

# The Cult of Shakespeare in Soviet Russia and the Vilified Ophelia

Natalia Khomenko, York University (Toronto, Canada)

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## Abstract

This article examines the representations of Ophelia in Soviet academic and literary texts, as well as in Grigori Kozintsev's internationally renowned film version of *Hamlet*. Analyzing the Soviet cult of Shakespeare, I argue that Soviet portrayals of Ophelia — ranging from a threatening mechanical creature to a shrinking doll — reflect the difficulty of legitimizing Shakespeare and his plays, even under conditions of strict ideological control. Accepting Shakespeare as a proto-socialist writer, and lauding Hamlet as a people's hero, requires a struggle against the text and a policy of determined misreading. As a disruptive girl character, not easily assimilated into the centralizing force of communist ideology, Ophelia is marginal to the masculine project of state-building into which Shakespeare, and consequently Hamlet, are co-opted. In Soviet portrayals, she embodies the doubt about how Shakespeare's foreign birth and bourgeois origins might affect his potential for properly educating proletarian readers. This representational trend continues beyond the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991; at the same time, post-Soviet women authors query Ophelia's marginal status, using her as a point of entry into the cultural canon.

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What does Hamlet have in mind when he remarks to Polonius, cryptically, "For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion —" (2.2.181-82)? In the 1940s, the prominent Soviet literary and art critic Mikhail Morozov interpreted this line as a comment on Ophelia's moral degradation, writing that "in the same way, the beautiful Ophelia, coming into contact with the filth of the court life, can breed evil" (*tak i prekrasnaya Ofeliya mozhet porodit' zlo, soprikasayas' s gryaz'yu pridvornoy zhizni*) (Morozov 1964a, 213). In Shakespeare's text, Hamlet makes the connection to Ophelia by warning Polonius against letting his daughter walk in the sun, lest she conceive (2.2.182-86). The pun on "sun/son," coupled with a reference to spontaneous generation, suggests a morbid joke about the unseemly consequences of letting Ophelia associate with men, and especially with the prince himself. However, ignoring Hamlet's own part in this potential conception, Morozov interprets his remark as a sober observation of Ophelia's openness

to internalizing the vicious customs of the court and propagating them further. The Soviet scholar directly links Ophelia to dead and decomposing flesh, capable of actively spreading the infection she has contracted from the rotten state of Denmark.<sup>1</sup>

Morozov's reading exemplifies the intensely critical and conflicted attitude toward Ophelia in Soviet scholarship. She is perceived as a deeply ambiguous figure whose lovely surface might hide dark and threatening entrails (not unlike those of a dead dog). This reading of Ophelia may be observed not only in academic publications but also in Soviet popular literature and poetry; the proliferation of such (mis)representations of a key Shakespearean character indicates they are performing significant cultural work. The objective of this article is to analyze the provenance and significance of Soviet representations of Ophelia. Throughout the article, I outline the privileged position Shakespeare came to occupy in the Soviet Union, examine the concurrent glorification of Hamlet, and explore the problems of legitimizing the playwright, the play, and its protagonist. Taking into consideration the treatments of Ophelia published shortly before the revolution, I trace her transformation, in the context of the early Soviet cultural politics, from a benign, if ineffectual, figure to an actively dangerous, frequently inhuman cipher. As a girl character, marginal and potentially destabilizing to the ideologically sound interpretations of *Hamlet*, Ophelia could safely reflect all doubts about Shakespeare's ultimate usefulness and about Hamlet's potential as a revolutionary. However, this marginal status also makes her a useful figure for Soviet and post-Soviet women writers in search of a point of entry into the cultural canon.

After the October Revolution of 1917, the Bolshevik party found itself in a peculiar position: highly ideological, the new state still lacked a coherent and consistent cultural policy. It quickly became apparent that any hope for rapidly producing a uniquely Soviet (or even, in a pinch, proletarian) culture was futile, since the lower classes were largely illiterate, while those who boasted pre-revolutionary education immediately became suspect as potential ideological enemies. The new state could not simply and unequivocally appropriate the existing works of art as a temporary stop-gap, and numerous writers, including Vladimir Mayakovsky, were passionately calling for the complete destruction of pre-revolutionary culture in order to start over with a clean slate.

In order to resolve this problem and to establish cultural independence, party leaders implemented several strategies. Certain groups, such as *Proletkult* and a number of avant-garde associations, strove to produce uniquely Soviet art works, with varied success. At the same time, it became clear that, without incorporating at least some elements of pre-revolutionary culture, it would be impossible to educate the illiterate majority of the new state. Without laying claim

to the past, the new state would find itself entirely lacking in cultural capital on the world stage. By the 1930s, the necessity of securing recognition and respect from other countries became a cultural commonplace and one of Stalin's overwhelming concerns. To a certain extent, this attitude shift may be explained through Papernyi's theory of two cultures, which describes the early Soviet attitudes to pre-revolutionary architecture. Papernyi defines the 1920s as a "Culture One" period: during that decade, the new state saw itself as the beginning of a new history and thus deemed the past largely useless and deserving to be destroyed. In early 1930s, however, "Culture Two" takes over: Soviet culture sought to present the "old world" as its own past, positioning itself as the final point of history (Papernyi 1996, 45). After the heated cultural policy debates of the 1930s, all throughout World War II (and specifically the period between 1941 and 1945, known in the Soviet Union as the Great Patriotic War), through the Thaw (which began after Stalin's death in 1953 and lasted until approximately 1965), and until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Soviet academics and writers worked not only to anchor their ideological projects in the cultural past, but also to argue that their interpretation of this past was superior to all others.

William Shakespeare, extremely popular in Russia throughout the nineteenth century and highly valued by Western countries, was almost immediately implicated in the Soviet project of building cultural capital. Insisting on Shakespeare's role as a proto-revolutionary writer and appropriating his works as evidence that the October Revolution was historically inevitable, by the 1930s Soviet ideology workers had fully launched what Arkady Ostrovsky calls "Shakespearization, as the state policy for Soviet culture"(Ostrovsky 2006, 57).<sup>2</sup> Still, an undertow of doubt — related to Shakespeare's foreign birth, suspect social status, interest in aristocratic characters, and unrealistic plots — persisted. As a foreign writer of uncertain class origins, whose plays, at close reading, failed to yield unequivocal support for the communist cause, Shakespeare remained an inherently suspect figure even as he was adopted as one of the substantiating authorities of Soviet literature and culture. Moreover, the claims that Soviet culture at least partly had its foundations in the Shakespearean text were continuously threatened by the text itself, available both in English and Russian, and demanded constant vigilance, both in scholarship and in performance.

This tension between an ideologically motivated interpretation and a resistant play text is especially evident in the case of *Hamlet*, whose main character was viewed by Soviet critics as Shakespeare's mouthpiece and his theatrical alter ego.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, scholarly explorations of the play published in the Soviet Union vigorously resist the idea that Hamlet might be indecisive or unjust, arguing instead that he is at all times a progressive, active, and democratically minded

hero. Still, because the popularity of this play both in pre-revolutionary Russian and in the Soviet Union ensured that it was widely read, the contradictions between the text and its ideologically correct readings must have been glaringly obvious. In his pamphlet written for English-speaking readers, Morozov describes the Soviet staging process and demonstrates just how closely directors' interactions with the play were controlled by the ideology workers. In the planning stages, the theaters were sent packages of information that included "a digest of critical opinion on *Hamlet*, comments, a bibliographical list and so on." In addition, "if required, a Shakespearian authority [would] be dispatched, who [would] not only give a series of lectures to the actors, but [would] also be present at rehearsals" (Morozov 1947b, 60). These measures would, presumably, ensure that the progressive, revolutionary persona of the Danish prince (and, by extension, of his creator) remained unchallenged.

In this context of strict ideological control, Soviet portrayals of Ophelia identify her as a site where doubts about this foreign playwright and his suitability as a vehicle for communist ideas can be safely expressed. Ophelia is the obvious choice for such a displacement of cultural anxiety, since her relationship with Hamlet presents a whole range of problems that cannot be resolved satisfactorily onstage or in academic writing without throwing a shadow of doubt on the character of Hamlet and thus on the heavily idealized playwright.<sup>4</sup> For Soviet writers and academics, the image of Ophelia as a pure and simple being was both aesthetically appealing<sup>5</sup> and intensely familiar from the nineteenth-century representations, both in Russia and in Europe. However, such an image also required an acknowledgment that Hamlet behaved reprehensibly toward Ophelia. The Victorians, in particular, idealized this character and viewed her as a pitiable victim of the cruel world, cut down before her time.<sup>6</sup> Remarking on Victorian images of Ophelia, Kimberly Rhodes notes that the English audience "is meant to sympathize with Ophelia while Hamlet treats her harshly" (Rhodes 2008, 18). However, in Soviet constructions the suggestion that Hamlet is overly harsh, even deliberately cruel, to Ophelia would have clearly contradicted the ideological idealization of him. When Hamlet is understood to be a proto-socialist hero, neither recognition of his harshness nor subsequent sympathy for Ophelia is a desirable reader response.

