

Sarah Bernhardt's Ophelia

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Abstract

This essay argues that both Sarah Bernhardt's 1880 sculpture of the drowned Ophelia and her later, on-stage appearance in 1886 as the dead Ophelia contributed significantly to the nineteenth-century obsession with death and sexuality. The cult of Ophelia was central to this obsession, and in both her sculpture and stage appearance, Bernhardt added subversive aspects that hinted at the nature of the female subject and the afterlife of Ophelia that would continue to play a significant role in visual culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In 1880, Sarah Bernhardt, whose acting career had already made her something of a superstar, completed a sculpture of the death of Ophelia. Then, six years later in a Paris theater, she fulfilled a long-held ambition of acting the part of Ophelia in a production of *Hamlet*. These two examples of her extraordinary creativity each made significant contributions to the afterlife of Ophelia and in particular to the cultural icon of the dead or dying Ophelia that is so familiar today. In art, though theater and film may be strongly influenced by art works depicting Ophelia, that afterlife can be virtually independent of Shakespeare, the lifeless or near lifeless body of Ophelia serving as a site of erotic desire and idealized feminine beauty (Rutter 1998, 301-13; Fraser 2000, 245-50, 253-55; Young 2000, 262-67; Romanska 2005b, 496-97).

A number of recent publications and art exhibitions have traced aspects of the ongoing fascination with the Ophelia phenomenon, a fascination that began in the eighteenth century and continues to capture the creative imagination of artists today. During the last few years, the constant reinvention of Shakespeare has extended the long-standing appropriation of the death of Ophelia deep into popular culture. As a result, depictions of Ophelia's last moments are ubiquitous within the twenty-first century world of electronic social-networking sites, video- and photo-sharing sites, wikis, blogs, vlogs, and folksonomies, often collectively referred to as Web 2.0. (Young 2009; Iyengar and Desmet 2012). What follows here will endeavor to show how Bernhardt's celebrity status almost certainly ensured that her two representations of Ophelia made significant contributions to the ongoing reinvention of the construct of Ophelia in both art and

stage performance. I begin with Bernhardt's sculpture, but to place the work in as full a context as possible, I offer first a brief account of her work in this medium prior to the completion of *Ophelia* in 1880, together with some relevant contextual material concerning her seemingly obsessive fascination with death.

Sarah Bernhardt as Sculptor

Bernhardt's interest in sculpture appears to date from about 1869. Following the advice of the sculptor Roland Mathieu-Meusnier (another early influence was Jules Franceschi), who recognized her talent in modeling and urged her to continue, Bernhardt became so caught up in the creation of sculptures that she was tempted to give up her stage career. In 1873, unhappy about her work at the Comédie Française and physically unwell, she decided to take a studio and devote herself to sculpture. As she explains in her memoirs: "As I was not able to use my intelligence and my energy in creating rôles at the theater, as I wished, I gave myself up to another art, and began working at sculpture with frantic enthusiasm" (figure 1). "I soon made great progress, [. . .]. I was indifferent now to the theater" (Bernhardt 1907b, 262; Tooley 1899, 96). Although she was in the early 1870s "discouraged and disgusted with the theater" (Bernhardt 1907b, 268), she never completely gave up acting, and within a few years, acting became once again the center of her creative existence in spite of the doubts she had experienced. Even so, as her acting career blossomed, she continued sculpting and (less successfully) painting. For her, these two creative outlets outside the theatre were to remain important throughout the rest of her life.¹

Never one to be intimidated by a challenge, in both 1874 and 1875 she submitted sculptures to the annual Salon de Paris,² the most prestigious of European art events during the first nine decades of the nineteenth century (Paturot 1874, 67, 69, 76; Viadot 1883, 16; Tooley 1899, 96). Thereafter, she regularly exhibited both sculptures and paintings at the Salon until 1886.³ In 1875, she studied sculpture with the renowned sculptor-painter Gustave Doré and was subsequently commissioned to provide a sculpture for the façade of the Opéra de Monte Carlo.⁴ In 1876, Bernhardt submitted to the Salon a large and ambitious project, *Après la Tempête* (After the Storm), inspired by a tragic story she had heard while recovering in Brittany from the psychological and physical aftermath of the death of her half-sister Régina. In her memoirs, Bernhardt describes her struggle to finish this large pieta-like sculpture, depicting an old Breton woman with the body of her drowned grandson across her lap. Her work resulted in an "Honorable Mention" at the Salon, and her plaster version of the sculpture was then followed by versions in marble and bronze (figure 2).⁵

As a means of publicizing her evolving commitment to the plastic arts and to challenge the stereotypical view that sculpture was a male art, Bernhardt in about 1875 had the Paris photographer Melandri create photographs of her working in her studio on a sculpture (see figure 1), with others depicting her as a painter (figure 3). It should be noted, however, that her paintings were not as warmly praised as her sculptures, although they were regularly exhibited. The photographs show her wearing a white satin pant suit designed by the well-known couturier Charles Frederick Worth. Bernhardt also wore a white tulle scarf and white pumps with butterfly bows (*noeuds de papillon*). As Carol Ockman has pointed out, Bernhardt's outfit "feminized the then controversial masculine garb originally adopted by Rosa Bonheur, George Sand, and other female artists and writers" (Ockman 2005, 43). The photographs elicited a great deal of comment and clearly had the desired effect of drawing attention to Bernhardt's newly chosen *métier*. According to one authority, some fifty or so of her sculptures have been traced, although the whereabouts of only about half that number is known (Abdy 1997, 250-51).

An important source of information about Bernhardt's sculptures is to be found among the reviews, catalogues, and descriptions relating to the exhibitions of her art works that she organized to correspond with her acting tours abroad. Her primary goals were always twofold: to enhance her own celebrity status and to boost her income through sales. Her first such exhibition occurred when she appeared with the Comédie Française in London in 1879. The exhibition at the William Russell Galleries on Piccadilly included five of Bernhardt's busts, a version of her *Après la Tempête* (the *Times* reviewer noted the "palpable echo of the famous 'Pietà' of Michael Angelo"), a small head of an infant Bellona, the statuette of a crouching jester, and a bronze bas-relief based on a design by Georges Clairin that depicted Bernhardt as a Muse-like figure crowning with laurel wreaths the busts of Shakespeare and Moliere.⁶ The exhibition provoked considerable interest, and on 16 June Tom Taylor, the art critic for *The Times*, wrote a detailed and generally positive review that was reprinted two weeks later in the *New York Times*. Among those who attended the London exhibition were the Prince and Princess of Wales, Sir Frederick Leighton (President of the Royal Academy), and William Gladstone.⁷ In London, according to one source, she sold the majority of the works on display — ten pictures and six pieces of sculpture, including a bronze casting of *Après la Tempête* that went for four hundred pounds (Aston 1989, 133).

