Hamlet* in this article adopt differing trajectories, yet certain dimensions of Ophelia's character appear to be the common denominators or the points of departure among them. Of the three revisioning works which are the focus of this article, the text of *Ophelia* yields deeper insights into the new characterization as well as creation of Ophelia, for she is the novel's

protagonist. Efforts are made to concentrate on a limited number of inevitably interrelated features which ascertain Ophelia's transformations within these revisioning novels. Finally, all quotations from *Hamlet* are based on The Arden Shakespeare, edited by Harold Jenkins (1982).

#### SEXUALITY AND AGENCY

The corpus of criticism on *Hamlet's* Ophelia majorly addresses her virginity, sensuality and fragility. Ophelia, in Hirschfeld's (2003) opinion, vicariously receives Hamlet's splenetic censure of his mother's concupiscence, and as such, she, as the potential breeder of sinners, is rejected by Hamlet as his would-be spouse. Watson (2004) argues that Hamlet's use of double entendre on various occasions, for instance, his use of "nunnery" (3.1.141) which idiomatically signifies bordello and his ludicrous temperament before the Mouse Trap when he addresses Ophelia, "That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs" (3.2.117), arouse the conception that Ophelia is a nymphomaniac, allowing her no opportunity to defend herself against Hamlet's imposition of obscenity on her character. Further, she is not only sexually provocative but tragically deranged. Watson mentions that in the context of the contemporary ideology of the English Reformation, Ophelia's sympathetic prayer for her deceased father is not lamentation but dementia. One of the prominent instances of transformation in some of the novel revisionings of *Hamlet* is that Ophelia presents, especially in Klein (2006), a resolute thinking character who, among others, criticizes traditions regarding sexuality, expresses her attitude toward relations with the opposite sex, and initiates, out of her own will, intimate or sexual affairs.

Klein's (2006) Ophelia has tolerance neither for patriarchal morality nor for traditional books on morals. During her stay at the court of Elsinor, she, as a court lady, studies conduct books as a part of her education, and yet she casts sarcasm on the attitudes of these books toward women: "They all said that I must be silent, chaste, and obedient, or else the world would be topsy-turvy...I scuffed at this" (p. 38). In defiance of all the instructions of moral books, she seeks pleasure in reading "*The Art of Love*, for all the moralists condemned it as a dangerous book" (p. 50). She is lucid in her ideas regarding sexual pleasure, for she explicitly wishes to travel to Italy "where the men are taught to overcome virgins and the women know many freedoms" (p. 50). That Ophelia articulates her views regarding different issues and possesses an inquiring mind is by itself a feature which distinguishes the novel from *Hamlet*. Contrarily, in *Hamlet*, it is the prince, who, according to Kinney (2002), is the philosophizing figure, a Wittenberg student, whose thoughts represent a range of theological and philosophical issues of Shakespeare's time whose leading figures are Martin Luther and Montaigne. That a person with the philosophizing mentality of Hamlet can adore a shallow girl at the Danish court, who is nothing but an "O-phallus"—as emphasized by Jacques Lacan (cited in Showalter, 1985, p. 77)—appears to be the question of some critics or readers of *Hamlet*. Whereas the question of Ophelia's intellect was not previously an issue in the traditional criticism of *Hamlet* and even in modern, for instance, psychoanalytic readings of Ophelia, it appears that this question is now prioritized in the transformations of this female character. That Hamlet adores Ophelia and that during her internment ceremony, he reveals his unbounded affection, "I lov'd Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers / Could not with all their quantity of love / Make up my sum" (5.1.264-6) is a serious question posed, at least, by those critics who cannot construe Hamlet's remarks as merely poetic or

