

# Intersemiotic Intermezzo: The Blended Afterlives of Shakespearean Figures in Anime and Manga

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## Abstract

The present article focuses on two direct citations of Ophelia—in *Claymore* and *Ergo Proxy*—and extends the analysis to iterations of Shakespearean figures in *The Ancient Magus' Bride*, to propose an approach to analyzing “episodic” adaptations of literary text in popular media forms. I argue that these intertextual moments, like dramatic *intermezzo*, develop characterization in the larger original narrative that frames it, even when those stories are not wholly adaptations of the literary work.

While these anime and manga selections are not strictly adaptations, the intericonic references found in them extend both the surface recognition and the narrative afterlife of the Ophelia figure. Even as “filler” episodes or arcs, the intericonic references to one or multiple Shakespearean texts tend to recast or consolidate relations among central characters in each series. As such, the Shakespearean moment can be read as creative reinterpretations of multiple “Shakespearean” sources, and a point of re-engaging overarching themes of selfhood, madness, and transformation—themes which are central to the serial narratives.



The figure of Ophelia, particularly her drowning as depicted in John Everett Millais' painting, has been widely adapted across cultures and media. This article examines how Ophelia's iconic imagery and thematic elements are reimagined in Japanese anime and manga, focusing on *Claymore*, *Ergo Proxy*, and *The Ancient Magus' Bride*. Through intertextual and intericonic references, these works explore themes of selfhood, madness, and transformation, demonstrating how Shakespearean figures can be creatively reinterpreted.

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Gertrude's description proposes a tableau that at once beautifies and attempts to lend a pastoral note to Ophelia's death.

When down her weedy trophies and herself  
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide  
And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up;  
Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,  
As one incapable of her own distress,  
Or like a creature native and indued (180)  
Unto that element; but long it could not be  
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,  
Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay  
To muddy death.<sup>1</sup>

For six lines Ophelia is half submerged, mermaid-like, singing. Tara Pedersen describes how Ophelia's death is reimagined by Gertrude as "not simply as a desperate suicide, but also as a situation

in which a young woman simultaneously *succumbs to* and *finds a home* in the water that surrounds her”.<sup>2</sup>

Millais stages the drowning in a similar way, but compressed into a single moment. What Pedersen suggests for Gertrude’s lines can be applied to Millais’s painting: the image does not limit itself to a depiction of the event of a character’s death; instead it “charts a landscape and an ecology in which Ophelia’s character takes shape and which, in turn, is formed in its relationship to her”.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 1. Millais, John Everett. Ophelia. 1851–52.  
Oil on canvas. Tate Britain, London.

While it is by no means the only depiction of Ophelia’s drowning, Millais’ distillation of this moment continues to be one of the most recognizable depictions of Ophelia in popular culture. This image reappears across media forms in Japanese popular culture, sometimes as straightforward citations and at times as parody.<sup>4</sup> The

figure and its interpretations has been traced in depth by Honda Masuko, in *Ofiria no Keifu*.<sup>5</sup>

The present article focuses on two direct citations of Ophelia—in *Claymore*<sup>6</sup> and *Ergo Proxy*<sup>7</sup>—and extends the analysis to iterations of Shakespearean figures in *The Ancient Magus Bride*,<sup>8</sup> to highlight a proposed approach to analyzing “episodic” adaptations of literary text in popular media forms. I argue that these intertextual moments, like dramatic *intermezzo*, develop characterization in the larger original narrative that frames it, even when those stories are not wholly adaptations of the literary work. This is premised on the polysystemic tendencies of *ho’nan*<sup>9</sup> and on the effects of blended character figuration, understood here as creative re-combinations that allow creators to recast figures meaningfully in new stories.

Furthermore, this article reiterates intericonicity at work across intermedia renditions of Shakespeare. Fidelity to a source text matters little when visual forms refer to each other, so that the discussion of the textual work is often only “revisited” through audience engagement, including academic studies like this. To analyze reconfigurations by way of intersemiosis, I emphasize how visual citations in anime and manga reiterate thematic and narratological tensions that attend specific figures in their source contexts and, perhaps more importantly, in the target texts and new intermedia contexts of retelling.

Neither *Claymore* nor *Ergo Proxy* is a direct adaptation of *Hamlet*, but they make use of the name Ophelia and reprise this specific image of her. In *The Ancient Magus Bride*, Titania and Oberon

make an appearance, accompanied by a handful of narrative and visual references to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. But the sleeping girl they visit is neither Ophelia nor Hermia. In fact, figures in the target texts are the hybrid, often simultaneously fragile and monstrous—part-human, part-something else—and in the episodes where intertextual links to the Shakespearean work are most visible, there the complexity of their respective “awakenings” joins the long conversation about Shakespeare’s immortal, if sometimes dead, icons.

Pedersen proposes that readers adopt, like Gertrude, an “open-ended practice,” choosing “to read the uncertainty of this scene as a moment of promising multiplicity or of vacuous ambiguity.”<sup>10</sup> This becomes even more important as the figure of Ophelia crosses over to other media. In intersemiotic transfer, elements from the source text are transmuted and, like Ophelia of line 177, some are borne up in the target text while other aspects recede.