Back in Paris, Bernhardt was interviewed in January 1880 in her elaborately decorated dressing room at the Comédie Française. Towards the close of the interview, she made what appears to have been her first recorded allusion to her *Ophelia* sculpture. The interview originally appeared in *Boulevard* and was subsequently reprinted on 30 January 1880 in *Brief: The Weekly News*.

As the interview was closing, the unnamed author explains, "I could not leave the loge without asking Mdlle. Sarah Bernhardt what she was preparing for the next Salon. She replied that she was working in the studio of Stevens, and that she intended to exhibit 'Ophélie Morte,' as well as a painting, 'Les Fiançailles de la Mort,' a young girl *en toilette blanche*, with orange-flowers, prepared to go to the altar, and to the figure of Death which lurks behind it" (Anonymous 1880c, 114).⁸ Contrary to what she had told her English interviewer, however, Bernhardt did not that year submit her *Ophelia* to the Salon, although she did exhibit the painting she had mentioned in her interview, along with a sculpted bronze portrait of herself as a Sphinx. Possibly she did not have time to finish her *Ophelia*, or possibly she ran into difficulties working with marble. Though not referring specifically to Bernhardt's *Ophelia*, an early biographer, without citing any supporting evidence, remarked in 1896 that "In sculpture, Sarah felt herself from the first ill at ease. The cold exasperated her, for marble is glacial. How to warm it, and give it life and movement!" (Wisner 1901, n.p.). At this time also her life was in considerable turmoil, since she had quit the Comédie Française in April and subsequently had been forced by a court ruling to pay a large sum (100,000 francs) in redress for having broken her contract.

There is also the fact that Bernhardt made another visit to London, and then in August of 1880 visited Copenhagen to perform at the Theatre Royal (Bernhardt 1907b, 351-62). There does not appear to have been an accompanying exhibition of her works at either venue, but the visit to Denmark, which she describes in some detail in her memoirs, seems to have furthered her growing interest in *Hamlet* and in particular the figure of Ophelia. While in Copenhagen, she asked to be taken to Elsinore so that she could see the various sites associated with *Hamlet*. The King of Denmark, who had attended her opening performance of *Adrienne Lecouvreur* with the Queen, the Princess of Wales, the Queen of the Hellènes, and other dignitaries, responded with great warmth to Bernhardt's request by offering her the use of his steamboat. The manager of the Theatre Royal organized a magnificent lunch, and Bernhardt's entire company, along with "the principal nobilities of Denmark," then made the short journey to see Hamlet's supposed grave, Ophelia's Spring, Marienlyst Palace, and Kronbourg Castle. Bernhardt, however, was disappointed and recorded in her memoirs that reality did not come up to expectation and she regretted making the excursion: "The so-called Tomb of Hamlet is represented by a small column, ugly and mournful looking; there is little verdure and the desolate sadness of deceit without beauty." Even so, she was obviously gratified when "They gave me a little water from the Spring of Ophelia to drink and the Baron de Fallesen broke the glass without allowing anyone else to drink from the spring" (Bernhardt 1907b, 359).⁹

Having formed her own company, Bernhardt left Europe on 15 October for an extensive first tour of North America, taking with her the now finished *Ophelia* sculpture, along with five other sculptures and fifteen of her paintings. Her physically grueling tour would last until May 1881. In at least six of the larger cities she visited (New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Milwaukee), she arranged for exhibitions of her art works (Marks 2003, 38, 44, 72, 95, 101, 104, 113, 146, 176-77; Colombier 1881, 52, 74-78). The exhibition in New York began with a private showing to invited guests on 8 November at the Union League Club Theatre (Anonymous 1880a; Collins 2008, 27). In Boston, Bernhardt followed the same timetable for her exhibition at the Studio Building on Tremont Street. There was a private viewing on Thursday 9 December, followed by a public viewing from Friday the next day.

As was the case in London, the works on display at her exhibitions were for sale, and almost all, in spite of some very virulent complaints about Bernhardt's supposed financial greed, were purchased for delivery following the end of the tour (Marks 2003, 40, 51, 72). However, her *Ophelia* was not for sale. On public display for the first time, the sculpture was the object of some positive, though largely very generalized praise from American art critics (Marks 2003, 72, 95, 101). As a consequence, Bernhardt understandably held fast to her decision to take this particular new sculpture back to France for entry in the 1881 Salon. It duly appeared there that Spring (Forbes-Robertson 1881, 427; Mason 1881, 74) and was again reviewed (figure 4). One critic who saw it there was John Forbes-Robertson. Writing for the *London Magazine of Art*, he had this to say:

Sarah Bernhardt, who has been delighting London audiences lately by her marvellous personations, and who excels in other arts than that of acting, confines herself this year to sculpture. Her 'Ophelia' is what the French call a *bas-relief*, but the Italians, we should imagine, an *alto-rilievo*. Only the head and bust are shown, as she is supposed to be floating on the water just before sinking. One breast is bare, and on the other has fallen from her dishevelled hair a string of flowers. Her head is turned over her right shoulder, her eyes are placidly closed, and the expression of her face is tender and sweet exceedingly. (Forbes-Robertson 1881, 427)

Before looking more closely at Bernhardt's *Ophelia* and before discussing her on stage performance as Ophelia, it will be helpful to have some familiarity with both her deep-rooted lifelong obsession with the subject of death and with her awareness of Ophelia's death as a subject that had long been of particular fascination to artists in France and elsewhere. Only within the context of these two matters can her two contributions to the phenomenon of Ophelia's afterlife be fully appreciated.

Sarah Bernhardt and Death: A Personal Obsession

Bernhardt's obsession with death has often been commented upon. It appears to have had its roots in her teenage years. Suffering from repeated illness, extreme thinness, a persistent cough, and a tendency to spit up blood, she and her doctors expected her to die at an early age (Bernhardt 1907b, 262, 266). While quite young, she persuaded her mother to purchase a coffin for her. Never one to pass up an opportunity to excite sensational publicity, she later had the photographer Melandri record her as though dead in her coffin (figure 5). Dressed in white and bedecked with flowers, her appearance in the photograph is inevitably suggestive both of nineteenth-century depictions of dead women in general and of Ophelia in particular. On a plinth beside the coffin and as though mourning Bernhardt's death, the photographer (or Bernhardt) placed Bernhardt's marble bust (now in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris) of her artist lover, Louise Abbéma, who appears to be looking down at Bernhardt's "corpse." This juxtaposition of the two women, it has been suggested, creates a complex thematic interplay relating to death and immortality, the status of women and women artists, and what we now see as a pervasive nineteenth-century cult of invalidism, eroticism, and the dead female, topics often linked to the madness and death of Ophelia (Ockman 2005, 51-52; Showalter 1985, 77-94; Dijkstra 1986; Bronfen 1992; Peterson 1998, 1-24; Kiefer 2001, 11-39; Young 2002, 279-345; Romanska 2005a, 35-53; Romanska 2005b, 485-513; and Wildschut and Krien 2009).