Thus we have Morozov's analysis, which, in drawing a connection between Ophelia and the image of dead canine flesh breeding maggots, suggests that the fault for Hamlet's harshness might lie with Ophelia herself. Elsewhere Morozov describes her as "mincing" (*zhemannaya*), questions whether she might love Hamlet only for his looks and status, and hints that Hamlet's criticisms of Ophelia are "not for nothing" (*nedarom*), that "she has been a blind instrument in the hands of Claudius and Polonius" (*chto ona byla slepym orudiem v rukakh Klavdiya i Poloniya*) and "assisted

in [Hamlet's] death" (sposobstvovala ego gibeli) (Morozov 1964b, 167-68).<sup>7</sup> Morozov is one of the first Soviet scholars to draw the reader's attention to Ophelia's possible failings and to question her relationship with Hamlet and overall function in the play, but this line of analysis regularly recurs in later studies. Consider the analysis of *Hamlet* in I. Vertsman's article. Generally adhering to the view of a "tender, kind" (nezhnaya, dobraya) albeit "weak-willed, unintelligent" (bezzvol'noy, neumnoy) Ophelia, Vertsman is still able to imply that Hamlet's treatment of his former beloved is to a certain extent caused by her own deep-seated flaws. Explaining Hamlet's accusations, he argues that "Hamlet had discovered for himself, behind Ophelia's charming countenance with which nature had endowed her, something repulsive, vile, shameless" (Gamlet otkryl sebe za charuyushchim oblikom Ofelii, kotorym odarila ee priroda, nechto ottalkivayushchee, gnusnoe, besstydnnoe) (Vertsman 1964, 108-11). His assertion of Ophelia's double nature, of course, speaks against all suggestions of her tenderness and charm: as in Morozov's reading, she contains a vicious seed of infection, readily visible to Hamlet's perspicacious eye.

Some Soviet writers and directors attempted to evade this conundrum altogether and explain away Hamlet's scandalous behavior toward the innocent Ophelia. For instance, in the notes to his stage production, Nikolai Okhlopkov explains carefully that Hamlet was forced to condemn his beloved in an effort to "save her, preserve her, albeit at the price of a terrible separation . . . so that Claudius should not use her childish naïveté and purity as a weapon for his provocations" (Okhlopkov 1966, 182). Reflecting on the play, Grigori Kozintsev argues that Hamlet's crude behavior toward Ophelia and his treatment of her as "a whore from a cheap brothel" (kak s potaskushkoy iz groshovogo pritona) are simply manifestations of his unwavering dedication to unmasking falsehoods of Elsinore (Kozintsev 1983, 318-19). These explanations do little beyond suggesting a truly monstrous selfishness and failure of judgment on the part of Hamlet; they also indicate the interpretative gap that loomed large, despite the best efforts of Soviet scholars and directors. This interpretative gap could not be simply ignored, since Ophelia is in many ways central to the play and, to a large extent, shapes the audience's reading of it.<sup>8</sup>

As a girl character, vulnerable and changeable but also driven to insanity and eventual death by the actions of the hero, Ophelia could not be made to fit easily into the Soviet Shakespeare project. In this, she is unusual. In her discussion of a Soviet production of *Antony and Cleopatra*, Irene R. Makaryk points to the relative ease with which, in order "to celebrate a positive hero and his relationship to the masses, and, by extension, to celebrate the centralizing force and importance of the party," the female figure, peripheral to this project and distracting from it, may be in performance "dismissed, submerged, or otherwise assimilated by the centralist impulse" (Makaryk

1993, 189). However, Ophelia's violent grief, her fragile and romantic flowers, and eventual insanity prevent any easy access to a cathartic union between the positive hero and the audience. Marginal to what was perceived as a rational, masculine struggle against oppression, Ophelia becomes a potentially destructive embodiment of opposition to the values of socialist culture. Her very girlhood, her position as a desired and desiring subject, and the potential for disorder demonstrated in her sexually charged ballads all resist the ongoing, ideology-driven attempts in literature and art to defuse the subversive potential of eroticism by creating a culturally dominant image of an asexual woman worker.<sup>9</sup> Alien to the values of Soviet literature yet central to one of Shakespeare's most famous plays, this girl character poses a complex problem of literary representation.

Thus, in Soviet literary re-imaginings, Ophelia emerges as a deeply unsettling character — a source of delusion and deception and sometimes a direct threat that extends beyond the fictional world to the reader. Her very isolation from the members of the court and, indeed, from the audience by the impassable gulf of her insanity means that she cannot be easily subordinated to the centralizing and unifying ideological impulse. In literary works, and especially those by male writers, Ophelia thus becomes the ultimate Other, with her representations ranging from a monstrous and murderous machine, to a deceitful mechanical guide, to a Nazi matron, as I will show.<sup>10</sup> As I suggest later in my analysis of Dmitriy Golubkov's poem (1959), the only possibility of assimilating the figure of Ophelia into Soviet discourse is by explicitly re-imagining Shakespeare's plot in order to remove all morally ambiguous moments, especially those related to the play's protagonist. In other works, Ophelia vividly embodies a range of outdated, foreign, or ideologically flawed values of which Shakespeare might have been reasonably accused, if the evidence of his text were allowed to stand in the ideological court. The ideologically ambiguous Ophelia in non-dramatic texts allowed this cultural anxiety to be safely enacted and dismissed; shape-shifting, illusion-mongering, and back-stabbing, an enemy of progress and realism, she took on every quality of which Shakespeare was covertly suspected but of which, as a cult figure, he could never be directly accused.

### Making Shakespeare in the Soviet Union: The Case of *Hamlet*

"Shakespeare stood before us as a poet-philosopher, inspired by the cutting-edge ideas of his time, as a great writer of the people. Soviet theatre restores to Shakespeare's humanism the primordial meaning that it had during the great revolutionary epoch of the emancipation of the individual" (Shekspir predstavil pred nami kak poet-filosof, proniknutyy peredovymi ideyami svoego vremeni, kak velikiy narodnyy pisatel'. Sovetskiy teatr vozvrashchaet

gumanizmu Shekspira tot pervozdannyy smysl, kotoryy on imel v velikuyu revolyutsionnuyu epokhu raskreposhcheniya chelovecheskoy lichnosti) (Nel's 1960, 8). So writes Soviet scholar Sof'ya Nel's in the introductory chapter of her book *Shakespeare on the Soviet Stage* (a portion of this book was later published in English as "Shakespeare and the Soviet Theater: The Optimism of Tragedy," 1964). The claims that Shakespeare wrote for the people, that he sought to communicate humanistic and revolutionary ideals, and that Shakespearean text needs the communist party to regain its original import are commonplace in Soviet scholarship. Indeed, in his essay "Shakespeare: Social and ideological description" (originally published in 1933), Anatoly Lunacharsky argues that "[w]ithout us, without our era [. . .] such people as Shakespeare (and there are many of them in cultural history) would, in a manner of speaking, be meaningless" ([bez nas, bez nashey epokhi [. . .] takie lyudi, kak Shekspir (ikh nemalo v istorii kul'tury), byli by kak by bessmyslenny) (Lunacharsky 1965, 310). In Soviet readings, Shakespeare became a proto-communist playwright, whose ideas have been over time deliberately obscured and sometimes openly distorted by bourgeois academics, writers, and directors.<sup>11</sup> The ability to produce "correct" interpretations of Shakespeare thus functioned as a distinction between "us" (the perceptive socialist readers) and "them" (the blind bourgeoisie). At the same time, the construction of a Soviet Shakespeare forbade direct and attentive engagement with Shakespeare's text, lest the reader find troubling inconsistencies. In essence, Soviet culture engaged in a more extreme version of what Marjorie Garber calls "the fetishization of Shakespeare." Garber speaks of the desire, in the Western academia, to participate in "the fantasy of originary cultural wholeness, the last vestige of universalism" and "[t]o believe in something, in someone, all-knowing and immutable" (Garber 1999, 67). The stakes of literary analysis for Soviet directors, writers, and scholars, however, were frighteningly high. Soviet ideology workers heralded an unproblematically immutable Shakespeare as concrete proof of historical wholeness and continuity that explained and justified the existence of the communist state. To suggest that this wholeness might be merely a self-serving nationalistic illusion meant to cast doubt upon the Soviet Union as the end product of a smooth and expected historical development. Such a suggestion was punishable by accusations of anti-Soviet leanings, which potentially meant the loss of one's livelihood, freedom, or even life.

And so, the Soviet Union set out to claim Shakespeare for its own. As Solomon Volkov argues throughout his fascinating, if not always well supported, overview of the Soviet art world, Stalin, after becoming the supreme state leader by the late 1920s, was himself deeply invested in obtaining from Europe the recognition of the Soviet Union as capable of appreciating "real" music, art, and literature (2004).<sup>12</sup> Volkov's book shows Stalin intervening directly in the ideological directives

concerning art and literature; it is not impossible that he might have had a hand in quelling the ecstatic destruction of pre-revolutionary heritage and preventing Shakespeare from being thrown in the garbage heap of history. While Shakespeare was a key figure even during the ideological turmoil of the 1920s, beginning in the early 1930s the party line clearly stated that the highly evolved proletarian audience cared deeply for Shakespeare and understood him much better than the corrupt and fragmented bourgeois world.