Given the semiotic pool formed around Ophelia’s figure, and the temptation of reading into each motif, we may draw our focus to one element. It is a motif less apparent in the verbal form but indispensable to the visual representation. It is *the* element, glassy, arranging itself into a stream or brook, which weeps and muddies in turn; it is *the* drink. Visually, water is rendered at various transparencies: at times transparent, at others almost opaque and reflective.. In visual media, the presence of water in Ophelia-scenes can hardly be ignored: it is the medium into which the woman sinks, the weapon for [self-]murder. It is the poison that she drinks and that finally silences her song.

The watery surface as a mirror also proposes possible doublings, possible duplicities, and depths kept in darkness. Although Ophelia's clothes both bear her up and pull her down, it is the water that bisects her as a figure. Visible at the surface are the signs of her being a maiden, if a disheveled one: her features—face and hair, perhaps her breasts or a dainty hand—and her costume float awhile, and these are the features that make her recognizable. The rest is hinted at, hidden by water, and is represented as water into which human features dissolve. If Gertrude offers “the opportunity to view Ophelia as the very emblem of the unknown to which Hamlet refers,”<sup>11</sup> then it is water that mediates—that holds the place, as a placeholder—for that unknown part.

This Ophelia figure is thus hybrid, part human, part something else. That something else could be a stereotypical aspect, her “feminine” nature: if to be human is to be enculturated, then the culture and politics of Elsinore is where Ophelia is outside her element. That else could be an object: *object d’art* and of the gaze, “painted” and “colored,” overdetermined. It could also be flora, another gendered thing, plucked and scattered. Also a corpse, already dead but still alive in the telling. Some audiences perceive depths to her—psychological, cultural, ideological—where others ascribe none—that she is all surface, spectacle, symbol. What is transposable in Ophelia is her divided character, and this much is proposed by the text, as when Claudius remarks: “poor Ophelia / Divided from herself and her fair judgment / Without the which we are pictures or mere beasts...”<sup>12</sup> Confronted with bifurcation as madness, Ophelia seems

only part-guilty of her own demise, and questions of both intent and autonomy arise as she is taken back into society to be buried and also to be analyzed.

Ophelia, as much as Hamlet himself, dramatizes the “gap between an ordered world of shared symbolic meanings and the murky world of intrigue and mental disorder that exists” so that iconographic allusions in *Hamlet* tend to demonstrate “the difficulty of agreeing about even the most common tropes (on which emblems were often based).”<sup>13</sup> It is Ophelia who performs this incongruity and resistance to interpretation *par excellence*. What then can be said of other instances of Ophelia?

To consider Ophelia as a water-nymph emphasizes the paradox of her doing nothing to save herself from drowning. How could, after all, a mermaid drown? As her *landscape* partly constructs her, it is in dissolving her in water that those determinations are partly unmade. Suspended between lines 176 and 178, the adaptability of her figure is revealed. The Ophelia figure is one thing on the surface, possibly another underneath. That surface is transposable, easily shareable among texts, and subjected to a formal comparison and quick equivalences; but underlying meanings can only be gotten after a bit of a dive.

### ***Hybrid at the Navel***

The difficulty of analyzing—i.e., further dividing—Ophelia lies not only in her character but in the nature of characters themselves.

By definition, “the word *character* designates a human or human-like individual,” which also implies that “the concept is less amenable to a formulaic or mechanical approach.”<sup>14</sup> Prior even to discussing notions of personhood opened up in *Hamlet*, the difficulty of theorizing characters in general lies in the ontological questions that arise from this literary element’s relation, or resemblance, to humans.

Murray Smith describes character as “crucial to the rhetorical and aesthetic effects of both narrative and performance texts because they engage receivers’ imaginations through what [Smith] calls recognition, alignment, and allegiance.”<sup>15</sup> While a character like Ophelia may function emblematically, it does not prevent audiences from assigning human depths—psychological depth, but also a temporal phenomenological depth, i.e., a “backstory”—to her. Most of all, it does not keep them from *relating to her*, that is, finding a bit of themselves in her or vice versa, and finding her in others.

Characters are “devices in the communication of meaning and serve purposes other than the communication of facts of the storyworld as well.”<sup>16</sup> One such purpose is the characters’ embodiment of or being determined by a central theme or idea. These symbolic trappings may be carried over and are likely to be culturally reworked when a literary figure is adapted.

This is why, while it is given that adaptations borrow and recontextualize characters, it is helpful to view those characters as *blended*, as opposed to either being unique or unified. The view that it is the *redistribution of narratological functions*, rather than *preservation of clear equivalences*, allows a better exploration of how

the structure of a source narrative is adapted in the target text. That is, beyond character names and archetypes, aspects such as actions, roles, positions of characters, when re-assigned, become identifiable as meaningful units of a particular narrative, which in turn affects how themes take shape around them in new stories.

The dynamic structuralism allowed by blending is especially suited to the analysis of characters in adaptations. This is not only because of its ability “to provide compressions to human scale”<sup>17</sup>—which already describes the aspect of character that *embodies* a concept—but also because blending as a theoretical approach “makes us better at describing just how new meanings can be creatively constructed out of the existing knowledge structures.”<sup>18</sup> Blending is not strictly structuralist in that meaning is not reduced definitively; rather, it aids in compressing and explaining the “multiplicity of possible interpretations, while maintaining a very clear view of how the forms inspire the meanings”.<sup>19</sup> What this approach seeks to avert are rigid structuralist interpretations and recourse to strict formulae, without denying the importance of both in the discussion and comparison of stories. This is achieved by allowing innovative or provisional links between characters, constructed in the moment of analysis. Dissolution is assumed, rather than one-to-one correspondences between characters, and this dispersal affords a more complex reading of both the functions of characters and the structure of the narratives in question.