On the eve of her departure for her first tour of America, Bernhardt was interviewed by the correspondent for the *New York Herald*, an interview subsequently printed in the *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*. Among other things, she was asked why she had had her photograph taken while she was in her now famous coffin. To this, she responded "with a pouting, coquettish smile," and the retort: "After my death I shall be ugly, shall I not?" Her interviewer, joining in her game, replied decisively with "I think not." Bernhardt then answered her question, though with how much veracity we shall never know, by saying, "Well, I know they would take my photographs after my death, and they would pain my friends. I thought it better, therefore, to have them taken while I was still living and my face was pleasing to them — that is all!" (Anonymous 1880b, 7). Whatever her true motives, Bernhardt kept her coffin with her for the rest of her life, and when she died in 1923, her body was, according to one biographer, dressed in white satin and placed in her coffin (Silverthorne 2004, 117). Ironically and in spite of the availability of her coffin photographs, Bernhardt allowed herself to be filmed on her deathbed in 1923 in Paris. Too sick to leave her bed towards the end of making the movie *La Voyante* (The Clairvoyant), she had the cameras brought into her bedroom. In spite of her heroic efforts, however, she collapsed and died before the movie

was complete, and another actor dressed in Bernhardt's costume finished the final scenes, though with her back to the camera (Menefee 2004, 39).¹⁰

Bernhardt constantly thought about death in part because of her half-sister Régina. As has often been noted, and as she recounts in her autobiography, Bernhardt was profoundly affected, both physically and psychologically, by the death of Régina, with whom she had been very close. During her sister's final days, Bernhardt had her coffin moved into her sister's room so that she could sleep in it and remain beside her sister each night: "After the death of my sister I fell seriously ill. I had tended her day and night, and this, in addition to the grief I was suffering, made me anaemic" (Bernhardt 1907b, 270). Tragically, Bernhardt would later lose her other half-sister (Jeanne), who died from an addiction to drugs in 1884. But there were other signs of Bernhardt's obsession with death. Following her somewhat inauspicious acting debut in 1862, she took poison and for five days hovered between life and death. When questioned upon her recovery, she replied (whether truthfully or not we do not know) that she had poisoned herself because she "wanted to see what death was like" (Gottlieb 2010, Ch. 6).

Related to this desire, perhaps, were visits to the *École Pratique d'Anatomie* in Paris (School of Anatomy). There, she studied corpses and dissections. At some point, she also acquired a skeleton that she playfully named Lazarus (Collins 2008, 19). Along with many of her contemporaries, she also visited the Paris morgue to see the bodies on display (Silverthorne 2004, 36), and late in life, still maintaining her morbid fascination with death, she appears to have arranged to perform for a group of prisoners on death row.¹¹ Possibly, too, like many other Europeans, she was affected by the extraordinary popular craze related to the so-called "L'Inconnue de la Seine" (the Unknown Woman of the Seine), a beautiful young unidentified woman drowned in the Seine, whose death mask was produced in innumerable copies that became popular souvenirs as well as serving as an inspiration for artists and writers in various countries for decades to come (Phillips 1982, 321-27; Alvarez 1985, 156; Bronfen 1992, 206-67; Romanska 2005a, 37-38; Pinet 2002, 175-90; Chrisafis 2007; Perni 2012, 195). However, because the exact date of the drowning death of L'Inconnue is unknown, one cannot be certain whether it preceded Bernhardt's *Ophelia*.¹²

One can be more certain about at least two other artifacts related to Bernhardt's obsession with death. The first, one of Bernhardt's most prized possessions (she included a photograph of it in her memoirs), was a human skull (figure 6), now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, that had been presented to her by Victor Hugo sometime after her acclaimed performance in his *Hernani* in 1877 (image from Bernhardt 1907b, opp. 248; see also Ockman and Silver 2005, 13). It was inscribed with verses on the theme of death that he had composed in her honor:

Squelette, qu'as tu fait de l'âme?
 Lampe, qu'as tu fait de la flame?
 Cage déserte, qu'as tu fait?
 De ton bel oiseau qui chantait?
 Volcan, qu'as tu fait de la lave?
 Qu'as tu fait de ton maître, esclave?¹³

The second memento mori that she kept by her was something that alluded to the means of her suicide in Victorien Sardou's *Cléopâtre*. This five-act derivative of Shakespeare's drama *Antony and Cleopatra* received its premier on 24 October 1890. Bernhardt's memento was a magnificent bracelet, now owned by the Sakai City Government, Japan, in the form of a snake, designed for her by Alphonse Mucha and Georges Fouquet (Ockman and Silver 2005, 13).

Sarah Bernhardt and Death: Her Other Art Works and Stage Performances

In addition to acquiring artifacts, Sarah Bernhardt also found outlets for her obsession with death both in the works of art she created and in her dramatic roles on stage. Mentioned already was Bernhardt's pietà-like sculpture *Après la Tempête*. To this, one might add her 1877 bronze sculpture of *Le Fou et la Mort* (The Fool and Death), depicting the jester Triboulet holding the skull of his daughter in Hugo's *Le roi s'amuse*. Equally morbid, perhaps, was her painting *La Jeune Fille et la Mort* (Young Girl and Death), which she presented at the Paris Salon in 1880. As has already been noted above, it depicts a young girl on the eve of marriage, with the figure of death beckoning her, a version of the popular "Death and the Maiden" topos.

On stage, Bernhardt's death scenes became legendary. Early in her career in 1868, for example, she played Cordelia in a French translation of *King Lear* at the Odéon, her limp body (one assumes) carried on stage by her grieving father in the final scene. Of her death scene in *Zaire* early in her career, she left an extraordinary account:

I was determined to faint, determined to vomit blood, determined to die . . . I gave myself entirely up to it. I had sobbed, I had loved, I had suffered, and I had been stabbed by the poignard of *Orosmano*, uttering a true cry of suffering, for I had felt the steel penetrate my breast; then falling, panting, dying on the Oriental divan, I had meant to die in reality, and dared scarcely move my arms, convinced as I was that I was in my death agony. (Bernhardt 1907b, 266)

During the 1880 *New York Herald* interview cited earlier, the journalist asked her, "How do you feel after a scene like that, for instance, of the death of Adrienne Lecouvreur? Do you easily recover from the painful illusion, madame?" To this, in a revealing statement about her acting method, Bernhardt replied,

The illusion? Ah! With me it is reality at the time. I am always ill after that death scene, and generally have to be assisted from the stage. In playing I lose my identity utterly, and for the time being I am no longer Sara — I am only the hapless woman I represent. My tears are not simulated — they are real, burning, hot tears that scald my cheeks!