histrionic exaggeration. One of such critics is Klein (2006) herself who moots this point: "If Ophelia was so dim, what on earth made Hamlet fall in love with her?" As such, the new characterization of Ophelia can be considered as the rebirth of a woman who has gained voice throughout the centuries. As a revisionist author, Klein has to face Shakespeare and the bulk of critical literature which is ineluctably male-oriented in its approach to Ophelia, for the text of *Hamlet*, according to Showalter (1985), has not provided insight into Ophelia's psyche. In *The Dead Fathers Club*, Leah Fairview, a twelve-year old girl who represents the figure of Ophelia, discloses her sexual awareness to the eleven-year old Philip who is entrapped in a precarious world further darkened by the presence of the ghost of his father who incessantly urges him to revenge his murder. Philip, who, after being plagued by the ghost of his father, has revealed certain symptoms of a schizophrenic and receives psychological treatment, is encouraged by his mother as well as Mr. Fairview, whose role resembles that of Polonius, to meet Leah. Though senior to Philip by one year and despite certain flaws in her character, Leah is, in personality, far beyond Philip in intellectual maturity, social experience, and determination. She regards Philip naïve in the art of love and instructs him how to kiss a girl; the experience of being kissed on the lips which, at first, appears to Philip "weird" broadens his experience of life and enkindles him to explore if kissing the other girls he knows would create the same emotional engagement (Haig, 2006, pp. 78-80).

In *The Prince of Denmark*, intercourse, for Ofelia, is a matter of love and mutual consent rather than acquiescence to authority. She tells Hamlet that though she holds him in high esteem, she defends her "virtue as a maid" (Holderness, 2002, p. 93). Ofelia, in fact, bluntly refuses to yield her chastity to the prince as a royal authority or the heir apparent. Eventually, it is Ofelia who, out of her own volition, offers her chastity to the prince and affirms that she "would fain die, rather than live a maid" (p. 101). Klein's (2006) Ophelia, too, is determined "to be the author" of her own life; she declines to be "a player in Hamlet's drama" or "a pawn in Claudius's deadly game" (p. 241). The twelve-year old Leah, in *The Dead Fathers Club*, daringly smokes cigarettes, and sarcastically challenges divine authority: "Who says [we can't smoke]? God?" (Haig, 2006, p. 94). Transformation of Ophelia into a dauntless determined figure in the three novel revisionings which are the focus of this paper is an aspect which posits the new Ophelia against her traditional figure. Though ostensibly lewd in certain respects, she acts as a result of her own will and agency than of being enforced by the rulings of a patriarchal or transcendent authority. Hunt's (2005) assertion is that the text of *Hamlet* is evocative of Ophelia's rampant carnality to the extent that the audience may believe in the possibility of her impregnation. She is bluntly instructed to shun Hamlet's affectionate overtures, for, according to Traub (1992), patriarchal mindset, in Shakespearean era, is apprehensive of women's erotic passions. Such a masculine attitude toward female sensuality manifests itself in the reification of women in Shakespeare as statues and corpses. Women per se have been allowed no other choice but to appear as objects of amour to suffer their eventual death. The apprehension arising from feminine sexuality is revealed in many tales that deal with the themes of adultery, incest, and cuckoldry in the works of Shakespeare and other contemporaneous writers. To be devoid of virginity is the demise of womanhood. Even marriage, despite its lawfulness, is essentially the loss of virginity. As such, marriage is no exception to social beliefs regarding chasteness; nuptial bond by itself is the violation of chastity, and it

makes the married woman susceptible to promiscuity. This is the reason of Hamlet's harangue in the nunnery scene. Hence, one may argue that the text of *Hamlet* offers no profound insights into Ophelia's psyche, and this is an aspect which has been addressed within revisioning literature. Though Ophelia's sexuality is still a focal point in the three revisioning works of *Hamlet*, she is endowed with a degree of agency and voice in the expression of her emotions and will. She is far from being meek, submissive or fragile. She displays a vibrant sensuality, yet she is simultaneously vociferous in the expression of her convictions regarding intimacy or sexuality. Further, Ophelia is vivacious and self-willed in the three novels, and when dead, as in the case of *The Prince of Denmark*, her corpse is no longer the image which is favored by the cult of male necro-aesthetics. As such, the revisionings of *Hamlet* constitute a response not only to the Shakespearean play but to certain portions of literary or artistic creation which have eroticized Ophelia's corpse.