However useful this construct has proven throughout Soviet history, Shakespeare was not an easy territory to claim. To see his characters as "people with a new worldview, whose personality and behavior are sharply opposed to their stagnant environment," and "whose social position was, to a certain extent, analogous to the position of progressive people in any revolutionary epoch," required a policy of determined re-interpretation and misreading (lyudey s novymi vzglyadami na zhizn', svoim kharakterom i maneroy povedeniya rezko protivostoyashchimi kosnoy srede. Ikh polozhenie v obshchestve bylo v kakoy-to mere analogichno polozheniyu peredovykh lyudey v lyubuyu revolyutsionnuyu epokhu) (Nel's 1960, 9). In fact, the history of Shakespeare in the first decades of the Soviet Union reflects the difficulty of accepting this writer wholesale (and the Soviet canon allowed no other acceptance) and shows a vacillation as to whether this fraught figure was, after all, necessary. While Shakespeare was eventually adopted as an integral part of the Soviet world and regarded as a key influence that "aided in forming and validating key artistic principles in Soviet literature, as well as in surmounting various fallacies and fashionable trends" (sposobstvovalo formirovaniyu i utverzhdeniyu korennykh khudozhestvennykh printsipov sovetskoy literatury, preodoleniyu razlichnogo roda zabluzhdenyy i modnykh veyanny), this refashioning was not without its problems, as evidenced, in particular, by the Soviet history of *Hamlet* (Vykhodstev 1964, 41).

*Hamlet* was a troublesome play for Soviet ideology, precisely because of its equivocal deliberations between passivity and action. The Soviet Union inherited the nineteenth-century view of Hamlet as a key figure, however passive and vacillating, in the discussion of the current social and individual concerns.<sup>13</sup> However, as the Soviet cult of Shakespeare gained power, earlier suspicions of Hamlet's weakness and passivity gradually morphed into impassioned assertions of his strength, heroism, and flawless moral character.<sup>14</sup> Summing up decades of discussion, L. Grossman wrote in 1955: "The great dramaturge of the English Renaissance did not engage in justifying others' weakness of will — his favorite character/hero was created for action and heroic deeds. As a true humanist, he [Hamlet] is anti-feudalist, humane, democratic. He is inspired by the great moral idea" (Velikiy dramaturg angliyskogo Renessansa ne zanimalsya apologiyey

bezvoliya — ego lyubimyy geroy byl sozdan dya deystviya i podviga. Kak podlinnyy gumanist, on antifeodalen, chelovechen, demokratichen. On voodushevlen velykoy moral'noy ideey) (Grossman 1955, 111). Similarly, in her glorification of Shakespeare, Nel's condemned those who, in the centuries past, "saw in Hamlet's doubts his weakness" (v somneniyakh Gamleta videli ego slabost') and argued that the prince's penchant for doubting directly corresponded to his capability for action (Nel's 1960, 245). If anything, the intense cultural fixation on the play only increased after Stalin's death in 1953. The following year, as Eleanor Rowe puts it, "ushered in the '*Hamlet fever*,'" which continued for decades (Rowe 1976, 135).

At the same time, as we see in Nel's, the ongoing reassertion and reiteration of Hamlet's role as an active and positive hero was accompanied by the uneasy recognition that this interpretation was not unequivocal, and neither did it emerge organically from the text of the play. This probably accounts, at least partially, for the Soviet reluctance to stage *Hamlet* until after Stalin's death. Even Morozov, in his English pamphlet, feels the need to account for the obvious paucity of *Hamlet* productions and writes evasively, "The Soviet theatre would not have found it beyond its powers to have many more productions of *Hamlet* every year. But what would be the point of it? It seems to me that in their cautious approach to *Hamlet* our theatres have displayed a feeling of respect for the finest thing that has ever been created by the mind of man" (1947b, 49). In this attempt to justify a lack of continuing engagement with the play, Morozov suggests that close, incautious examination is disrespectful and might interfere with the harmony and balance of this work. Similarly, disapproval of close reading practices, witheringly described by one prominent Soviet critic in 1949 as "niggling exercises of Anglo-American neo-philologists, who can see nothing beyond the filing cabinet where they've collected Shakespearean conjunctions and articles" (poka chto sil'no napominayut krokhoborcheskie shtudii anglo-amerikanskikh neofilologov, ne vidyashchikh nichego za sobrannoy kartotekoy soyuzov i predlozhenyy u Shekspira) clearly had concrete ideological underpinnings and was intended to protect the fragile image of the playwright (Samarin 1949, 114). Close reading was specifically threatening to the democratic and morally flawless Hamlet, as constructed and propagated by Soviet thinkers. In other words, Hamlet worship and Hamlet fever required constant struggle against the text and determined dismissal of challenges to laudatory readings.

This struggle against the play is visible in many Soviet non-dramatic works that draw on *Hamlet* to explore issues of historical continuity or individual heroism. One such work is David Samoylov's poem "Exoneration of Hamlet" (Opravdanie Gamleta 1963), which offers a detailed illustration of the unbidden questions about the Danish prince's moral stance, the contemporary desire to acquit him from all blame, and Ophelia's role in this acquittal. Samoylov unflinchingly

examines Hamlet in what is, perhaps, one of his most problematic moments (with his dagger drawn and about to be plunged into the curtain that hides the hapless Polonius) and firmly rejects the very idea that the prince might not know full well who is behind the curtain. Samoylov argues that Hamlet's acknowledged propensity for pondering eliminates the possibility of error and, furthermore, ensures a comprehensive view of the present and future, all in the same moment "of silence, passion, and experience" (molchaniya, strasti i opyta) (Samoylov 2006, 140-41). Unlike the "villains" (zlodei) who murder unthinkingly, Hamlet pauses to consider and to divine, and kills Polonius out of historical necessity, having weighed all the pros and cons:

Ah, he knows that behind the curtain  
 You, Polonius, stand, crafty and flat.  
 Hamlet pauses like a frozen panther,  
 For he knows the laws of hearts,  
 For he knows causes and consequences,  
 Sees the expanse beyond the blow of the dagger,  
 Ophelia's death, her weak revenge, —  
 All that will happen after.  
 For centuries.

(Akh, on znaet, chto tam za port'eroy,  
 Ty, Poloniy, ploskiy hitrets.  
 Gamlet medlit zastyvshy panteroy,  
 Ibo znaet zakony serdets,  
 Ibo znaet prichiny i sledstviya,  
 Vidit dal' za udarom klinka,  
 Smert' Ofelii, slabuyu mest' ee, —  
 Vse, chto budet potom.  
 Na veka.)

The poem ends with the poet's passionate encouragement to Hamlet not to pity the "decayed bloodlines" (Ne zhaley zagnivshikh krovey!) and to "strike, don't be timid!" (Bey, ne robey!). A blind murder of an unarmed man through a curtain is thus transformed into a deliberate act of justice. In fact, as the poem suggests, Hamlet needs to apologize not for committing the act but for taking so long to do it. All doubts about the Danish prince as a role model posed by the play are

intended to be swept away — or, perhaps, swept under the rug — by the reiteration of Hamlet's indissoluble connection to the future.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, as these lines from Samoylov's poem show, the exoneration of Hamlet and, through him, of Shakespeare, has not been fully completed; the actions of the Danish prince still need to be defended. Perhaps the most difficult question is, "What about Ophelia?" How is a wholly positive reading of Hamlet possible when the audience sees his consistent disregard and verbal abuse of this young, vulnerable girl, followed by the murder of her father? Samoylov identifies an obvious solution for this problem: if Ophelia is envisioned as an antagonist — an opposing force, an avenger, who is weak because of her gender and status as the direct offspring of the "decayed bloodlines" — then the contradiction between Hamlet's supposedly irreproachable morality and his treatment of Ophelia disappears. She can thus become the site onto which all the tensions produced by the Shakespeare cult are deflected and absorb every suspicion directed at the great Shakespeare and at Hamlet, his mouthpiece. With Ophelia imagined as an adversarial force moored in the past and threatening the Soviet reader with historical and literary degradation, the Shakespeare-Hamlet dyad can retain its revolutionary associations in the cultural consciousness.

### Russian Ophelia at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

In the beginning of the twentieth century, before the October revolution, Russian poetry already reflected the idea that Ophelia might be essentially alien to the forces of progressive modernity. We see this, for example, in Valery Bryusov's poem "Ophelia" (1911), whose heroine commits suicide by throwing herself from a window onto a busy urban street. The poet emphasizes the indifference of the "businesslike, well-dressed, noisy" (*delovaya, naryadnaya, shumnaya*) human turmoil to the heroine as she stands in the window and jumps (Bryusov 1961, 335-36). Despite the poem's title, this is not a story of a Shakespearean character transplanted into a Russian urban center; rather, the poem offers a cautionary allusion. The first two lines specifically highlight the distinction between its heroine and her literary prototype: "You did not make Ophelia's garlands, / You did not hold fresh flowers in your hands" (*Ty ne splekala venkov Ofelii, / V rukakh ne derzhala svezhikh tsvetov*) (Bryusov 1961, 335-36). The epigraph — the four opening lines of Afanasiy Fet's "Ophelia was singing and perishing" (*Ofeliya gibla i pela*, 1846) from the cycle "K Ofelii" (To Ophelia) — identifies the prototype as not so much the original Shakespearean character as a nineteenth-century Romantic construct (Fet 1959, 132-33).