When the interviewer asked how she could keep her health while giving "such successive shocks to her entire nervous system," Bernhardt answered, "I do not keep it. I'm consumptive (*poitrinaire*). I spit blood, and, being of a very nervous temperament, the slightest thing irritates me" (Anonymous 1880b, 7).

Following her debut as Marguérite in *La Dame aux Camélias* in 1880, her death scene in this play (later recorded on film in *Camille* 1911) became a popular favorite (see *Sarah Bernhardt in Camille*, DVD containing restored version by David W. Menefee), but there were other works with death scenes throughout her acting career, including *Phèdre*, *Hernani*, *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, *Fédora*, Victorien Sardou's *La Tosca*, in which the title character jumped to her death from the battlements, and Sardou's *Cléopatra*, in which death is self-administered with the aid of an asp (the subject of Bernhardt's bracelet), and in 1899 Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in which Bernhardt played the title character and later recorded her death scene on film (*Le duel d'Hamlet*) in 1900 (see *Sarah Bernhardt in Camille*, DVD also containing restored version of *Le Duel d'Hamlet* by David W. Menefee).¹⁴ She recorded yet another death scene in the movie *Daniel* in 1921 (see *Sarah Bernhardt, Mothers of France / Mères Françaises*, DVD also containing restored version of *The Death Scene from Daniel* by David W. Menefee). At the same time, no doubt, she found Hamlet's meditations on death particularly suited to her own temperament (figure 7). As one commentator, attempting to make sense of Bernhardt's obsession with death, recently suggested,

Paradoxically, [Bernhardt's] success at dying released her from expectations that she would die young. As a classical tragedienne, Bernhardt must have had an uncanny relationship to death. Her living depended on it. As she expired onstage, she would often end by coughing up blood or falling into a dead faint. By the early 1880s, her talent for dying was so remarked on that a final death agony was practically mandatory. Rhapsodic critics insisted that she never died the same way twice. For the next forty years, she died nightly, and sometimes two times a day . . . (Ockman and Silver 2005, 55)

Sarah Bernhardt and Death: Art Works by Others

In addition to Bernhardt's legendary obsession with death, there is yet another possible inspiration for her decision to sculpt the death of Ophelia. By the time she created her *Ophelia*, the subject of Ophelia's death had been taken up by a number of painters and book illustrators. Four works in particular may have been familiar to Bernhardt. We know that Bernhardt met John Everett Millais while in England in 1879, but there is no record of what they talked about (Bernhardt 1907b, 313). Millais's depiction of the drowning Ophelia had caused a sensation at the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1852 (figure 8). Shortly after its creation, the painting passed into private hands. Although the painting was exhibited occasionally prior to 1880, Bernhardt was never in the same locale, and when it was exhibited in Paris in 1855, she was probably too young to have seen it. However, although she probably never saw Millais's iconic painting, she may have seen one or other of the two engravings of it that were produced in 1864 and 1866 respectively, the first by Alfred Smith, and the second, a mezzotint, by J. Stephenson.

A particularly striking feature of Millais's painting, important because it was one that would be matched in Bernhardt's sculpture, was the artist's placing of Ophelia on her back in the water. To Victorian sensibilities, such a pose was suggestive of the fallen woman and evocative of unmentionable erotic potential, both matters already explored a year or so earlier in George Frederick Watts's painting *Found Drowned* (1848-50) now in the Watts Gallery (Rhodes 2008, 94). Bernhardt's coffin photograph and the angle of the camera employed to take it must have evoked the same kind of uneasy response among nineteenth-century viewers. Significant in this context is Georges Clairin's portrait of Bernhardt that caused such a stir at the 1876 Salon (figure 9). For this, Bernhardt posed, semi-reclined on a sofa, her eyes directed at the viewer in what for the nineteenth century could have been interpreted as an immodest or even lascivious invitation. Two of her biographers describe the portrait as follows: "She is dressed in a clinging white satin *robe d'intérieur* . . . There is no hint of the great lady in her undulant attitude or her inscrutable smile. Indeed, no lady of the faubourg would have allowed herself to be pictured in such intimate attire or in so inviting a position" (Gold and Fizdale 1991, 134).

More promising, however, as possible direct inspiration for Bernhardt's sculpture are four French works that she probably did see. The first is an 1844 oil painting by Eugène Delacroix (figure 10), one of several of his works depicting Ophelia's death.¹⁵ Predating Millais's work, it is a dramatic rendering of Ophelia's fall into the stream. Her breasts are uncovered, and her left arm is raised still clutching the branch of a tree. The work was exhibited in Paris in 1864 and again in 1878 when Bernhardt, given her keen interest in the arts, may have seen it. Delacroix seems to

have aimed at depicting the horrific moment when Ophelia's body entered the water. As such his painting, like his other versions of the same subject, is far removed from the tranquility of Millais's depiction. Ophelia has a terrified look on her face, and her clothes are being stripped from her body by the motion of her fall.

A second work is James Bertrand's *Mort d'Ophélie* (Death of Ophelia), which appears almost deliberately to echo Millais's much earlier painting (figure 11). Exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1872 with a second Ophelia painting entitled *Folie d'Ophélie*, *Mort d'Ophélie* depicts a supine Ophelia, semi-submerged in water, her feet to the left, her head to the right (the reverse of Millais). Bertrand's Ophelia has flowers in her hair, and she holds a garland in her hands which rests upon the base of her throat. Gone is the déshabillé and dramatic struggle of Delacroix's various Ophelias. Like Millais's Ophelia, Bertrand's wears a dress that completely covers her; however, in a notable departure from the Millais picture, Bertrand's Ophelia wears a dark-colored dress. This makes for a much more somber composition but also allows for the viewer's gaze to concentrate upon the beauty of the highlighted face and hands of Ophelia. It seems very likely that Bernhardt, who was in Paris in 1872, would have seen Bertrand's depiction of this serene Ophelia with the idealized face merging with the water.