Beyond the character unit, the larger narrative can also be blended. Each series signals its polysystem of referents: *Ergo Proxy*,

for example, features non-human characters with the names Kristeva, Deleuze, and Guattari, pointing to psychoanalytical intertexts and suggesting that the selection of referential figures can go beyond picking up popular literary names from a database. Both *Ergo Proxy* and *Claymore* have episodes dedicated to adapting Ophelia, and these short “arcs” arguably impact the storyworld as a whole, given that neither series is in fact “episodic” in the narratological sense of the term.

Likewise, none of the works can be considered *direct* adaptations of Shakespeare, but they can be read or reviewed as *ho‘nanmono*—the “adaptational” product that better accommodates polysystemic phenomena, especially given how these Japanese popular texts are built loosely on appropriations of multiple exotically “occidental” fantasy narratives, in the tradition of modes of domestication of European narratives in the Late Meiji period.

*The Ancient Magus’ Bride*, for example, clearly has multiple literary sources. Apart from Shakespeare, story arcs feature the lore of H.P. Lovecraft. Yet, there is no contention that Yamazaki Kore’s work is an original story of its own, no matter the number of fantasy intertexts it accumulates. Nonetheless, encountering this text, whether in manga or anime form, with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in mind can lead to a “recasting” of those intertextual relations through specific equivalences proposed by juxtaposition to the Shakespearean text.

The intericonic—visual and figurative—as well as thematic references to Shakespeare’s comedy may resonate even through

episodes where it is arguably absent. The figuration of the titular magus, Elias Ainsworth, with his skull head reminiscent of a Welsh *Mari Lwyd*, can then be reviewed as a connection to Nick Bottom with an ass's head. This remains true even if there is a donkey in the scene. The titular bride, Chise, a Japanese girl who turns out to be a human Sleih Beggey, a loose take on the Manx fantasy creature, could be read as Hermia or Thisbe or Titania. The connection is possible even after, or because Titania comes riding in, a character separate from Chise, mounted on the aforementioned donkey that is neither Elias nor Nick Bottom, because in this story Chise is the “mistress who with a monster is in love”.



Figure 2. Ancient Magus Bride, Chapter 8 “The Faerie Queen”

This multiplicity of equivalences is welcome, even if it is sometimes limited to an arc or episode, like a metareferential intermezzo or the interpretative insinuations made by a play in a play in a play. While the composite nature of characters is not a new idea, this approach also allows the momentary exclusion of other aspects of a character's composition, including other sources from which that character is adapted, without negating those alternative correspondences.

Lastly, this framework allows us to consider intericonicity, the sort of intersemiotic transfer or translation that occurs between pictorial forms without necessarily passing through verbal expression.<sup>20</sup> In Barbara Dancygier's formulation of such critical practice, she notes how it

...treats language expressions (but also visual images, sounds, gestures, and all other meaningful forms of human expression) as prompts which the human mind uses in an act of meaning construction and comprehension. The central assumption, rather than a corollary, is, then, that meaning is best described as dynamically constructed in a mental process which is by definition creative and imaginative.<sup>21</sup>

While Dancygier still puts *other* modes of expression in parentheses, Kourdis and Yoka, in theorizing intersemiotic translation "unmediated by language," highlight that images are already carriers of meaning and thus can be translated directly into other images.

With the exception of the name "Ophelia," after all, it is by such an intericonic relation that both *Claymore* and *Ergo Proxy*, on the

surface, allude “simply” to Millais’ painting. Both anime series feature—in one episode each and for a few frames more than the painting—a direct intericonic adaptation of the figure of drowned Ophelia. This is especially true in *Ergo Proxy*, where the posture of the hands and the weeds on the bank make a reappearance.

Note that in *Ergo Proxy*, the name Ophelia is mainly *seen* as a store logo. No character actually goes by that name. Audiences only recognize *that* Ophelia at the sight of the drowned girl. But the character, Re-L, is not necessarily *an* Ophelia figure. I argue that Re-L may well be the Hamlet in this story of doubles and reversals, though it is Re-L’s female form that lends itself emblematically to the echoing of Millais’ painting. Her visual citation denotes the intentionality behind borrowing the name “Ophelia” and leads the familiar viewer to expect further references, using Millais as short-circuit, to *Hamlet*.



Figure 3. *Ergo Proxy*. Episode 14: *Ophelia*

Visual allusion is the starting point, the maiden parts displayed on the surface: it is enough to signal that there is referencing at work. But images in visual narratives are not inconsequential even when they are emblematic. In relation to intersemiosis between artworks, particularly in painting, Lotman describes two tendencies: “One relies on repeating something that is already familiar; the other is interested in creating something new.”<sup>22</sup> This notion is already central to adaptation: the difference between repetition and variation is subjectively measurable through familiarity.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, the popularity of the figuration of Ophelia can be what audiences recognize first, in order to recognize and confirm that the name Ophelia is not just any name but *that* Ophelia from *Hamlet* and, perhaps, all that she may embody.