### MOBILITY AND EDUCATION

A close connection can be perceived between mental capacity and physical agility in the characterization of Ophelia in the three novels analyzed in this paper. Her mind is enriched through education; mobility is not limited to her physique. Traub (1992) claims that as male sexual discharge is gratified by women's stillness, and as intercourse symbolizes—though allegorically—the unification of the sexes during coition, in Shakespearean drama, chastity is more associated with closedness and stillness whereas mobility and openness are considered lascivious. In Shakespeare, these are Laertes and Polonius that dictate codes of chastity to Ophelia. Laertes construes Hamlet's love, "trifling," "a toy in blood," "not permanent," and "not lasting" (1.3.5-8) and cautions his sister against Hamlet's "umaster'd importunity" (1.3.32), i.e. Hamlet's unrestrained sensuality. Polonius, too, chides Ophelia for her fondness of Hamlet's affectionate emotions; he calls his daughter "a green girl" (1.3.101), ordering her to avoid any contact with Hamlet: "I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth / Have you so slander any moment leisure / As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet (1.3.132-134). To suffer a drowning death is, as Showalter (1985) mentions, another aspect of femininity. Feminine fluidity stands in contradiction to masculine aridity; just as shedding tears is against masculine norms, lachrymosity and death by drowning is feminine. This is the reason for the numerous female characters in literature that die as a result of drowning. On the first pages of narrating her story, Klein's (2006) Ophelia convinces her readers to believe her mobility and invincibility to death by drowning; she recalls the days of her youth when she would swim with her brother Laertes "in Elsinor's river" (p. 7). Despite being a young girl, she appears at times to be endowed with a macho spirit, for she is as adventurous as the other boys and entertains herself with activities which may frighten ordinary girls: "we captured frogs and salamanders" (p. 8). Holderness, too, portrays, though in brief, the time when Ophelia possesses a masculine personality: "a tomboy...who fought with her brother" (Holderness, p. 83). Though Holderness mentions education as a necessary stage in the life of a girl, yet he appears to regard Ophelia majorly as an object of pleasure, for education is merely a further adornment, making a girl more "seducible" and "marriageable" (p. 85).

Khan and Bughio's (2012) textual analysis of the conversation between Hamlet and Ophelia during the so-called nunnery scene reveals that not only is the dialogue

between the two characters dominated by Hamlet's positing a sequence of topics, but via this dominance, the prince enforces Ophelia to adopt the position of one who is left with no choice but to succumb to the barrage of castigating remarks. Hamlet's presumptuousness of speech is the consequence of his educational background which enables him to subdue Ophelia through a disproportionate interaction between the two ex-lovers. Education of Ophelia follows a different trajectory in *Ophelia*. Though Klein's (2006) Ophelia is victimized by her intelligence-seeking father Polonius and is, by the traditions of the day, deprived of having a tutor, she is allowed to "study with Laertes" to advance her learning (p. 8). She and her brother "spent hours in daily study" and "read the Psalms and other verses of the Bible," and soon she excels her brother in Latin (p. 9). Holderness's (2002) Ophelia is also educated, though she mesmerizes Hamlet more by her voluptuousness than by her mental power. Polonius, while lavishing much praise on Ophelia's being educated, acknowledges the curtailment of his patriarchal authority:

young women in these days are, as your lordship well knows, schooled and learned as though they were young men. My daughter lacks nothing in obedience. Yet in faith to win her consent in this, my lord could do no better than to address his wishes to the lady Ophelia in her own person. (p. 89)