Two years later at the Salon in 1874, the little known painter Noël Saunier exhibited a canvas that appears almost to reverse Bertrand's composition by depicting Ophelia in a luminous white dress. She is on her back, too, and though apparently dead, she is upon the bank of the stream rather than submerged in the water in the background. The white of her dress and the serenity of her face contrast sharply with the dark tones of the natural environment that surrounds her (Paturot 1874, 244; Lafond 2012, 180-81). Saunier's work and its presentation of Ophelia as in a state of blissful repose as she unconsciously offers her body to the viewer's gaze is certainly suggestive, though not necessarily an obvious direct influence upon Bernhardt's sculpture. Not only is its tranquil mood so very different from the horrific dramatic moment captured by Delacroix, but its emphasis is upon the representation of youthful female beauty.

More significant for my purposes here was an Ophelia work that was shown two years later than that of Saunier at the same Paris Salon in which Bernhardt presented her acclaimed *Après la Tempête*. The work in question was a bronze bas-relief of Ophelia's death by the well-established sculptor Auguste Préault (figure 12). This remarkable work, now in the Musée d'Orsay (Paris), was a re-working of a plaster version that he had originally created in 1842 and exhibited in the Paris Salon of 1850-51 (Mower 1981, 298-99). It depicts a full-length Ophelia merging with water. She is draped in a sheet that covers all but her arms, shoulders, and one leg. Paradoxically, the drapery (like that in Delacroix's various treatments) serves to emphasize the sinuous and erotic contours of

her body. Her eyes are closed, her mouth is partly open, and her head is tilted to her left. The official Museum website describes the sculpture as follows: "Ophelia is shown drifting lifeless on the water. With closed eyes and parted mouth, she escapes the stiffness of death. The waves intermingle with the folds of the wet sheet wound around the girl, emphasizing the curve of her limbs."¹⁶ At the Salon the year after Préault exhibited his early plaster version of his sculpture, Léopold Burthe in 1852 exhibited a painting of Ophelia (now in the Musées de Poitiers) employing a somewhat similar pose. Though still grasping a branch above her head, Burthe's Ophelia is semi-submerged in the water (Lafond 2012, 177-78). Her clinging dress, like that of Préault's Ophelia serves to emphasize the sensuous lines of her body. One breast is exposed as will be so with Bernhardt's Ophelia, although there is no evidence that Bernhardt ever saw Burthe's painting. Bernhardt had a particularly strong presence at this same Salon since, besides her own works, also on display were portraits of her by her close friends Clairin and Louise Abbéma. Indeed, Lucy H. Hooper in her report "From Abroad" (dated Paris, 26 May, 1876) told readers in the United States that Bernhardt was the heroine of that year's exhibition on account of her *Après la Tempête*, the two portraits of her, and her statuette as *La Fille de Roland* (Hooper 1876, 765). It is inconceivable that Bernhardt did not see Préault's sculpture and that it did not in some way influence her execution of the same subject a few years later.

Sarah Bernhardt's Sculpture of the Death of Ophelia

Bernhardt's *Ophelia*, first exhibited during her American tour in 1881-82 and then at the 1882 Paris Salon, is a marble bas relief, 70.5 x 60 cms., that depicts the flower-bedecked head and upper torso of Ophelia. She is supine, her right shoulder and breast are exposed, and she is seemingly merging with the water around her. Her eyes are closed and her head is turned to her right. It has been suggested that the sculpture is a self-portrait (Binion 1993, 8). Although I would be very hesitant to endorse this theory, there is one feature that does seem to be derived from Bernhardt's own physique, namely Ophelia's somewhat long neck. By incorporating this feature into her sculpture, Bernhardt is able to create a version of the sinuous, serpentine movement of her body that she frequently employed in her death scenes and that is occasionally found in portraits of her, a prime example being Clairin's 1879 painted portrait of her in the role of the Queen in Victor Hugo's *Ruy Blas* (figure 13). Now in the Bibliothèque de la Comédie Française (Paris), this shows Bernhardt walking away from the viewer but looking back over her right shoulder as though inviting the viewer to follow her. Her entire body forms a spiral that is emphasized by the swirling twist of her dress and its train. It has been claimed that the serpent-woman motif was in the nineteenth century "not just an attribute of the *femme fatale* of the *Fin de siècle*; it is an aesthetic

ideal that pervaded all aspects of the culture," the photograph of Bernhardt in her coffin and her Ophelia sculpture being representative examples (Westerweel 1995, 266-67).

Bernhardt's sculpture was created close in time to Madeleine Lemaire's painting *Ophélie*, well-known from prints, although the original work cannot be located (figure 14). Painted sometime in the 1880s, Lemaire's work shows Ophelia, in a tottering pose, standing beside the stream. Her breasts are bared and, as one critic has noted, Lemaire made Ophelia "leer with the glowering light of the vampire in her eyes, thus emphasizing the sexual origin of her madness — an aspect further accentuated by the very indecorous fashion in which her dress has slipped off her shoulders to reveal her breasts" (Dijkstra 1986, 44). Seth Lerer, in a more recent attempt to capture in words the disturbing effect of Lemaire's painting, talks colloquially about Ophelia's creepy eroticism" and likens her pose to "a kind of crazy Liberté — her breasts bare, her hair disheveled, her flowers falling out of her hands" (Lerer 2012, 18). She is a subversive figure, completely contrary to the norm presented by male artists (Cousseau 2001, 105-22), who generally chose to present Ophelia fully clothed (a painting by Léopold Burthe mentioned earlier in note 15, however, appears to have been a rare exception, as were the various depictions of Ophelia's death by Delacroix).

Although its eroticism is more contained than that portrayed by Lemaire, Bernhardt's sculpture of Ophelia is equally subversive in its departure from the norm. Rather than the disturbed and disturbing facial leer of Lemaire's Ophelia, Bernhardt's figure offers a romanticized image of unclothed female beauty in a state of ecstasy. While retaining the partial nudity of Delacroix's work, Bernhardt's representation instead makes no attempt to mirror the impact of Ophelia's dramatic fall into the water, what Judith Wechsler has described as a "body in torment" (Wechsler 2002, 213). This permits the state of ecstasy depicted in Bernhardt's Ophelia to be read as expressive of the erotically charged moment that a beautiful woman in a state of apparent serenity passes from life to death. It is this moment in time that Bernhardt's sculpture so tellingly captures. Her sculpture consequently makes a major contribution to a version of Ophelia that points directly towards the ongoing fascination with Ophelia among modern artists, but also towards the countless re-workings of images of the dead or dying Ophelia now so commonly to be found on internet video- and photo-sharing sites. Such web images, as I have discussed elsewhere (Young 2009), sustain the mythic relationship between water and femininity, and the intimate relationship between madness and femininity so often commented upon by feminist scholars. Many of the images also permit us, as do many earlier art works, to gaze at the vulnerability of Ophelia's youth and beauty, an often erotic process that in extreme cases invites comparison with the invitational pornographic images of young women now so ubiquitous elsewhere in the darker corners of the world wide web.