More than anything, the epigraph points to the pitfalls of unwise emulation: in re-enacting the nineteenth-century idea of Ophelia, the heroine of the poem forcefully separates herself from the modern city, retreating into the romanticized, ineffectual past. As a counterpoint to this idealized

vision of Ophelia, Bryusov depicts the city's reaction to the heroine's suicide: although a curious crowd gathers briefly, her death fails to interact with the unceasing, cheerful movement of progress, for around the dead body "life whirred on, in the same splendid attire, / At a distance, autos and trams flew by" (zhizn' shumela, vse ta zhe, naryadnaya, / Avto i tramvai leteli vdali). The heroine's association with Ophelia, who is here the embodiment of what Bryusov sees as antiquated ideas and a passive worldview, prevents her from participating in this lively motion and dooms her to an inglorious death. Written six years before the October Revolution, and commenting on technological progress and social change, Bryusov's "Ophelia" is responding to the perceived split between the vivid, energetic world of the new century and the questionable relevance of Shakespeare and his Hamlet, repeatedly accused of passivity and, in the case of Lev Tolstoy, of outright immorality. In Bryusov's poem, these accusations are neatly redirected onto Ophelia, who is imagined as a figure oddly independent of her dramatic origins: Bryusov's allusion is not directly to Shakespeare but to a generalized idea of the hopelessly stationary, problematic past that is somehow imagined not to include the playwright.<sup>16</sup>

The tendency to link Ophelia to the past (but not, in fact, to the past of Shakespeare) is simultaneously a product of Bryusov's interest in modernity and part of a larger cultural view. It surfaces, for example, in the roughly contemporary poem "Ophelia from the clouds" (Ofeliya iz oblakov, 1914) by Konstantin Bolshakov. The poem is on the whole pleasantly and romantically nostalgic and does not seek to condemn the Shakespearean heroine. At the same time, for the speaker of the poem the thoughts of Ophelia evoke, among other things, "the smell of letters in the evangelic legend" (Kak zapakh buk v evangel'skoy legende) — an ancient fable with an odor of dust, a memory of earlier, gentler days (Bolshakov 1916, 13). And so, read together, these two pre-revolutionary poems suggest that the process of displacing the concerns about Shakespeare's contemporaneity and usefulness has already begun. However, before the violent birth of the new state and the forceful construction of post-revolutionary culture, these concerns are largely abstract, and the figure of Ophelia remains incongruous but unthreatening. In Bryusov's poem the unlucky girl, leaping out of the modern world, is harmful only to herself, while in Bolshakov's poem Ophelia is but a pleasant memory coming back to the narrator.

### Numbers into Useless Flowers: Writing Ophelia after the October Revolution

The situation is decidedly different in texts written after the revolution, as the stakes in Shakespeare-related discussion rise higher and higher while the new cultural politics are under construction. As in the case of Bryusov and Bolshakov, post-revolutionary writers do not seek to allude to the Shakespearean heroine with any degree of faithfulness; their invocations do not

reproduce or reevaluate dramatic plots or characters in any detail, and sometimes not at all. At the same time, the name of Ophelia has not undergone an attrition of meaning; it has not become fully separated from *Hamlet* as a play and its position in the Soviet ideological construct. It has, however, gained new significance in the context of violent post-revolutionary discussions of gender and sexuality.

Despite the initial promise of equality, the new state valorized traditional gender roles, and the patriarchal model was strongly re-asserted by the second half of the 1920s. Paradoxically, the woman question was simultaneously pronounced to have been resolved and declared a distraction from the central concerns of building a communist society (Golub 1994, 84). Forever frozen in her girlhood, simultaneously seductive and inaccessible, disrupting the neat outlines of the heroic narrative with her wild grief and longing, Ophelia embodied the destabilizing potential of womanhood that, purportedly, was no longer an issue in the Soviet Union. Soviet writers invoked this heroine to create for the reader a clearly defined sense of sexual temptation and ideological corruption, a draw of the utterly foreign world, outdated and illusionary but no less seductive for all that.

Yury Olesha's novel *Envy* (*Zavist'*, 1927), published during the early days of Soviet identity construction, focuses on the destructive potential inherent in Ophelia and explores her as an artificial construct, a romantic illusion of the past that Soviet citizens must resist. The main theme of the novel, as the title suggests, is the poisonous envy felt by the remnants of the bourgeois world for the new people building a communist society. In an attempt to subvert the technical and social advances of the communist society, one of the outdated bourgeois people, Ivan Babichev, a dreamer and an inventor, claims to have built a complex machine and "debauched" (*razvratil*) it, so that it might serve as a slap in the face to the people of this new age (Olesha 1968, 78). He explains his insidious plan: "And suddenly the best of machines is revealed to be a liar, a vulgar, sentimental scoundrel! [. . .] She, who is capable of everything, — she is now singing our sentimental romances, foolish romances of the old age, and gathers flowers of the old age. She falls in love, is jealous, weeps, dreams" (*I vdrug luchshaya iz mashin okazyvaetsya lgun'ey, poshlyachkoy, sentimental'noy negodyaykoy!* [. . .] *Ona, umeyushcha delat' vse, — ona poet teper' nashi sentimental'nye romansy, glupye romansy starogo veka, i starogo veka sobiraet tsvety. Ona vlyublyaetsya, revnuet, plachet, vidit sny*) (79). The name of this flawed machine, as one might guess, is Ophelia. The inventor imagines that Ophelia might be used to destroy what the new age is building, to drag it back to the futile, romantic past; he threatens one of the prime builders: "She will turn each of your numbers into a useless flower" (*Ona prevratit kazhduyu tsifru tvoyu v bespoleznyy tsvetok*) (85). As Julia Vaingurt puts it, it is difficult to imagine "a more effective subversion of the ideals of the

mechanistic physical and utilitarian social bodies than the one enacted by the imaginary, irrational Ophelia" (2013, 45).

Coupled with its invocation of Ophelia, the novel's apprehension of progress perverted or entirely halted reflects early Soviet doubts about Shakespeare's ability to offer anything to the new socialist world. In the second half of the 1920s, this doubt was already being elided in the discussion of Shakespeare as an author, but it is starkly present in Olesha's mechanical Ophelia, described in great detail by its inventor Ivan Babichev. Although this machine, as far as the reader can tell, does not, in fact, exist in the material world of the novel, it gains terrifying and murderous substance in the narrator's dream and turns against its own inventor. Under the guise of silly songs and flowers lies the hard, clinking interior, deadly to those who believe that they can harness and apply its power. In the dream sequence, the machine is revealed to be a "[t]errifying iron thing" (*Strashnaya zheleznaya veshch'*) that impales the hapless inventor with "a glistening needle" (*sverkayushchaya igla*) sliding out of its head (Olesha 1968, 102). Perhaps worse, once the dream dissipates, the reader realizes that the Ophelia machine is only a nightmare, an illusion that can warp reality: having devoted himself to her, Ivan Babichev achieves nothing apart from his own degeneration. Upon awakening, the narrator and the inventor find themselves torn away from the communist world, in which great deeds of body and mind are possible, and plunged back into petty bourgeois existence. Ophelia's promises of romantic transcendence prove to be misleading, and having reached for it, the two characters gain only the peace of indifference. Abandoning their anti-Soviet quest, they settle down to share, seemingly for all eternity, the enormous bed of a middle-aged, middle-class widow, herself a decaying remnant of the old world.

In his study of the 1920s, Golub calls Olesha's Ophelia a "gynoid," suggesting a blending of technology and femininity, but her link to Valya emphasizes the associations with girlhood inherent in the allusion to Shakespeare's heroine. Valya, to whom the protagonist is painfully attracted, is Babichev's young estranged daughter and thus the machine's symbolic sister, her twin self. Beautiful and sporty, Valya is infinitely capable of provoking love, but, as a model of pure Soviet girlhood, she urges men not to passion but to progress and social restructuring. Despite Valya's seeming perfection, she reflects a shadow of Ophelia's threat. Janet Tucker describes her as "a link with the revolutionary potential of the imagination rather than the established Soviet state" and argues that both Valya and Ophelia are revolutionary virgins who turn on their creators (Tucker 1996, 54-55). The narrator predicts that eventually, upon ripening into a woman, Valya will begin adorning herself in order to attract male attention; however, by the end of the novel he realizes that she is "a creature of a different world, foreign and miraculous" (*sushchestvo drugogo mira, zhuzhdoe i neobyknovennoe*) whose purity is "oppressively inaccessible" (*podavlyayusche*

nedostupna ee chistota) (Olesha 1968, 98). At the same time, even as the girl's potential for disorderly seduction is safely contained within the novel by her alliance with those who are building the new world, at times her position as a creature alien to the narrator borders on the inhuman. Under the narrator's ardent gaze, "her clavicles flash [. . .] like daggers" (klyuchitsy vspykhnuili, kak kinzhaly) visually echoing the needle produced by the mechanical Ophelia — and, quite possibly, the "daggers" in Hamlet's speech (98).

As a teenage girl in the Soviet Union of early 1920s, Valya represents the transition between two cultures but also the problem of femininity in a society that glorifies masculine strength. Despite the final reaffirmation of her purity, throughout the novel Valya is a seductive mirage to the narrator, paralleling the deceptive draw of the mechanical Ophelia and hinting at a kind of erotic agency. Also linking the two figures, Anthony Vanchu argues that Babichev has unwittingly created a desiring-machine, whose revolt illustrates the impossibility of fully controlling "the vitality and individuality of the female Other" (Vanchu 1991, 288). This connection between the killing machine and the girl on the cusp of womanhood emphasizes the significance and subversive potential of Ophelia's girlhood in early Soviet literature, suggesting a nightmarish knot of physical, romantic, and cultural desire embodied by her figure.