Like Ophelia in *Hamlet*, the importance of the quoted image may seem “emblematic rather than consequential,”<sup>24</sup> especially when severed from its narrative context. But by dint of being borrowed, the image is already doubly riddled: it is meaningful to both the source text/image/narrative and to the target text/image/narrative. Returned to their respective streams, I argue that *Claymore*, *Ergo Proxy*, and *The Ancient Magus Bride* go beyond visual allusion and tackle—at length—the discourses of selfhood, madness, and suicide that are worked out in *Hamlet*.

Whether they inherit these concerns *solely* from *Hamlet* is unlikely: *Hamlet* is only one in the polysystem of references assembled around each work. What is important here is how they deploy *Hamlet*—through Ophelia—when they do, and how this story

arc then contributes to the larger narrative by way of its elements. Why do the primary characters encounter the Ophelia figure this way, why here, why now?

### ***Awakening and Misrecognition, in that order***

*Ergo Proxy* and *Claymore* both cultivate metaphors of character “awakening.” This is not limited to “Ophelia arcs” or episodes of the series. In both storyworlds, there are multiple characters that transition from obedient naiveté into powerful and possibly monstrous forms. The most important of these are denoted in *Claymore* as “Awakened Being” and in *Ergo Proxy* as “Proxy”. In the relevant episodes, these metaphors manifest diegetically in the motifs of reflection and mirroring, particularly in water.

In *Claymore*, “Rippling Ophelia” is bloodthirsty and violent, longing to avenge the self-sacrificial death of her brother. She eventually “awakens”—turning into the sort of monster she detests—and asks the protagonist, Clare, to slay her.

In *Ergo Proxy*, Ophelia is a dystopic domed city visited by the main characters. Ophelia is an empty city with a lake at its heart, where the only resident is a “Proxy” that takes on the appearance of others in order to become the recipient of another’s love.

Ophelia’s figuration extends to the narratives of the said characters in that their concerns revolve around self-awareness or its lack, the obscuring of selfhood through physical “pretensions,” and

the loneliness of life after the death of loved ones, leading to the desire to share in a common, watery grave.

*Claymore's* Ophelia is a portrait of skewed motivation, internalized violence, and a lack of self-awareness. She is spiteful of the weak, but also of those who try to defend the weak. It eventually surfaces that this is a projection upon her deceased brother, who had died defending her from Priscilla, a Claymore that became an Awakened Being. Her motivation is thus to kill monsters, and she does so by matching them in strength and violence. But she also uses her power as a Claymore to kill humans and fellow Claymore, claiming that as long as she does not report her own crimes and kills all witnesses, then there is no limit to what she can get away with. The irony lies in that she is already the monster she hates, even before she awakens and physically becomes one. It is only defeat and death that allow her some introspection.

This irony is played out when Ophelia experiences her first defeat, after which she falls into a state of desperation and awakens as a serpentine monster, a transformation that she, in her madness, does not notice. When Clare finds her again in the forest, she speaks in a self-contradictory manner: she is hungry for human innards but claims she would not eat humans because that is something only monsters do. It is only when the battle moves to a lake that she is made to confront her own awakening: she sees herself reflected in the glassy water while she is trying to drown Clare. On land, in the forest where the battle begins, she is not afforded this self-awareness. Ophelia focuses on Clare and is utterly blind to her own form. In the

water, however, when she encounters her reflection, she is forced to re-evaluate her relation to herself and to Clare. Ophelia even dives into her reflection to pursue it and finds, underwater, only Clare—the person whom she had wanted to force into awakening and whom she had wanted to destroy. This is when Ophelia starts to falter because her hatred for Awakened Claymore is absolute and now extends to herself.

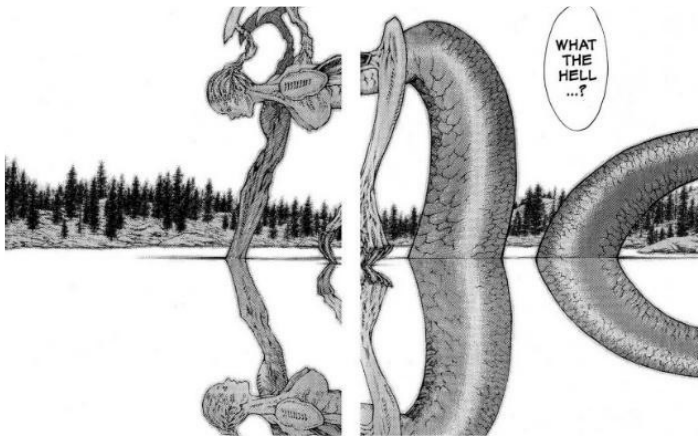


Figure 4. Ophelia belatedly discovers her monstrous form.  
*Claymore* vol. 8

It is a fitting reminder that the Ophelia figure can be half Ophelia, half something else. When *Claymore*'s Ophelia moves all that remains human in her to the tip of her own tail, she becomes a creature with two torsos. It also means that all that is human in her is what is finally capable of introspection. By isolating the human from

the monster, she begins to reconsider her own story, her brother's story, and Clare's story thus far. It is—as various English translations propose—both her “weak” and her “vital” point.

In the end, her full, and indeed feminine, iconicity is restored: she floats nude and hair loose—she had always worn it braided—suddenly pure in her childlike comprehension.