In the summer of 1881, Bernhardt gave her *Ophelia* to the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen in gratitude for the warmth and hospitality she had received when she first performed there in August 1880 (she subsequently made two further visits). The sculpture was received by the theater in June 1881 and was then put on display in the grand public foyer when this impressive room was inaugurated to celebrate the King's birthday on 8 April 1883. J. V. Dahlerup, one of the original 1874 building's architects, was responsible for both the foyer and the manner in which the sculpture was displayed. Today, Bernhardt's sculpture is still on view in its original location, and within its black and red velvet frame, it occupies a commanding position above the center fireplace (figure 15).¹⁷

Subsequent to the *Ophelia* that Bernhardt exhibited at the 1881 Salon, she appears to have created at least two more versions. One she exhibited in Chicago in the Women's Room at the Columbian Exposition in 1893 (Davenport 1893, 640; Elliot 1894, 273; see figure 16). Another was the subject of the photograph that Bernhardt included in her memoirs in 1907 (Bernhardt 1907a, opp. 328). A comparison of this photograph with photographs of the works exhibited in the 1881 Salon and the 1893 Chicago exhibition reveals differences in many small details. In 1885 at an auction in Vienna, "Mlle. Sarah Bernhardt's marble high relief, 'Ophelia,' which was in her exhibition in this country, brought 2,710 florins from an admirer of the actress" (Anonymous 1885, 189). The admiring purchaser is not named and the current whereabouts of the work is not known. It is just possible that this work, for which I have been unable to find a photograph, may have been that exhibited in Chicago, or it may have been yet a further version of what for Bernhardt was clearly a very successful sculptural subject. To my knowledge, no one has to date noticed that Bernhardt did more than one *Ophelia*. A third version can be seen in the photograph that Bernhardt chose to include in her 1907 memoirs (figure 17).

For the sculptor, the creation of such a work poses a considerable challenge. Not only must the finished work depict both the beauty and serenity of Ophelia, but the medium of marble must be made to yield the illusion of fluidity as the water moves around Ophelia and absorbs her body into its own element. That Bernhardt triumphed over these obstacles is a sign of her remarkable talent as a sculptor. Had she forsaken the stage completely and dedicated herself full time to sculpture, she might well have become as familiar a name as a sculptress as she is now as an actress.

Sarah Bernhardt's Stage Performance as Ophelia

Six years after completing her first version of her sculpture of Ophelia's death, Bernhardt in 1886 appeared at the Porte Saint-Martin Theatre in *Hamlet*, not as the protagonist but as Ophelia, a role that she had apparently long wanted to do. Remarkably, as she explained in

an interview in Paris, she had never seen anyone else in the part: "My Ophelia is my own conception. I have often wished to see a good Ophelia, Madame Terry, for instance, but lacked time and opportunity" (Anonymous 1886b, 1). In general, this production, with a specially commissioned new translation by Lucien Cressonnois and Charles Samson, was not a success, principally because the actor playing Hamlet (Philippe Garnier) was by all accounts quite unsuited to the role. Bernhardt's performance as Ophelia was generally, though by no means universally praised, particularly for her mad scenes and her chanting of her Valentine ballad (Roux 1886, 312; Anonymous 1886a, 274-75; Knight 1886, 195-97; Morlot 1886, 366-68; Anonymous 1886b, 1; Anonymous 1886c, 347; Anonymous 1886d, 9; Anonymous 1886e, 8). However, her audiences remained disappointed, and the production was soon abandoned (Huret 1899, 106; Verneuil 1942, 184-85; Aston 1989, 233). Plans to take the production to London were also dropped.

Several critics, however, noted an unexpected innovation introduced into the production by Bernhardt. In the graveyard scene, contrary to normal practice, Bernhardt had herself, as the dead Ophelia, brought on stage on a bier, thereby offering her audience yet another view of her as a corpse (Phelps 1890, 150-51; Sprague 1944, 173).¹⁸ Joseph Knight had a very mixed response to this. Following her departure from the mad scene and following what was normally the last that would have been seen of her, Bernhardt, contrary to normal stage practice, reappeared in person on stage. As Knight explained, "She is once more seen with her face rigid as marble, and her body, covered with flowers, carried on a bier to the churchyard" (Knight 1886, 197). He then goes on to suggest the advantage to Bernhardt that derived from this: "Its advantages are that it supplies a scene picturesque in itself, and that it introduces Ophelia in the last act, to the interest of which — at least, from the standpoint of the actress — it may be held to add." However, in the view of Knight, this startling departure from the customary use of a closed and untenanted coffin was "accompanied by drawbacks far more than compensatory." In the performance that Knight saw, there appears to have been no onstage grave:

Neither Laertes nor Hamlet can, according to stage directions, jump into the grave beside the corpse, or claim to "be buried with her quick." The short, fierce struggle of the two men begins across the corpse over which, at its outset, Laertes is bending . . . the mere irreverence of such a proceeding is in itself its condemnation. (Knight 1886, 197)

In having herself brought on stage in this way, Bernhardt was making an indirect allusion to Ophelia's song in act 4, scene 5, with its apparent reference to her father's funeral: "They bore him barefaced on the bier" (*Hamlet*, 4.5.163).¹⁹ At the same time her stage entry as a corpse gave literal rendering to the 1604 quarto text stage direction that calls for a "corse," rather than the "coffin"

named in the 1603 quarto and the 1623 folio texts. But principally, she thereby created yet one more opportunity to display herself as dead. Such a dramatic theatrical coup did not go unnoticed in theatrical circles. Within a year, Bernhardt's acting as the body of Ophelia was taken further when in late 1887, the Booth-Barrett production had the corpse brought in on a bier somewhat earlier in the play, during act 4, scene 7, while Gertrude is recounting the manner of Ophelia's death. The Booth 1890 promptbook has "4 guards . . . bring on bier carry down C & turn it setting it crosswise" (Shattuck 1969, 259). When the curtain fell at the end of the scene (act 4, scene 7), Laertes "throws himself on Ophelia's body" (Sprague 1944, 173). Mary Isabella Stone described another Booth production in which the drowned Ophelia was "Borne in upon a litter, her garlands hanging about her, her face slightly disfigured" (Stone 1990, 117). The practice then spread further, and it was not uncommon in late nineteenth-century productions to have Ophelia's newly-drowned body brought on stage, carried on a bier, and "damply plastered in her gown, or caught in a net covered in weeds and slime, her hair wetly streaming" (Rosenberg 1992, 822).