Although the sense of danger emanating from her character is ameliorated with time as active debate about Shakespeare largely ceases and his merits can be simply reasserted with each new examination, the figure of Ophelia, as it appears in Soviet poetry and fiction, continues to generate a strong sense of disquiet by subverting the smooth forward flow of history. The mechanical Ophelia capable of transporting the narrator into the pre-socialist past re-appears decades later in Gennadiy Gor's science fiction novel *The Statue* (Izvyaniye, 1972). This Ophelia is a teaching machine — a "book" that can leaf through eras and settings and change her shape, but she chooses to appear to everyone, including the narrator, as an attractive human girl. Although at least theoretically intended to stimulate and inspire her reader, this Ophelia is also consistently perceived by the narrator as an adversarial force who drags him backwards through time and forces him into the New Economic Policy time in Soviet Russia — the period, lasting through 1920s, when independent enterprise was more or less permitted. The narrator notes, humorously but worriedly, "Well, this is no good at all, Ophelia has again started playing with time, not reckoning with facts, experience, or people's nerves" (nu, delo dryan', Ofeliya opyat' prinyalas' za svoyu igru so vremenem, ne schitayas' ni s faktami, ni s opytom, ni s nervami lyudey) (Gor 1972, 43). Thrown back into the post-revolutionary disarray, the narrator is as lost in that era as though he were coming "from the other world" (s togo sveta) (Gor 1972, 33).<sup>17</sup>

On the contrary, Ophelia embraces all aspects of private, non-ideological existence: she worries about *propiska* (official permission to reside in a particular city, which still exists in some former Soviet countries), repeatedly marries, and quickly gains weight, settling into the role of a Soviet *hausfrau*. It is true that in the course of the novel she serves as a muse for a slew of male artists, including the narrator, but her ability to inspire seems little more than a romantic veneer, under which lies her dedication (most uninspiring in the framework of Soviet ideology) to bourgeois existence, here represented by the everyday comforts, the many-roomed flat, and jewelry provided by her first marriage. The novel traces her seemingly inevitable and irreversible transformation from a futuristic muse to a slovenly trophy wife, more concerned with her position and possessions than with the possibility of contributing to the creation of socialist culture. The disruptive potential of womanhood, so clearly visible in Olesha's machine, is here realized: the mechanical girl Ophelia has the power to catapult the narrator into the past, where he is forced to watch her unions with other men. Like Olesha's gynoid, she is able to reverse the flow of social progress, redirecting the readers' attention to the private and quotidian concerns.

Not surprisingly, this mechanical Ophelia's activity as a muse is noticeably and purposefully flawed. She literally steps out of the narrator's painting as it is displayed in a gallery, leaving the painting empty and its author shamed. Moreover, at the end of the novel, she steals from the narrator whatever he was able to create under her guidance. While returning the narrator to his own time, Ophelia manages "secretly to wring life out of [their] manuscript, as one might wring moisture from a dress after a heavy rain, and again to gather this life [. . .] and to hide all this poetry in her suitcase" (*nezametno vyzhat' iz nashey rukopisi zhizn', kak vyzhimayut vlagu iz plat'ya, popavshego pod prolivnoy dozhd', i snova sobrat' etu zhizn' [. . .] i vsyu etu poeziyu spryatat' k sebe v chemodan*) (Gor 1972, 238). The narrator might forgive her this theft, explaining that normal categories cannot apply here, but the reader can gather that Ophelia has failed in her function as a muse, and, what is more, failed deliberately: the narrator returns from his whirl-wind trip empty-handed, drained and robbed by the "book." Even in literature of the 1970s, Ophelia remains both retrograde and voracious: having accepted her as an inspiration and a suitable teacher, the narrator struggles painfully throughout the novel, analyzing the various ways in which his inspiration fails him, and emerges completely unproductive.

Ophelia is portrayed as a beguiling yet untrustworthy guide, quick to turn against those who believe in her ability to transcend time and space. As such, she is the necessary Other to the great Soviet project of creating the universal Shakespeare — the great genius capable of providing a historical anchor to the newly created culture and social realist art, and of serving as irrefutable proof for the October revolution as the end point of history. The suspicions about Shakespeare's

applicability, about the ways in which he is affected by his non-Soviet origins and class, and the apprehension that adopting him as a cultural icon might lead the nation astray, are transferred onto the figure of Ophelia. She gains, in these renditions, immense power over those who believe in her but, at the same time, remains unstable, illusory, and firmly moored to the limited pre-socialist perspective. Ophelia thus becomes the figure who, in one way or another, must be banished from the normative cultural consciousness intent on issuing a Soviet passport to Shakespeare, and on adopting Hamlet as a modern hero.

### Nationalistic Considerations: Ophelia and the Great Patriotic War

While the previous section examined Ophelia as a siren-like figure, calling to characters and readers with her sweet song of things past, after the so-called Great Patriotic War (the period of the Second World War, 1941-1945, that directly involved the Soviet Union) she also became linked to the problem of contemporary foreign ideologies. After all, Shakespeare continued to be read and staged in the West, and Germany in particular had long proclaimed a particular affinity for this author. This ongoing tension between competing ideologies and analyses is reflected in the allusion in Irina Guro's *The Hour-Glass* (*Pesochnye chasy*, 1976), a novel whose protagonist is a German-born Soviet spy in Nazi Germany during the World War II. After his radio is accidentally destroyed, the protagonist must continue living under cover in a country that is ideologically alien to him, continuously struggling to balance two contradictory identities — the Soviet citizen whose allegiances are only to the communist party and the German youth who might not fully underwrite the Nazi regime but readily responds to the power and entertainment it offers.

In particular, throughout the novel the protagonist is repeatedly offered a sexual encounter with Leni, a country girl brought into the city by her uncle (an influential Nazi official) and conscripted into the *Hitler-Jugend*. The offer of dalliance, significantly, is renewed even after Leni has married another high-placed official and become, in the protagonist's joking phrase, "a real Hitler-lady" (*nastoiashchey gitlerdamoy*), eagerly seizing, not unlike Gor's heroine, every advantage of her newly prominent position (Guro 1976, 324). To the sexual, ideological, and social temptations she offers, the protagonist responds: "Ophelia, get thee to the nunnery! [. . .] I said, you should return to your village. To your mom. And forget about Parisian chow. Live on milk. And, heil Hitler, on grass. That's all!" (*Ofeliya, idi v monastyr' . . . Ya skazal, chto tebe nado vernut'sya v svoyu derevnyu. K mame. I zabyt' pro parizhskuyu zhratvu. Pitat'sya molochkom. I, khayl' Gitler, travkoy. Vse!*) (Guro 1976, 329-30). Hamlet's original command has been traditionally interpreted as either a harsh reproach undeserved by the heroine or a very real, albeit misguided effort to preserve her from the influence of the court and from Hamlet himself. In this Soviet novel, the

echo of this command in the German spy's words becomes a justified accusation of ideological corruption and a decisive rejection of the world she represents.

Guro's allusion to Ophelia points to an urgent need for reform; incapable of performing a meaningful acceptance of proper communist values, this girl can only be transformed into a sort of primordial, animalistic state, feeding on nothing but milk and grass, all of her dangerous desire safely discharged. The fact that Leni does not follow this advice but will re-appear as a sophisticated, highly placed Nazi wife who attends evenings at the Swedish embassy, wears Parisian outfits, and studies English emphasizes the unrepentant and unreformed state of the Soviet Ophelia. In *The Hour-Glass*, an offhand reference serves to establish Leni as the embodiment of foreign femininity and as a seductive traitor who seeks to drag the narrator into her mire. This is, in other words, a fictional rethinking of Morozov's suggestion that beautiful Ophelia can breed evil in the same way that a dead dog's carcass can breed maggots. The narrator's quotation identifies her as infected and eager to spread infection further. Having banished her from his life, the protagonist of Guro's novel will strive to destroy the old world for which this girl longs — a world characterized by its desire for rich foods, complex but useless toys, and sexual decadence, compounded with an impotent yearning for fulfillment.