Hence, education, even in *The Prince of Denmark*, contributes to a girl's liberation from patriarchal subjugation to the extent that Polonius lays the burden of wooing on Hamlet's shoulders. Marshall (2007) states that Ophelia's victimization and vulnerability in *Hamlet* have been considered universal. Ophelia's characterization by Shakespeare has turned into a model for the analysis of girls' susceptibility to sexual exploitation and their eventual self-destructive behavior. Such traits are considered, by some theorists, as the universal symptoms of psychological development in girls, nurturing the idea that adolescent females are more vulnerable to psychic disorders than male adolescents. This aspect of Ophelia's characterization is challenged in *The Dead Fathers Club*, though toward the end of the novel, Leah attempts suicide. Leah relishes juvenile delinquency and motivates her eleven-year old boyfriend Philip to practice shoplifting. To demonstrate her adventurous spirit, she first enters a shop and steals some ointment, and then, while leaving the place, she drops the loot in the garbage can (Haig, 2006, p. 132). Her agility as manifested in a number of shoplifting feats and their subsequent escape from a security guard who chases them makes Philip achieve a close emotional bond with Leah: "I looked at Leah's eyes and her hair all pretty for me and I loved her" (p. 134). Philip's affection for Leah is indeed liberating in the sense that Philip, in his love for Leah, finds himself unencumbered by the ghost of his revengeful father who has pestered him with doubts and fears: "I loved her because it was the first time I hadn't [sic] thought of Dad since he was a ghost like she had gone in my head and shoplifted the sad things without me looking" (pp. 5-134).

Schalkwyk (2006) observes that Ophelia is rendered an empty figure in the Shakespearean play. Like Hamlet, she has lost a father for an obscure reason, yet she, unlike Hamlet, is devoid of a voice to articulate her disappointment with the world; if Denmark is a prison to Hamlet, it is to Ophelia "a torture chamber" (p. 15). To be acquiescent is an aspect of Ophelia's characterization in *Hamlet*. Conversely, in *The Dead Fathers Club*, not only is Leah a daredevil but a strong supportive friend for the young Philip; she resolutely defends Philip against the harassment of two bullying

schoolmates called Jordan Harper and Dominic Weekly. To safeguard Philip against the intimidating Dominic, she gives assurances to her young boy friend: “He is scared of me and he won’t [sic] mess with you again” (Haig, 2006, p. 81). To claim that Matt Haig has feminist intentions is a matter of surmise, yet he has created a new Ophelia who is undaunted in many respects, and Philip, who is constantly bullied by Jordan and Dominic, achieves relief through his friendship with Leah. When Leah proposes to make friends with Philip so as to support him, he still has qualms, wondering “if Dominic Weekly was really scared of a girl” (Haig, p. 81). In a short time, Philip’s hesitations concerning Leah’s influence vanish: “When I got to school everyone knew I was going out with Leah and she was right Dominic Weekly didnt [sic] pick on me and Jordan Harper didnt [sic]” (Haig, p. 83). Ching and Termizi (2012) claim that certain characters in Shakespeare are not only unattended and, in certain respects, isolated, but they glorify self-reliance. This can be designated in Hamlet’s praise of independence in Horatio in contrast with those such as Guildenstern and Rosencrantz who submissively serve their sovereign. The figure of Ophelia, in *The Dead Fathers Club*, is enabled to defend both herself and Hamlet against their enemies; it is Hamlet who now has to rely on Ophelia for his safety; and the feeling of being isolated and unattended overwhelms Philip when he, as a result of the ghost’s persistence, rejects Leah. Whereas stillness and closedness are admired traits in women in patriarchal societies of the Shakespearean era, the new Ophelia is not only recognized by her physical mobility but distinguished by her audacity as a result of her education for a life of challenge. Far from being a submissive figure, she defies Hamlet, and when he feels insecure, she is the source of solace.