Early on, the innovative stage business introduced by Bernhardt provoked harsh criticism. When the British actor-manager F. R. (Frank) Benson followed Bernhardt a few years later and used his real Ophelia in the funeral scene, *The Athenaeum* (15 March, 1890) reacted harshly: "the depositing of the real Ophelia, in the presence of the audience, in the grave into which her brother jumps, we resent as little short of an offence" (Sprague 1944, 173; Young 2000, 262-63). Such criticism aside, the stage business introduced by Bernhardt, continued into the early years of the twentieth century. A photograph exists of Ernest Carpenter's 1909 production of *Hamlet* in London that shows the recently-drowned Ophelia (Hutin Britton) in act 4 with the grief-stricken Laertes leaning over her body, and in about 1916 the same stage business was still alive, according to one eyewitness, John Gielgud (Young 2000, 266).

The kind of negative criticism directed at Benson did not, however, do anything to deter Bernhardt from exploiting the apparent shock achieved by bringing back onstage the actress who had played Ophelia in act 4. In her famed 1899 production, in which she now played Hamlet, Bernhardt had her Ophelia (Marthe Mellot) carried in shoulder-high on a bier during the graveyard scene. She also employed "an elaborate procession of maids and monks, with flowers and music" quite contrary to the supposed "maimed rites" (5.1.202) referred to in Shakespeare's text (Hansen 1899, 470; Norris 1899, 22; Taranow 1996, 170). Though this use of stage spectacle, uncalled for in the text, was not an innovation (Henry Irving had done the same thing), in this instance it helped to highlight and prolong the exposure of Ophelia's body. A drawing by Alphonse Mucha (now in the Collection Rondel, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris), published in 1899 by *Le Figaro (Supplément Illustré)*, 20 May-6 June, 1899) and in *Revue Encyclopédique* (Paris: Libraire Larousse, 1899), 491,

records some of the details of this feature of Bernhardt's production (Taranow 1996, 230) (figure 18). It does not show the figures of Hamlet, Horatio, and the Gravedigger, concentrating instead upon the funeral procession. To the left, a robed figure holds up a large crucifix at the beginning of the procession. Other elaborately-robed clergy follow. Then comes Ophelia's bier, carried by hooded monks. Upon the bier is Ophelia's body, and there are flowers at her feet, a bouquet on either side of her, a small bouquet in her hands, and a large, circular floral arrangement at her head. Three young women follow the bier and strew flowers. Mucha, a close acquaintance of Bernhardt,²⁰ clearly understood her purpose at this moment in the production, turning a spotlight, as it were, upon the corpse rather than upon Hamlet's response to the approaching procession.

In Conclusion

Sarah Bernhardt occupied a unique position with regard to the nineteenth-century obsessive fascination with the erotic presentation of morbid sexuality that was central to the cult of Ophelia. Her contribution to this cult was twofold. First, with her sculpture she was able to make a particularly telling, widely viewed, and what I have described as "subversive" contribution as manifested within the visual arts. Second, as an actress, she made a significant and influential theatrical contribution when she had herself brought on stage as Ophelia's corpse in 1886 and had Marthe Mellot do the same thing in 1899. Such "representations of the dead Ophelia that originated in nineteenth-century theatrical and visual discourses initiated," as a number of critics have observed, "the modern necrosexual aesthetic, which came to constitute the 'essence' of the feminine subject and which continues to dominate twentieth-century visual culture" (Romanska 2005a, 47). As I have attempted to show, no better nineteenth-century examples of this aesthetic can be found than those created by the actress and sculptress, Sarah Bernhardt.

Notes

1. Bernhardt's creative life extended into more areas than I have so far mentioned. She was the author of a book for children, two novels, three plays, short stories, theater criticism, essays, a monograph on *L'Art du Théâtre (The Art of Theater)*, and, as already mentioned, a volume of memoirs. Toward the end of her life, she acted in a number of films and was a pioneer in exploring the new medium of film.
2. Bernhardt's early works included a plaster medallion of *La Gouvernante de Madame Gérard*, another of Madame Gérard, and another entitled *Edouard II*. There were also portrait busts of Mlle Emmy de —; and a young American, Miss Multon. Bernhardt's entry for the 1874 Salon was a portrait bust of a young woman (Paturot 1874, 67, 69, 76; Viadot 1883, 16), and for the 1875 Salon she submitted a bust of her sister Régina, who had recently died.

3. In 1878, for example, she exhibited portrait busts of Emile de Girardin and W. Busnach; in 1879 portrait busts of Mlle Hocquiguy and Louise Abbéma; in 1880 a self-portrait as a Sphinx-like inkwell; and in 1881 a portrait bust of M. Coquelin. Examples of sculptures from the later period of her life include a bronze entitled *Algue* in 1900; a bronze *Gentleman* in 1920; and a bronze head of her son Maurice Bernhardt in 1920. Relatively recently, these works were all offered at auction at various dates. See <http://artprice.com> [accessed 7 July 2012].
4. The building was designed by the architect Charles Garnier, and inaugurated by Bernhardt in 1879. Bernhardt's work was entitled *Le Chant*, a winged figure representing music. There was a matching sculpture by Doré entitled *La Danse* (Zuber 2005, 170).
5. The original plaster is untraced, and so is one of the two small marble versions. One of these appeared in the sale of her collection in 1923, possibly the same work that can now be seen in Washington, D.C. at the National Museum of Women in the Arts (the gift of Wallace and Wilhelmina Holladay). A bronze version was put up for auction at Sotheby's, New York, on 26 May 1994 (lot 47).
6. This bas-relief was offered at auction on 23 April 1997 by the company of Dronot Richelieu (Paris).
7. A painting by René Lelong, now in the Dahesh Museum of Art in Greenwich (Connecticut), depicts Gladstone conversing with Bernhardt in front of her *Après la Tempête* <http://www.daheshmuseum.org/portfolio/1166/gallery/paintings/>.
8. Alfred Stevens, a Belgian-born painter, was both a close friend and the initial mentor of Bernhardt's early work as a painter. From 1849 until his death in 1906, he worked in Paris. The studio referred to here is presumably that of Stevens in Paris. Stevens was renowned for his paintings of women, and he was responsible for a number of portraits of Bernhardt, including one depicting her as Marie Madeleine, cradling a skull (now in the Museum Voor Schone Kunsten in Ghent), and another in which she is the model for a woman in a bath, *Le Bain* (The Bath) (now in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris).
9. For pictures and skeptical discussions of Hamlet's grave and Ophelia's Spring, see Bronk 1899, 195-202; and Riis 1901, 388-98).
10. In addition, the photographer Paul Nadar was able to take a post mortem photograph of her in her bed (<http://morthouse.com/post/15724113902/this-portrait-is-actually-by-paul-nadar-still>).
11. See the cover of the Paris Magazine *Femina* (November 1913): <http://www.bridgemanartondemand.com/image/739598/french-school-sarah-bernhardt-in-a-play-staged-for-death-row-prisoners-at-a-french-prison-front-cover-of-femina-magazine-paris-november-1913>.