Figure 5. Sanazami or “Rippling” Ophelia, *Claymore* ep. 14

In *Ergo Proxy*, the three main protagonists, Vincent, Re-L, and Pino, take a rest-stop at an identified dome. They spend their time in a grocery store with the sign “Ophelia,” where they rest and collect supplies to restock their air ship. What ought to have been a reprieve from an arduous journey becomes a confusing adventure when a nameless Proxy—which I call Ophelia Proxy for clarity, just as the city is metonymically the Ophelia dome—starts creating doubles for each person in the company. These doppelgängers try to convince each of the members of the group to stay a little longer, soliciting their

affection. It tries to invite them to stay permanently, too, tempting them to join all the previous inhabitants of that city in a watery grave at the heart of the conical city.

When it discovers that Vincent is Ergo Proxy (generally considered an agent of death), it attempts to seduce him into a double suicide; it claims to want nothing more than to end itself, and in finally encountering another powerful Proxy, suggests that the best thing for both of them is to disappear together.

The action in the episode is quite convoluted as the plot does not follow linear time, the characters are doubled, and some scenes are hallucinatory—that is, seen from under the lake water. Scenes such as Re-L floating in the lake *ala* Millais' *Ophelia* are repeated several times: once she is deposited there by the Ophelia-Vincent, another time the real Vincent finds her and attempts to rescue her, but she turns out to be the Ophelia-Re-L and pulls him down into the water (a siren, or Ophelia as bait).

It is underwater that the Ophelia Proxy narrates itself to Vincent, verbally and visually, revealing to him its motivations and inviting him to commit double suicide. When he refuses, it attempts to trap Vincent in a loop where he rises from the lake to find Re-L, who tells him that she is abandoning him. At least once, he gives in to violence, strangling Re-L and then “realizing” that she could be the real Re-L.

Arguably a “filler episode”—i.e., of questionable consequentiality to the series—the stop at the Ophelia dome consolidates the pseudo-familial relations among the three

characters, Vincent, Re-L, and Pino, who otherwise seem thrown together by circumstance. Its ending, which is shown at the beginning of the episode, of sailing away from this new misadventure alive and well is challenged narratologically by the possibility that two of the characters have sailed away with a double, in effect abandoning the “real” person at the dome.

There is a high level of discernment required of each character: can the main characters recognize their allies? For example, the clearest way to distinguish between the two Vincents—Re-L reveals at the end of the episode—is that the fake Vincent had no reflection in water. Pino’s strategies are less obvious, perhaps because she is both a self-aware android (an *autoreiv* infected by the *cogito* virus, and in that sense awakened) and a child, but she not only observes that there are two Vincents and two Re-Ls, she could tell when she is interacting with one or the other. Indeed, as the Ophelia Proxy realizes that neither Pino nor Re-L fall for its antics, it turns its attention solely to Vincent who, it is convinced, shares its own circumstances as a Proxy, and thus possibly its own insecurities and desires. Here is the Ophelia Proxy’s soliloquy, for which it uses Vincent’s voice:

I found if I pretended to be someone else, I could be loved. But after a while I realized, the person they loved wasn't me. I am no one. Therefore I am loved by no one. And so I decided to end myself. But even if we want to end ourselves, we can't. So we ended the others. For in them we found reflections of ourselves.... I'm afraid of being alone. I'm afraid of not knowing what I am. But worse, I'm afraid of finding out.<sup>25</sup>

At this point of the story, the main characters already know that Vincent turns into the titular Proxy, but it is not clear why and what it implies about Vincent's personhood. The aim of this particular journey—in the middle of which they make several episodic stopovers—is precisely to find answers to those questions. Vincent, after all, is only partly awakened: early in the series he is often depicted as having his eyes closed (or so narrow as to seem closed) so that it becomes meaningful to note when he is depicted with his eyes open.

### ***Antagonism for the Intermezzo***

There is an additional commonality here that is not typical of Ophelia figures: in both stories these characters are antagonists. Their villainy may be questionable, but both iterations thwart rather than aid the main characters in their larger quests. These Ophelia stories present the part of the hero's ordeal where he must face himself, his double or shadow, or else succumb and "skip to the end of the story" then and there. Both Ophelia figures thus function, as in a formulaic adventure quest, as foils to the respective protagonists' will to live, particularly *their will to live for others*.

In *Claymore*, the narrative's rhetoric revolves around the protagonist giving up or finding motivation, and investigates the notion that warriors such as Clare refuse to die because they have something to protect.

Through Ophelia it presents the alternative proposal: to die in the act of protecting another. Ophelia, as a fellow Claymore warrior, ought to have been Clare's ally, not her tormentor. But she immediately hunts Clare for sport, amused that the latter travels with a human boy, Raki. Encountering Ophelia requires Clare to part ways with Raki, but also to strive to be a better warrior with the help of an unlikely mentor, Irene, a survivor/defector from a previous generation of Claymore. She has to find a way to defeat Ophelia's "rippling" sword technique, but also to resist Ophelia's offer that Clare could simply die defending Raki or, indeed, her principles.

Ophelia's appearance requires Clare to re-evaluate her own "family-ties." This conflict brings to light how things stand with Raki, who wants to protect Clare, but generally fills the role of Clare's apprentice, sidekick, little brother, and potential love interest. He is also, as other warriors who see Clare travelling with him would argue, her burden—her adoptee.