#### SKEPTICISM AND NONCONFORMITY

With the death of King Hamlet, the hasty marriage of Gertrude and Claudius, and the appearance of the apparition, the amour between Hamlet and Ophelia, in *Ophelia*, undergoes tensions. Terrified of being accused of treacherous conduct, Ophelia sets out for a convent in France where she emerges as an outspoken critic of the church authorities, for instance, not because they expelled a pregnant nun from the convent, but because the ecclesiastic authorities condoned lewdness on the part of the male perpetrator. Ophelia complains that these are men who “beg, force, and sometimes deceive women into yielding their virtue” (Klein, 2006, pp. 3-282). The life in convent enables Ophelia to present her own image independent of the plot of *Hamlet* and the figure of Hamlet. This new characterization of Ophelia is a function of the modern efforts for the liberation of women, though Klein claims that she has made attempts to situate the novel in the milieu of the sixteenth century Europe. Ophelia, in certain respects, epitomizes the voice and skepticism of her modern creator’s period, for every author is situated within, and, affected by, his own historical context. Bloom (1998) regards Hamlet as a “Renaissance wit and skeptic, reader of Montaigne and London playgoer” (p. 387). These remarks imply that Shakespeare is influenced by his socio-historical context, though according to O’Rourke (2012), one must not conclude that an author’s context is a homogeneous mould which gives shape to a work. Shakespeare as a playwright had to be conscious of the taste and the positive or adverse responses from his audience. In the same manner, Klein’s characterization of Ophelia reflects, though not entirely, the contemporary feminist mentality and sensibility to which Klein is catering.

On certain occasions, this is Klein's (2006) Ophelia who presents herself as the originator of thoughts in *Hamlet*. During her tête-à-tête with Hamlet, she compares Elsinore to a "cage," deploring that Elsinore appears to her like a "prison" (p. 59) yet this is the Shakespearean text in which Hamlet presents this concept in his meeting with Guildenstern and Rosencrantz, proclaiming "Denmark's a prison" (2.2.243). Ophelia also demonstrates her conversance with the Scriptures, and at times she appears a pure atheist. She asks Hamlet "Does it not say in the Bible that there is providence even in the fall of a sparrow?" (Klein, 2006, p. 69). That Ophelia uses the quotation including "providence" is manifesting that Klein is giving a theological dimension to Ophelia's mind as a believer, yet she is, for the most part, a skeptic. Ophelia, during the time she has sought refuge in the convent, is outspoken regarding the basic tenets of Christianity, declaring, "I do not believe in miracles" (p. 312); by refuting the possibility of miracles, Ophelia is overtly rejecting the theological foundations of Christian faith. Ophelia has qualms regarding the principles of Christianity; she mocks the idea of transubstantiation and she wonders how the philosophizing Hamlet would believe that the nuns of the convent can "consume Christ's true body;" she does not believe in the prioress's prays and sermons, whispering to herself that "the bread served at meals and the bread served at Mass look and taste the same to me" (p. 263); her lack of belief in the spiritual world imbues her with amazement when she discerns some "joy" and relief in Therese, one of the devoted sisters, who, after eating a small piece of bread and a few drops of wine during Mass, feels relieved:

I marvel how the scrap of bread on her tongue fills Therese with a visible joy. The drops of blood red wine in her mouth invigorate her frail body, seeming to ease her pain. Her forehead is cool to my touch and her breathing easy. (p. 291)

Ophelia is a shrewd empiricist. When Therese dies on her deathbed with blood oozing from her palms, Ophelia, unlike the other nuns, cannot believe in a miracle and feels astonished that "despite three years of study in philosophy and medicine, I have not discovered a cause in Nature why Therese's hands bled at her death" (Klein, 2006, p. 320). Ophelia's disbelief in miracles, her empiricist approach, and her insistence on discovering "a cause in Nature" is redolent of the eighteenth-century skeptic philosopher David Hume's (1955) refutation of all miracles and his argument "that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion" (p. 137). The Humean skepticism in Ophelia, on certain occasions, turns her into a natural scientist when she ponders the same bleeding incident: "It is one of the body's many mysteries, which the study of anatomy seeks to unlock" (Klein, p. 320).

Spinrad (2005) reflects that Hamlet's renowned soliloquy, "to be or not to be" in Act 3, Scene 1, outlines, for the most part, his studies at the University of Wittenberg devoted to the concept of 'being' first mooted by Greek philosophers of the antiquity. Hamlet's cast of mind is inherently agnostic, though his soliloquy is interrupted by Ophelia who reminds the prince of Christian faith and the significance of praying, making him utter, "Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons / Be all my sins remember'd" (3.1.89). Unlike Hamlet who has been to Wittenberg, Klein's (2006) Ophelia has received most of her knowledge from women either at the court or at the convent, and yet her skepticism is Humean in essence; this manifests the intertextual nature of *Ophelia* as a complex of thoughts and quotations which, upon investigation, link the readers to more