The only literary text that, after the 1920s, hints at the possibility of useful engagement with the character of Ophelia argues that the way to achieve such an engagement is through disposing of Shakespeare, and of any sense of history, altogether. In his poem "Ophelia" (1959), Dmitriy Golubkov responds to the threat of foreign femininity by describing a performance of *Hamlet* that proceeds with no regard for its play text. Strictly speaking, Golubkov's poem does not quite qualify as a literary text: it is a rhymed description of a post-war school production of the play and is primarily concerned with the girl actress playing Ophelia. Predictably, Golubkov points to the alien quality of the play, suggesting the girl actress is "lost in the text as if in a deep forest" (*Zabludivshis' v tekste, slovno v chashche*) — a quality that is particularly palpable through "[t]his odd, alien role" (*Etu strannuyu, chuzhuyu rol'*), which the young actress takes on half-unwillingly (Golubkov 1959, n.p.). Ironically, he then goes on to suggest that the way to discern the "salt" (*sol'*) of the role is to interpret it in separation both from historical and textual context, wholly through the recent experience of war, and more specifically through literary conventions of Soviet war literature. The reader is given an improbable framing device — a visual memory of a "brave pilot" (*khraibryy letchik*) the girl's "friend and boy next door" (*Drug ee, sosedskiy parenok*), slowly dying in a hospital — through which the actress's performance must be filtered.<sup>18</sup> Golubkov uses the pilot's death to explain the experience of Ophelia, writing, "Her brother is far away. / Her father has been

stabbed to death. / The prince — her fiancé — is sputtering out like a candle" (Brat ee dalek. / Otets zakolot. / Ugasat prints — ee zhenikh). Of course, anyone familiar with the play will see the glaring omissions in his reading: the prince (who is not Ophelia's fiancé) is wholly responsible for her father's death, and if Hamlet is dying, then Laertes is not far away but very close by, as the direct cause for the prince's demise. In his poem, Golubkov is seeking to construct a comfortable fiction that presents Ophelia's dilemma and madness in a more acceptable form. She is deemed sympathetic only in separation from the main conflicts of Shakespeare's play — when supplied with a proper fiancé and freed from the burden of guilt, from madness, and from death. In essence, this imaginary staging argues that Ophelia can be understood and performed only after she ceases to be Shakespeare's Ophelia and is transformed into a Soviet girl with appropriate experiences and conflicts; indeed, this staging effectively banishes the text of Shakespeare's play altogether from the performance.

The poem also indicates that the heroine's position among her peers hinges on her ability to produce an ideologically correct interpretation of Shakespeare. Her initial difficulty angers the narrator, as well as her schoolmates: "Look at you, a goody-goody who's climbed on the stage, trying to do something that's none of your business. It is clear that you don't understand Shakespeare; you've only brought shame on the whole class!" (Ish, na stsenu vylezla, tikhonya, / Za chuzhoe delo prinyalas'! / Yasno, chto Shekspir toboy ne ponyat — / Tol'ko opozorila ves' klass!). The heroine's act of translating the text into performance therefore becomes a rite of passage that cannot be properly completed until she successfully circumvents all contradictions and puzzles offered by the play, emerging, so to speak, into ideological clarity from "the forest" of the text. In finally producing an acceptable reading of the play, the heroine leaves the unstable space of girlhood and is described as "the one who was a girl just yesterday" (devochka vcherashnyaya). She is now able to merge seamlessly with the group: "the hearts of the club members [are] with her" (i serdtsa kruzhkovtsev byli s neyu) as she begins interpreting Shakespeare properly for the audience. While we are told that the heroine literally becomes Ophelia, the preceding description demonstrates that she is forced to draw on a fictitious past to produce a highly selective version of a dramatic character. Her becoming is a hardening of various interpretative possibilities into a standardized tale of nationalistically useful womanhood, with the figure of Ophelia radically circumscribed and contained by her transformation into a faceless and nameless Soviet woman.

### Reading Ophelia in Film: Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet*

It is impossible to separate Soviet approaches to *Hamlet* from decades of ideologically motivated reading and discussion of Shakespeare. This holds true for Soviet film adaptations, and

particularly for Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet* (1964), which has enjoyed a great deal of Western attention. It has become, for Shakespearean scholars who do not read Russian but wish to write on the Russian or Soviet Shakespeare, a point of entry into the discussion. As a result, while there are several fruitful explorations of what this film offers to the reader visually,<sup>19</sup> there is little speculation as to what generated these visual strategies, apart from the director's desire to create an allegorical critique of the Soviet state and its repressions.<sup>20</sup> Studies of Kozintsev's film have not traditionally focused on the portrayal of Ophelia or on the ways in which this portrayal might be responding to existing Soviet habits of interpretation. As an exception to this tradition of reading, Courtney Lehmann's recent book chapter examines Kozintsev's depiction of Ophelia, specifically linking her analysis of the director's representational strategies to his anti-Stalinist agenda. She concludes that in Kozintsev's film this character "symbolizes the fatal diminution of the subject under the shadow of the Stalinist patriarch" (Lehmann 2013, 108). Assuming that the image of Ophelia created in Kozintsev's film is unique, Lehmann suggests that "both director and composer arrived independently at their prevailing perception of Ophelia as a doll" as the most effective vehicle for the film's political critique (Lehmann 2013, 107).

Kozintsev undoubtedly intended his *Hamlet* as a sharp repudiation of repressive social and political structures (about to return at the end of the Thaw). However, his film also absorbs the Soviet suspicion of Ophelia, reflecting the persistence of ideologically shaped reading practices from an earlier era. Symbolic representations of Ophelia as an inscrutable automaton or a wooden doll, already a familiar part of the Soviet popular culture, link the film directly to ongoing discussions of Shakespeare and his applicability in the changing political landscape. In order to convince his audience to accept Shakespeare's play as communicating some greater truth about human condition, Kozintsev reproduces the complex cluster of Soviet ideas about Ophelia's absolute purity, machine-like attributes, and need for containment. Next to the intensely human — and intensely Soviet — Hamlet,<sup>21</sup> she becomes a visual commentary on the aspect of Kozintsev's film-making practices that might be troubling to Soviet audiences, including vigorous manipulation of the text and determined editing, to produce a useful version of Shakespeare.

Kozintsev's Ophelia was played by nineteen-year-old Anastasia Vertinskaya, pale as an angel and dressed in white throughout the first half of the film; we first see her as a dancing pupil, performing a slow, highly stylized routine to the music played by her lady-in-waiting. In his commentary, published as a monograph, Kozintsev explains that this is a metaphor for the court conventions forced upon her: "a sweet girl, half-child is turned into a doll, wind-up toy with artificial movements, studied smile, and so on" (miluyu devushku-polurebenka prevrashchayut v

kuklu, zavodnuyu igrushku s iskusstvennymi dvizheniyami, zauchennoy ulybkoy i t.p.) (Kozintsev 1983, 434). In a companion metaphor, Ophelia, running to tell Polonius of her troubling encounter with Hamlet, is visually paired up in the shot with an exotic, blindingly white bird locked in a black cage. These two images come together when, after Polonius's death, ladies-in-waiting lock Ophelia into an iron corset and a cage-like underskirt, which visibly serve to contain her disorderly grief. Later, she will jerk into a disturbingly mechanical imitation of her dancing routine while still wearing her mourning dress. These two images — a caged bird but also a mechanical doll performing to music — merge to produce the isolated figure of Ophelia, as alien to the Soviet audience as Hamlet, imbued "with the conscientious, guilt-ridden sensitivity of the Russian intelligentsia," was intended to be near and dear to it (Etkind 2013, 140). While we do see a seagull soaring into the sky at the end of the drowning scene, presumably symbolizing the maiden's released soul, in her final scene Ophelia again becomes doll-like, entering "as an alabaster cherub" in yet another box — her coffin, now forever petrified and on display (Lehmann 2013, 108).

In his commentary, Kozintsev argues for Ophelia's madness as happy freedom from the strict conduct norms of the court, but her initial slide into insanity is signaled by a sudden launch into the same mechanical dance routine as in the beginning of the film, with the ladies-in-waiting holding on to her black veil as if manipulating puppet strings. Freeing herself from the binding dress, Ophelia is occasionally able to give the audience a coy, knowing smile, but for the most part she remains a pale, stylized figurine, not unlike a religious statuette. Indeed, in his commentary Kozintsev confirms this impression, suggesting that Ophelia's madness should be expressed "in an almost-religious key. Of course, not in the modern sense but in the popular, medieval way, as in wooden village madonnas" (Sumasshedshuyu Ofeliyu hochetsya vyrazit' v pochti religioznoy tonal'nosti. Razumeetsya, ne v sovremennom ponimanii, a narodnoy, srednevekovoy, kak u derevenskikh derevyannykh madonn) (Kozintsev 1983, 437). In her transformation from a mechanical doll into a wooden statue, Ophelia is never quite allotted the agency that might interfere with the audience's view of Hamlet. As Lehmann notes perceptively, "like a *matryoshka*, or Russian 'stacking doll', she is systematically reduced to ever smaller versions of herself": in the nunnery scene, "as the camera steadily pulls backwards, she shrinks before the viewer's eyes until her tiny figure fits perfectly within two rails" (Lehmann 2013, 108). The cutting of Ophelia's soliloquy in this scene only emphasizes her lack of subjectivity and ultimate function as a dramatic property, serving to highlight the usability of Shakespeare in criticizing oppressive state practices.<sup>22</sup> Rather than symbolize the diminution of the Soviet subject, Kozintsev's depiction of Ophelia reveals a tangle of conflicting ideologies that demand, even in an innovative and rebellious film, that sacrifices

be made in order to ensure the audience's identification with the main character. Following the tradition of Soviet interpretation, Kozintsev sacrifices Ophelia's humanity, transforming her into a wooden image of a girl with no potential for explosion.