This relationship recalls Clare's past relationship with her own mentor, model, big sister, and potential love interest, Teresa, whose death has been blamed on Clare because Teresa had adopted Clare and was "weakened" by this affection for and need to protect a human child.

Finally, Ophelia's entrance into the narrative leads directly to Clare's renewed relationship with Irene, enemy-turned-mentor, who offers to train Clare so she can defeat Ophelia, and finally offers Clare her remaining arm in a selfless gesture.

This three-stroke parallelism requires but one narrative mirror: Ophelia lost her older brother, because he distracted the awakened monster—the same enemy that killed Teresa—so that young Ophelia could run away. In his blended role of Polonius/Leartes, father/mentor/brother, and analog to Teresa-Irene/Raki, the death of Ophelia's older brother defines her primary understanding of violence and marks her protracted descent into madness and desperation. He fails as a role model because he dies without making her understand what role she ought to play in a perverse and violent world.

While Clare is surrounded by supportive characters who have made sacrifices for her, who become her models and who literally become a part of her,<sup>26</sup> and now has Raki to whom she can pay those favors forward, Ophelia's monstrosity lies in her lack of comprehension for why her brother willingly died for her and the irony of her wanting vengeance for a selfless act made for her sake.

This is how *Claymore's* Ophelia is incapable of her own distress. She experiences a violent loss and never quite understands why her loved one died, so she dispenses violence herself, based on contradictory principles. She then falls into her own trap, becoming the thing she despises most, and only in death understands the death of her beloved brother.

With Clare in the role of Hamlet—the central character whose struggle is reflected or refracted emblematically unto Ophelia—the addition of this antagonistic role then contributes to the notion that the Ophelia figure doubles Hamlet's development as a character.

Following the argument<sup>27</sup> that both Hamlet and Ophelia are present for “To be or not to be,” we can imagine this relation as twin trajectories as each character plays out the ideas in the supposed soliloquy in the ways available to each of them in turn.

This doubling is just as apparent in *Ergo Proxy*, where the Ophelia proxy spends a majority of the episode serving as a double to Vincent, though it also copies Re-L. While the relation between Vincent and Re-L is increasingly romantic and may present a viable equivalence to Ophelia and Hamlet, Re-L is the more likely Hamlet figure.

In this episode, when the Ophelia Proxy attempts to drive Vincent to despair, it involves Re-L threatening to leave Vincent behind. What is of interest here is that the confrontation between the two Proxies—the two “monstrous” beings—are played out as a conversation between two Vincents, not between Vincent and Re-L.

The Ophelia Proxy does use a heterosexual example to illustrate its failure to gain the affection of another, but even this seems to be reliant on its approximation of Vincent’s desires more than its own. More importantly, the Ophelia Proxy misreads the relations among the three characters several times. Again, while the company of Re-L, Vincent, and Pino looks like the makings of a nuclear family: this is not how relations actually stand. Re-L is the authority figure, she calls the shots, has the gun, and—while the gender dynamics here are even more complex if we consider the series as a whole—for now, it is enough to mention that Re-L thinks Vincent is weak and womanish.

The Ophelia Proxy's trump over Vincent was precisely the unrealized potential for power: *being* a Proxy. It considers Vincent the weakest link, most likely to fall with the envious branch. This is why it is Vincent that the Proxy finally attempts to drown, and does so by showing him his own figure.

If this case is strange, if only because the duplication of bodies is also accompanied by a duplication of narratives and narratological devices. The ending, also seen twice, presents Vincent steering the airship while nursing a cold, presumably from staying submerged in the lake too long. Both Re-L and Pino, both of whom do not fall for the doubling as easily, appear to be themselves. Re-L coldly reassures Vincent that all it took for her to recognize him was to face the real him. What it took, from Vincent's perspective, was also to recognize that he was not *like* the Ophelia Proxy: that while he bore the same fears, he wished to pursue the truth behind his being a Proxy and had, in Re-L and Pino, people who recognize—and possibly love—him for himself despite his own lack of certainty about his identity.

The solution to not drowning, according to this episode, seems simple enough: get away from the water!

This last turn is important as it also makes Ophelia, on the one hand, a mythic siren who attempts to drown others, and on the other, an antagonist defeated when she drowns in "her own element." Ophelia Proxy is trapped in a self-defeating cycle where it slays everyone except the one being it wants to get rid of, itself. More importantly, it fails to bait Vincent to one last double suicide, even

though it manages to bait him into entering the water to save Re-L from drowning.

It can be argued that both antagonists conduct a misreading: they take the protagonists at face value and judge their strengths by what they find on the surface. Both attempt to reflect that image back, but in fact the image—or the antagonist—fails to comprehend the other. It is thus that the Ophelia figure is still drawn here as a *negative* image, but a productive one to revisit, because against it is juxtaposed not only Hamlet, but other possible Ophelias as well, each in their own moments suspended, only determined in part.

### ***A Habit of Misreading: Elias as Ophelia***

To read *The Ancient Magus' Bride* as Shakespearean requires beginning at the intermezzo, where it is most apparent: in episode 6, Chise Hatori awakens in the forests of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This episode, entitled “The Faerie Queen,” is a lull between two dangerous adventures and provides a moment for considering some intriguing character blends for the story as a whole.