12. Romanska, making the same error that I had made in 2002 and believing that Bernhardt's *Ophelia* dates from 1890, juxtaposed photographic illustrations and argued that "Bernhardt stylized her bas-relief of Ophelia as *L'Inconnue*" (Romanska 2005a, 37; and Young 2002, 119). Concerning *L'Inconnue*, Sacherverell Sitwell once argued for a date in the late 1870s or early 1880s (Sitwell 1945, 315-17). Other commentators suggest a somewhat later date. See, for example, Anja Zeidler's web essay (Zeidler 2013).
13. "Skeleton, what hast thou done with thy soul? / Lamp, what hast thou done with thy flame? / Empty cage, what hast thou done with thy beautiful bird that used to sing? / Volcano, what hast thou done with thy lava? / What hast thou done with thy master, slave?" (Author's translation).
14. Bernhardt's performance in the dueling scene and Hamlet's subsequent death have been preserved in a 1900 film, available on YouTube at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mp_v_dP8s-8. Cf. Bernhardt's death scene in the film *Daniel* (1921).
15. The 1844 painting is now in the Oskar Reinhart Collection, Winterthur. Delacroix's other versions of the same subject consist of a virtual monochrome painting of 1838 now in the Pinakothek, Munich; a lithograph of 1843; and a painting of 1853 now in the Louvre (Johnson 1981, nos. 264, 282, 313). An examination of the provenance and history of these works suggests (though not conclusively) that Bernhardt was most likely to have seen the 1844 painting. For a discussion of some examples of other nineteenth-century representations of dead women, see Young 2002, 337.
16. See the image at http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/search/commentaire/commentaire_id/ophelie-369.html?no_cache=1&cHash=9678851fa5.
17. I am indebted to Niels Peder Jørgensen (Forskningsbibliotekar, mag.art., Det Kongelige Teaters Arkiv Bibliotek) for sending me photographs of the theater foyer and of Bernhardt's *Ophelia*.
18. It should be noted in passing, however, that twenty years earlier, *The Athenaeum* had had no such qualms when reviewing the reading of *Hamlet* in St. George's Hall by an English clergyman, J. C. M. Bellows, the father of the actor Kyrle Bellew. The reading was accompanied by a background miming of scenes from the play. Of Ophelia's funeral, the reviewer said: "In the burial of Ophelia, Mr. Bellew has introduced some improvements. The modern coffin is done away with, and Ophelia is borne to the grave upon an open bier, such as was used in Anglo-Saxon periods" (Anonymous 1870, 237). Bernhardt's innovation within a full theater performance was thus not quite the unprecedented novelty that it might have first seemed.
19. All citations from *Hamlet* are to the *The Norton Shakespeare* (1997).
20. Mucha worked closely with Bernhardt during much of her theatrical career. He was responsible for the still frequently reproduced series of posters depicting her in her principal roles. At the

base of the 1899 poster depicting Bernhardt as Hamlet, Mucha included an image of Ophelia on her back

Permissions

Figure 1. Sarah Bernhardt Working on her Sculpture of Medea. (Photograph by Melandri, c. 1875). Photograph in Bernhardt, *Memories* 1907, opp. page 288.

Figure 2. Sarah Bernhardt, *Après la Tempête*, 1876. Bronze. Photograph courtesy of Sotheby's, Inc. © 1994.

Figure 3. Sarah Bernhardt Painting. (Photograph by Melandri, c. 1875). Photograph in Bernhardt, *Memories* 1907, opp. page 280.

Figure 4. Sarah Bernhardt, *Death of Ophelia*, 1880. (Marble bas-relief. Royal Theatre, Copenhagen). Photograph courtesy of Royal Theatre, Copenhagen.

Figure 5. Sarah Bernhardt in her Coffin. (Photograph by Melandri, ca. 1880). Photograph in Bernhardt, *Memories* 1907, opp. page 270.

Figure 6. Skull presented to Sarah Bernhardt by Victor Hugo following her successful performance in *Hernani*, ca. 1877. Photograph in Bernhardt, *Memories* 1907, opp. page 248.

Figure 7. One of a number of photographs of Bernhardt as Hamlet holding Yorick's skull. (Photograph by James Lafayette, 1899). Courtesy of Library of Congress (LC-USZC4-6529).

Figure 8. John Everett Millais, *Ophelia*, 1851-2. Oil on canvas. Tate Gallery, London. Photograph Wikipedia Commons, PD-Art.

Figure 9. Georges Clairin, Portrait of Sarah Bernhardt, 1876. Oil on canvas. Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Paris. Photograph © Petit Palais/Roger-Viollet/The Image Works.

Figure 10. Eugène Delacroix, *Death of Ophelia*, 1844. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of Collection Oskar Reinhart (Am Römerholz), Winterthur.

Figure 11. James Bertrand, *Mort d'Ophélie*, 1872. Oil on canvas. Current location unknown. Photograph courtesy of Whitford Fine Art, London.

Figure 12. Auguste Préault, *Ophélie*, 1876. Bronze bas-relief after a plaster original of 1842. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY.

Figure 13. Georges Clairin, Portrait of Sarah Bernhardt as the Queen in *Ruy Blas*, 1879. Oil on canvas. Bibliothèque de la Comédie Française, Paris. By permission of Erich Lessing Kunst- und Kulturearchiv, Vienna.

Figure 14. Madeleine Lemaire, *Ophélie*, c. 1880s. Photogravure of now lost painting. Brewer, *Character Sketches* 1892, Vol.3, after 126.

Figure 15. Foyer, Royal Theatre, Copenhagen. Completed 1883. Bernhardt's *Ophelia* was placed above the central fireplace. Photograph courtesy of Royal Theatre, Copenhagen.

Figure 16. Sarah Bernhardt, *Death of Ophelia*, c. 1893. Marble bas-relief. Exhibited in Chicago in 1893. Present location unknown. Photograph from Elliot 1894, 273.

Figure 17. Sarah Bernhardt, *Death of Ophelia*, date unknown. Marble bas-relief. Photograph from Bernhardt, *Memories* 1907, opp. page 258.

Figure 18. Alphonse Mucha, Sketch depicting Ophelia's funeral, 1899. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Collection Rondel, Paris. Reproduced in *Revue Encyclopédique* (Paris: Libraire Larousse, 1899), p. 491.

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