As Shakespeare is adopted as a time-transcending symbol of resistance to oppression, Ophelia, imprisoned by the cold and stony world of Elsinore, is also rigidly bound by the director's vision of her. She is not entirely human but a creature of some alien, dream-like world. Kozintsev describes her room as "the odd little nest [. . .] painted with fairy-tale unicorns and birds" (strannoe gnezdyshko [. . .] raspisannaya skazochnymi edinorogami i ptitsami); his Ophelia inhabits a "little china world" (farforovomu mirku) — fragile and fanciful (Kozintsev 1983, 422). Throughout the film, she is visually separated from the other characters and, indeed, from the audience. During the conversation with Hamlet, overheard by her father and the king, and during the initial encounter with the royal couple after Polonius's funeral, Ophelia appears behind a dark bannister, as if behind bars, seemingly incapable of circumventing them. While, as Jack Jorgens argues, "a fresco showing Apollo embracing Daphne just as she metamorphosed into a tree" in Hamlet's room might be "a reminder" of female inconstancy, and "an apt parable of unattainable permanence, beauty, and truth" (Jorgens 1977, 228-29),<sup>23</sup> the depiction of Daphne also offers a metaphor for Ophelia's position in the film. Caught in a frightening embrace, the girl on Hamlet's wall is transformed into unyielding, unfeeling bark, with the leaves that will later be harvested to make a celebratory wreath for her pursuer. This image certainly argues that the union between the two is impossible, but it also illustrates vividly the metamorphosis Ophelia must undergo in order to enable Hamlet's position as a "universal" signifier. Even in the drowning scene, Ophelia reminds the viewer of a painting — poignant yet oddly removed. She is floating face-up underwater, completely still (there appears to be no noticeable current), with the surface over her face reflecting branches and clouds. In this next-to-last glimpse, Ophelia's containment is re-affirmed: although we can see her, she exists only as a distant outline, separated from the audience by a glassy, reflective, seemingly impenetrable layer.

Kozintsev's manipulation of Shakespeare is noted by the Soviet critic Natela Lordkipanidze, who, in a review published for English readers, reminds her readers that Kozintsev removed Hamlet from the prayer scene (instead, Claudius speaks to a mirror) and radically cut down the text of the play. Lordkipanidze explains that these adjustments were necessary so that readers would not mistakenly conclude that the prince "*fails* to take [the King's] life" or that "what prevents Hamlet from promptly carrying out his revenge for the murder of his father, is something which is latent in himself" (Lordkipanidze 1964, 171, emphasis in original). Such a conclusion, Lordkipanidze continues, would be entirely wrong, since "Hamlet is energetic, strong and resolute. Were it not

for special reasons, he would never have delayed action and the murdered would have suffered retribution. But these special reasons do exist, and they lie in the extreme scrupulousness and thoughtfulness of Shakespeare's hero" (171-72). While the critic falls just short of stating this explicitly, the implication in this commentary, just as in early Soviet criticism, is that Kozintsev was able to improve Shakespeare by tweaking the script in order to clarify various unfortunate ambiguities in the presentation of Hamlet. Ophelia's transformation into a metal automaton, a wooden or alabaster statuette, or a stacking doll re-enacts for the audience the well-worn reading practices necessary for producing a Shakespeare who can speak the truth about the Stalinist era. Kozintsev's Hamlet is exonerated of any faults and grows to gigantic proportions, signaling that Shakespeare, however altered, remains an inexhaustible source of self-knowledge for Soviet audiences. As Lordkipanidze concludes:

[Hamlet's] image becomes magnified on a gigantic scale [. . .] Hamlet's true greatness is revealed to us easily and simply as though needing no further explanation. [. . .] All will realize that, next to the great figure of Hamlet, the basic and clear concepts of honor, conscience, kindness and justice are now regaining their true value. (173)

In using *Hamlet* to depict the condition of the subject under the Stalinist regime, offering to his audience a readily recognizable and transcendent image of human resistance to a prison state, Kozintsev turns to the interpretative strategies to which he had been exposed for over twenty years. If, as Kathy Howlett argues, "Shakespeare on film gives to Shakespeare's 'global' drama a local habitation and a *frame*," providing the audience with specific contextual frameworks necessary for interpreting the events on screen (Howlett 2000, 11-12, emphasis in original), Kozintsev's film gives meaning to the play by drawing on "local" views of Hamlet and its characters established during the early Soviet era. Thus, paradoxically, the director's criticism of the oppressive Stalinist regime partially relies on the collection of images and associations formed in the course of the same regime. The dual representation of heroic Hamlet and inhuman Ophelia survives the Thaw and, later, the fall of the Soviet Union, becoming both valuable export matter (in the form of films and literary texts) and the next generation's cultural heritage.

### Ophelia and Soviet Women Writers

With the exception of Sof'ya Nel's and Natela Lordkipanidze, the Soviet (and post-Soviet) writers and critics discussed here are almost uniformly male. This is partly due to the prevalence of men in Russian literary professions throughout the twentieth century, but it also reflects the extent to which the glorification of Hamlet and problematization of Ophelia in the Soviet Union

is a heavily gendered enterprise. If anything, Soviet ideology, while claiming gender equality, privileged masculine homosocial relationships, which woman could truly enter only as a good, all-forgiving mother or an androgynous colleague in party pursuits. Not surprisingly, Soviet male writers are acutely uncomfortable with any feminine presence near their proto-revolutionary hero.

Conversely, women authors seek to reclaim Ophelia, extolling her womanhood in a rebellion against ideologically inspired gender discrimination. For example, Marina Tsvetaeva in "Ophelia — to Hamlet" and its companion piece "Ophelia — in Defence of the Queen" (1923) adopts the persona of Ophelia to speak back to the Danish prince, pointing out the flaws in his worldview and conduct. Similarly, in her novel *The Leopard from the Peak of Kilimanjaro* (Leopard s vershiny Kilimandzharo, 1965), the Soviet science fiction writer Olga Larionova stages a performance of the play, and subsequently re-writes Ophelia's death, only to show to what extent this heroine is misinterpreted by the male narrator, who is an ideological heir to both Hamlet and, as the title suggests, Ernest Hemingway. To a great extent, these works seek to reclaim Ophelia from the oppressive bounds of masculine reading practices, buttressed by Soviet ideology and post-Soviet nationalistic discourse, and establish her as a valid model of rebellious girlhood that reacts powerfully to perceived injustices.

Directed, as these texts are, against the monolith of Soviet ideology, they cannot be discussed in detail in this article and demand a thorough discussion in a broader study. Their main concerns, however, are neatly summarized in Olga Nechaeva's recent poem "Ophelia, float and sing . . ." (Ofeliya, plyvi i poy, 2004), which urges the heroine to recognize that she has not, after all, passed away: "Everybody died — but you are alive, / everybody left — you are still here" (Vse umerli — a ty zhiva, / vse vyshli — ty ostalas' zdes') (Nechaeva 2009, 11). Ophelia's survival, her ability to breathe water, and the mix of "water, wine, words" (voda, vino, slova) in her mouth supersede the relevance of Shakespeare. Nechaeva exclaims with some contempt, "Ophelia, what matters Shakespeare, / what matters Denmark, come to your senses!" (Ofeliya, kakoy Shekspir, / kakaya Daniya, ochnis!). These lines forcefully position Ophelia as speaking subject — indeed, the sole survivor, now entrusted with telling the story; the transubstantiation of river water into wine in her mouth suggests almost miraculous potential for creativity. Having broken free, as Nechaeva urges, from the constraints of the Shakespeare ideology (rather than being broken away from Shakespeare's play, as in the works discussed in this article), the figure of Ophelia can be used in speaking against the centralizing impulse, so strong even in today's Russian Federation, with its growing emphasis on traditional gender and family roles. Because of her history as an ideological scapegoat, for Russian women writers Ophelia can act as a role model who has not been directly implicated in the construction of statehood and can thus be used to evade the centralizing

impulse.<sup>24</sup> As an unmarried girl caught in the turmoil of political unrest and mistreated by her beloved, Ophelia enables a frank examination of women's position in a highly ideological context. While in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, Shakespeare and his Hamlet are frequently appropriated as the unchallengeable center of the national ideology, the story of Ophelia is the story of subversive potential open to women seeking to declare themselves as active, speaking, and desiring subjects, staking out their place in the state narrative.

### Notes

1. I am deeply grateful to Deanne Williams, who, years ago, suggested that I think about Ophelia in Russian culture. This article would not have come into existence without her generous guidance and patient encouragement. I would also like to thank Anton Smolski, who, out of pure and selfless curiosity, read multiple versions of this article over the years, and did not hold back on critical commentary.
2. While Ostrovsky primarily focuses on staging practices, his overview of Soviet criticism is eminently relevant to my argument. See also Alexander Shurbanov and Boika Sokolova (2001), especially chapters 3 and 4, "Novum Organum" and "An East-European Calendar" (the book focuses on the events in communist Bulgaria, but these two chapters offer a thoughtful discussion of the Soviet background).
3. Aleksandr Anikst, a leading Soviet scholar, assumes in his biography of Shakespeare that Hamlet's "what a work of God is man" speech is simply a convenient expression of "one of the greatest humanistic ideas of the age" (odna iz velichayshikh gumanisticheskikh idey epokhi) shared by the playwright, and that in the "To be or not to be" speech "is revealed the soul of the great humanist artist, shaken by the recognition of the omnipotence of evil" (raskryvaetsya dusha velikogo khudozhnika-gumanista, potryasennogo soznaniem vsesiliya zla) (Anikst 1964, 39; 215).
4. The exception to this is Nikolai Akimov's production of *Hamlet* at the Vakhtangov Theatre in 1932, which seems to have engaged a little too directly with the ideology of the moment. According to George Gibian, Akimov "concluded from current Soviet criticism that Hamlet must have resembled Erasmus, the humanist par excellence, and even made Erasmus speak several lines of comment on the play . . . Ophelia, for example, was rendered as a corrupt young society girl, who drowned during one of her drunken sprees" (Gibian 1952, 31). Akimov's production, as Gibian suggests, did not go beyond staging the postulates of the contemporary ideology, and yet it was mercilessly criticized for decades to come; see, for example, Yu. Yuzovskiy's 1932 review "Perecherknuty Gamlet" (Hamlet, Crossed-Out), or Morozov's 1947