Chise is unconscious when the scene begins. Titania’s reposing image, often the scene of her waking after being “dreaming she had been enamored of an ass,” is given instead to Chise. But the reference to Shakespeare is not confirmed until Titania arrives, riding a white donkey, and is hailed as *Yōsei no joō*.<sup>28</sup>

Oberon, appears soon after: he is a fawn, indicating figural and functional character blend with Puck.

Given that the conflict in the comedy is motivated by Oberon and Puck's conspiring to steal a human child that Titania has taken to foster, it seems fitting that, in *The Ancient Magus' Bride*, Oberon and Puck have coalesced into one character, half fairy king, half troublemaker, and still husband of the Fairy Queen. This is that moment of blending: characters amalgamating into each other, merging and splitting amongst themselves the visual design or representation and the structural functions in the narrative.

In Shakespeare's play, the couple's conflict can be made sense of from the perspective of faerie society or marital relationships meant to parallel ancient myth: Queen Titania wishes to keep a child she has claimed safe within her retinue while King Oberon wants to take the boy to become his henchman. Half in jest, one may say this makes no sense from an Asian perspective: a marital quarrel over custody seems odd given that the couple is, in modern terms, neither separated nor divorced; and it is further curious that Oberon's trick is to divert his wife's amorous attentions to whoever else she may chance to look upon, inadvertently making her fall in love with an ass. What sort of marriage is that?

Perhaps this is not the space to discuss *Concordia Discors* at length; in short, the work presents a Titania who expresses concern for her supposed children with serious magnanimity, while Oberon appears uninvited, speaking and acting seemingly based on his own whims. Though Titania has her hounds drag Oberon (lovingly) away, the couple are generally in accord with each other. This rendition of Oberon and Titania in Yamazaki's manga and its anime adaptation

may find them more akin to the same figures celebrating their Golden Wedding Anniversary in Goethe's lyrical intermezzo; it certainly resembles Yamazaki's assemblage of relationships in her *Faust* adaptation. It is in Goethe's *Faust*, specifically in the lyrical intermezzo that Titania and Oberon are celebrating their golden wedding anniversary, to the dismay of many serious traditional scholars who thought such nonsense had no place in *that* drama.

As for *The Ancient Magus' Bride*, this is a tale about a young Japanese girl who auctions herself off and is purchased by the titular Magus. It does not transport the reader to a high fantasy setting, looking instead from Asia to the British Isles as the fantasy archipelago. Hatori Chise is orphaned and purchased in Japan, then she is magically transported to Europe, where her uncanny powers, localized in diegesis, draws in not yokai but fae. There, her green eyes and red hair are not so out of place, and her curse becomes something of a gift.

The other lead character is Elias Ainsworth, whose head is a horned ungulate skull. So, it seems like a good start for a romance, and I argue that he is cast in the role of Ophelia in much the same way played out in *Claymore* and *Ergo Proxy*.

It is worth highlighting how Yamazaki knowingly creates *ho'nanmono*, re-imagining Europe as a pastiche of cultural references to European details and taking a narrative leap into the unknown—the narrative afterlife—from there. Another example from Yamazaki is *Frau Faust*, published while *The Ancient Magus Bride* was at its first peak of popularity, in a condensed attempt to capture the

same audience as the highly successful series, albeit with a different set of European source texts.

In general, Yamazaki's dark fantasy titles are for a josei (or a mature female) audience. Apart from the intercultural, and probably interspecies, romance promised by the series, *The Ancient Magus' Bride* is more thematically concerned with filial and marital roles than is *Frau Faust*. Both, however, follow a narrative structure that I have previously traced specifically for Faust-myth retellings: a female homosocial network that actively builds a central "contractual" relationship between a "young" audience surrogate and an "ancient" magical mentor or partner. Figures from the latter's past assemble in a "found family" or a network of relationships that fills the gap of knowledge experienced by the younger character, both as audience surrogate and by virtue of being "young," inexperienced and with the limited self-awareness of youth.

Intentionally convoluted family relations also highlight the multiple social roles that each character plays, and thus the dynamism of their relationships. This detail is telling, just as Chise's red hair has flagged her as "not Japanese" and thus also not quite human, but marks for her a clear place in the borders of the human and fae. Titania and Oberon refer to Chise as Elias' apprentice, but also as their grandchild, and also as Elias' bride. Later, Oberon even inquires—quite invasively, like a despicable auntie—about whether there are offspring. To this he adds his preference for a blonde grandchild.

This analysis of character blends of the Shakespearean cast is the surface symptom of a deeper narrative transformation: Yamazaki has tended to assemble her characters into relational units, easily identified by the trope of “found family,” a narrative decision that puts the Japanese text at odds with cultural premises behind the marital squabble in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, where the head and hind of the chaos is a quarrel of a couple already married.

In the adaptation, Titania and Oberon appear to work in tandem in their invitation to bring the Chise to a new “parental home,” in this case the fairy world. Orphaned and abandoned, Chise’s “belonging” is reiterated by the confused or intentionally convoluted family relations suggested by these secondary, adoptive parents.<sup>29</sup> But while Chise is the obvious orphan figure in the series, Elias is the one meaningfully treated by the Fairy Queen and King as their child. Both Elias and Chise are rejects of their respective societies, both are “neither fae nor human.” Elias is “the incomplete one,” a mysterious social reject who performs the role of gentleman magus who runs an apothecary from his country house.