intertextual relations. Theorizing on the nature of madness, Ophelia classifies it into two general types: one which afflicted Hamlet; and the one which appeared in Therese. She speculates that the former may “spring from a diseased mind, while the other...may be divine in origin” (Klein, 2006, p. 312). Ophelia is, on the whole, skeptical of both court and church as ideal places for mental growth, for whereas court is, in her view, the scene of seduction, murderous rivalry, and illusion, church is the house of hypocrisy, needless abstention from pleasures, and self-delusion. Skepticism is also a feature of Leah’s characterization in *The Dead Fathers Club*, though her nonconformity is not as intense as that of Ophelia in Klein’s novel. She blankly expresses her hatred of God, yet her reasoning is imbued with sentimentality. Despite being the daughter of a man who is considered by the public as a “bible-basher,” she detests God as she thinks the divinity was indifferent to her mother’s ordeal. Leah is convinced that God rejoices in man’s sufferings, for sufferance, in her opinion, entrenches man’s belief in God: “I hate God....God just looks down at people asking him for help and he doesnt [sic] do anything because he knows if they are hurt theyll [sic] want to believe in him more” (Haig, 2006, p. 93). Leah is appalled by the contradictions in God’s commands: “he says you cant [sic] do things like you cant steal. But he steals. He steals people...he let Mum die...and he didnt [sic] do anything” (p. 93). Leah construes the death of her mother, despite all prays for her health, as divine larceny (p. 95); In Leah’s view, to dream of a life of felicity in the hereafter is merely self-delusion; it is a false conception held by her father who “wants to think Mums [sic] in Heaven” (p. 93). Ophelia impugns both patriarchal and ecclesiastical authority. Her skepticism and nonconformity is manifest in both *Ophelia* and *The Dead Fathers Club*; to be antithetical to the power of an authoritative figure is also a characteristic feature of Ophelia in *The Prince of Denmark*, though the nature of her confrontation with authority, as discussed under the rubric of agency and mobility in this paper, is mostly anti-patriarchal than antireligious.

## CONCLUSION

Ophelia, in *Hamlet*, is not only represented as a sexually provocative character but also exploited as a means of political advancement. Stevenson (2002) remarks that Hamlet calls Polonius, Jephthah (2.2.406), hence, comparing him with the Judge of Israel as mentioned in the Book of Judges in the Old Testament. Hamlet’s remark may imply, among others, Polonius’s pandering of Ophelia to secure political promotion in juxtaposition with Jephthah’s sacrifice of his daughter in return for military kudos. Romanska (2005) contends that unlike Hamlet, whose meditations present the complex of his mentality, Ophelia is deprived of a voice which can provide the readers with an insight into her psyche. As a result, Ophelia, through time, has been glorified by her physical substance than by her intellect. That Ophelia boldly comments on a variety of issues is the materialization of her unheard voice. What revisionist authors such as Holderness (2002), Haig (2006), and especially Klein (2006) have depicted in their novels is a pregnant discourse, which can be considered as Ophelia’s voice in contrast with her traditional figure as *femme fragile*. The modern Ophelia, in certain respects, is representing the social and cultural stance of women in today’s world, though Haig and Holderness may not have essentially feminist perspectives. This social aspect of Ophelia can be explored with regard to the intertextuality of the revisioning works and their

relations to numerous other works and voices. The revisioning of *Hamlet*, as discussed in the introductory section of this article, may have a variety of reasons; however, the outcome is interpretable with regard to the framework of the previous critiques on *Hamlet*, and, in particular, Ophelia. As such, the dimensions of voice, agency, education and skepticism, to name a few, which distinguish the new figure of Ophelia—in the scope of the three novels of this article—cannot be considered as a mere response to Shakespeare as a canonical figure but to the corpus of literary criticism and artistic creation which has drawn upon the text of Shakespeare for the characterization as well as representation of Ophelia.

### ENDNOTES

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