- pamphlet *Shakespeare on the Soviet Stage* (41). Despite its immense success with the public, the production was quickly dropped by the theater (Stribný 2000, 84); by the end of the 1940s, Akimov himself was persecuted for his "cosmopolitan leanings" and had to leave the theater.
5. Contradicting his own suggestion of a fatal flaw, elsewhere Morozov argued that Ophelia was wholly comprehensible and unproblematic in her naïve girlish simplicity. According to him, "the world of Ophelia's images is simple and transparent, as simple as she herself and her view of life" and "is distinguished by astonishing orderliness and completeness" (Mir obrazov Ofelii ochen' prost i yasen, kak prosta ona sama i prosto ee otnoshenie k zhizni . . . etot mir otlichaetsya udivitel'noy stroynost'yu i zakonchennost'yu) (Morozov, 1947a, 235).
  6. See, for example, Carol Solomon Kiefer (2001) and Georgianna Ziegler (2001).
  7. The suggestion that Ophelia betrays Hamlet by obeying her father is fairly common in Soviet scholarship: see, for example, A. Anikst (1961, 89).
  8. See, for example, H. R. Coursen (2001, 53-61), and (2010, Chapter 5, "*Hamlet*, and the Question of Ophelia").
  9. The attempts to create a smooth, monolithic image of the superhuman Soviet citizen are evident all throughout Soviet literature. The new, post-Soviet edition of Anatoly Kuznetsov's *Babiy Yar* (2008), an autobiographical account of Nazi occupation, offers a vivid illustration of this by italicizing everything that was removed by the censors at the first publication in 1960s. It quickly becomes obvious that, among other things, Soviet censorship was disturbed by references to overpowering emotion (such as grief or fear), as well as to insanity, hunger, or sexual desire. See also Ekaterina N. Shapinskaya (2000, 150-55). In the same volume, Almira Ousmanova concludes that in the 1930s and 1940s, female characters became the medium through which ideological messages were conveyed, and the "female body became a symbol of the global evolutionary reconstruction of the world" (Ousmanova 2000, 163). For a more general overview of the battle against sexual impulse and expression in the early Soviet Union, see Eric Naiman (1997).
  10. Soviet representations are highly unusual precisely because of these threatening connotations. As Ruth J. Owen shows, for example, German literary appropriations of Ophelia both in the nineteenth and twentieth century focus on the drowning scene, attesting to "Ophelia's cultural mobility as an embodiment of pastoral innocent and mortuary eroticism" (Owen 2012, 173). Owen summarizes her exploration: "As the immobile, drowned girl, Ophelia makes an acceptable vision of death" (175).
  11. Morozov directly accuses Western critics and directors of misinterpreting Shakespeare's drama in two consecutive articles, "Falsifikatory Shekspira" (Falsifiers of Shakespeare) and

"Teatrovedcheskaya ekspansiya Wall Strita" (Wall Street's expansion into theatre studies), both published in *Teatr* in the first half of 1949. For an early English-language overview of Soviet engagement with Shakespeare, see Miklós Szenczi (1965).

12. On p. 244, Volkov also quotes Olesha's admission: "We are still desirous of the acknowledgement from the West. [. . .] When our books are translated in the West, this satisfies our vanity" (Do sikh porn nam hochetsya poluchit' priznanie ot Zapada. [. . .] Kogda perevodyat nashi knigi na Zapade, eto udovletvoryaet nashe tshcheslavie).
13. In the 1830s, Vissarion Belinsky saw Hamlet as a figure of astonishing potential, capable perhaps of becoming the new man for the new age: he acknowledges certain weaknesses but sees them as a transitional stage in the evolution of this character (Belinsky 1959, 202). On Hamlet as a revolutionary figure and model for the nineteenth-century intelligentsia, see also Yury D. Levin (1989). On the other hand, in 1860 Ivan Turgenev, deeply suspicious of the popularity of nihilism among young intellectuals, condemned the kind of intellectual narcissism he perceived in Hamlet and described this character as purely destructive, capable of bringing to himself and others only a barren void (Turgenev 1964). See Peter Holland (1999) for an overview of this reading and its uses in pre-revolutionary Russia.
14. Boika Sokolova demonstrates that some forms of this reading already appear in the early 1920s: see her article "Between Religion and Ideology: Russian *Hamlets* of the Twentieth Century" (2001, 145-46).
15. Ironically, even a later article, "To Be or Not To Be As an Individual," by R. Kosolapov, in arguing that one cannot become a true individual by emulating a single literary model (even Hamlet!), foregrounds this argument by urging the readers to note "*the selective attitude to the heritage of past shown by the Danish prince*" (*izbiratel'noe otnoshenie k naslediyu proshlogo, kotoroe proyavlyayet datskiy prints*) and decides that the question "to be or not to be" is directly applicable to the Soviet identity building (1975, 107, emphasis in original). In other words, even while introducing this relatively new, for Soviet criticism, point of view, Kosolapov is careful not to undermine the earlier argument for Hamlet as a worthy and flawless model. On the whole, Soviet criticism seems incapable of self-reflection: a weighty tome entitled *Shekspir i russkaya kul'tura* (Shakespeare and the Russian culture), edited by M. P. Alekseev, although published in 1965, decisively stops its inquiry at Blok's poem "I am Hamlet" (Ya — Gamlet) of 1914, unequivocally suggesting that post-revolutionary engagement with Shakespeare is not open to analysis. In his approving review, the famous Soviet literary critic A. Aniskt does not in any way comment on this upper boundary and indicates no need for further study (1967).

16. Bryusov's unwillingness to relegate Shakespeare to this irrelevant past is immediately evident from his other work and autobiographical texts; so, in his diary on 26 November 1896, he fantasizes about spending the next two years reading only the Bible, Homer, and Shakespeare (Ivanova 2002, 41). In 1903, Bryusov participated in a group project of translating Shakespeare's sonnets; his translations of Sonnets 44, 55, 57, 58, 59, 60, and 61 are still well known.
17. To a certain extent, this is a play on words: the expression "s togo sveta" in Russian literally means "from the world of the dead" or, less morbidly, "from heaven." This is a strong indication that Soviet citizens saw the 1920s as an ideological fissure that separated them from the pre-revolutionary world.
18. I say that this memory is improbable because a war pilot, who has presumably been shot down, would likely not have been returned to the hospital in his hometown, and the poem makes it quite clear that the girl would have been too young during the World War II to serve as a nurse on the frontlines. The author is here more concerned with the symbolic value of the image rather than with its historical accuracy.
19. These explorations range from Jack J. Jorgens's monograph *Shakespeare on Film* (1977) and Lorne M. Buchman, *Still in Movement: Shakespeare on Screen* (1991) to Samuel Crowl's brief discussion in the recently published *Screen Adaptations: "Hamlet"* (2014). Notably, Emily S. Brebach's article "From Olivier to Kozintsev: Visual Technique in Transforming *Hamlet* into Film" dismisses the Soviet context altogether and argues that Kozintsev's film "can be *best approached* as a creative reaction to Olivier's *Hamlet*" (1981, 69, emphasis added).
20. For example, see Tiffany Ann Conroy Moore, *Kozintsev's Shakespeare Films: Russian Political Protest in "Hamlet" and "King Lear"* (2012, chapter 3); David Gillespie, "Adapting Foreign Classics: Kozintsev's Shakespeare," (2005, 82); and Arthur P. Mendel, "Hamlet and Soviet Humanism" (1971). Mark Sokolyansky offers a comprehensive overview in "Grigori Kozintsev's *Hamlet* and *King Lear*" (2007).
21. It has been suggested that Innokenty Smoktunovsky was selected for this role partly because of his own experience of Soviet repressions and deprivations. Alexander Etkind writes: "In *Hamlet*, Smoktunovsky played himself — a survivor of the Great Terror, a soldier of a great war, a man who perceives his country as a prison though he does not know the reason or remedy for this state of affairs" (Etkind 2013, 144).
22. Anthony B. Dawson comments that this is "a way of further reducing her individuality and rendering her poignantly symbolic": see his *Hamlet* (1995, 190). For further commentary on

the cutting of Ophelia's text in contemporary film, see Kendra Preston Leonard, "The Lady Vanishes: Aurality and Agency in Cinematic Ophelias" (2012).

23. Jorgens mentions the fresco in an earlier article, although without explicitly tying it to Hamlet's view of women; see "Image and Meaning in the Kozintsev *Hamlet*" (1973, 311). In a later article, Barbara Hodgdon suggests that this image "emblemizes the impossibility of Hamlet's love for Ophelia" (Hodgdon 1975-76, 308).
24. This use of Ophelia closely corresponds to the character's potential, as suggested by Elaine Showalter in her seminal article, "Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism" (1985, 79). For similar arguments, see also, in the same volume, *The Afterlife of Ophelia* (2012), Alexander Huang, "The Paradox of Female Agency: Ophelia and East Asian Sensibilities" and Lois Potter, "Ophelia and Some Theatrical Successors."

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