Finally, it is not Chise who re-enacts the Ophelia scene, though she often ends up soaked in a tub or a pond. It is Elias who disappears into the forest when he is unable to cope, a failure manifesting as the inability to mask his monstrous form and thus to conform to human appearances.

In episode 9, Ruth—the Black dog or Grim that becomes Chise’s familiar and brother figure—finds Elias half submerged in a pond. Unlike Ophelia, he floats prone rather than supine. This is his

pose for repose, given that ungulate anatomy and enormous horns will not let him rest on his back; he sleeps prone even in bed. It is thus that we rediscover another Ophelia, almost driven mad by the inability to comprehend or conform to society, and weak for the affection of a half-understood beloved.



Figure 6. *The Ancient Magus Bride* vol. 14  
“None so deaf as those who will not hear”

The relationship dynamic between Elias and Chise involves switching roles in terms of student and master, wise one and ignoramus, child and adult. That Chise had sold herself, ready for bondage, and yet is freed and “apprenticed” and gradually falls in love with her “monster” parallels her own development of a sense of self, just as affiliation with her is cast as Elias’ inappropriate desire to learn to be *more* human, something he is not. The episode with Oberon and Titania fills a gap in their development as characters, proposing alternate parentage and the possibility of dynamic

harmony where marriage is not a resolution to conflict, but the taking up of a partner with whom to shuffle roles, for better or worse.

Though not strictly an adaptation, the visual resonances and thematic ties to the comedy emphasize the impact of Shakespeare's figurations of the fey and their "ways", but also recast the characters of *The Ancient Magus Bride* as atypical families, even before a wedding—or three—can take place.

To conclude, whether these moments of adaptation are extended or fleeting, deliberate or incidental, engaging with them laterally allows audiences to move beyond questions of fidelity. These transformations of Ophelia's figure and the scene of her drowning, enrich our understanding of the artistry of the previous works—Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but also Millais' *Ophelia*—while opening up possibilities of what comes after: not muddy death, but an afterlife in new media, in garments still heavy with their drink.

## Notes

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2. Tara Pederson. *Mermaids and the Production of Knowledge in Early Modern England*. Routledge, 2015. 134; emphasis in original.
3. Pederson. *Mermaids*, 134.
4. See especially Yoshihara Yukari. "Ophelia and her magical daughters: The afterlives of Ophelia in Japanese pop culture". In *Shakespeare and the supernatural*, eds. Victoria Bladen & Yan Brailowsky (Manchester University Press, 2020).
5. Honda Masuko. *Ofiria no keifu: Aruiwa shi to otome no tawamure* [The genealogy of Ophelia; Or, playing at death and the maiden] Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 1989.

6. [Manga] Yagi, Norihiro. *Claymore*. SHONEN JUMP ADVANCED. (VIZ Media, 2007); "Ophelia's Madness arc" spans vols. 6 to 8, or chapters 31 to 40, originally released from December 2003 to September 2004.  
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7. Murase, Shukō (dir.) and Dai Satō (writer). *Ergo Proxy*. WOWOW. 23 episodes. (25 Feb – 12 Aug 2006)
8. [Manga] Yamazaki Kore. *The Ancient Magus' Bride*. Seven Seas Entertainment, LLC, (2015) ; [Anime] *Mahōtsukai no Yome [The Ancient Magus' Bride]* Wit Studio, Production I.G., (2017).
9. For polysystem and the adaptation, refer to Patrick Cattrysse, *Descriptive Adaptation* (...); for ho'nān, see J. Scott Miller. *Adaptations of Western Literature in Meiji Japan*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
10. Pederson. *Mermaids*, 134.
11. Pederson. *Mermaids*, 136.
12. Shakespeare, "Hamlet", 4.5.84-86.
13. Bridget Gellert Lyons. "The Iconography of Ophelia." *ELH* 44.1 (1977): 60-74. 63.
14. Ismail Talib. "Chapter 4: Character." *Narrative Theory: A Brief Introduction*.
15. Murray Smith cited in Linda Hutcheon and Siobhan O'Flynn. *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Routledge, 2007). 11
16. Fotis Jannidis, "Character." *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Eds. Peter Hühn, et al. (Hamburg University Press, 2012) section 3.7
17. Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, "Conceptual Blending, Form and Meaning." *Recherches en communication* no. 19 (2003): 58 - 86. 63
18. Barbara Dancygier, "What can blending do for you?" *Language and Literature* 15.1 (Feb 2006): 5 – 15. 6
19. Dancygier, "What can blending do," 11.
20. Kourdis, Evangelos & Yoka, Charikleia (2014), "Intericonicity as Intersemiotic Translation in a Globalized Culture", in Wang & Ji (eds.), *Our World: A Kaleidoscopic Semiotic Network, Proceedings of the 11th World Congress of the IASS/ALS*, 5-9 October 2012, Hohai University Press, pp. 162-176.
21. Dancygier, "What can blending do," 6.
22. Kourdis & Yoka, "Intericonicity as Intersemiotic Translation", 2014
23. See works on adaptation theory, such as Hutcheon and O'Flynn; Sanders, etc. Sanders, Julie. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. Routledge, 2006.
24. Lyons, "The Iconography of Ophelia," 62.
25. *Ergo Proxy* ep. 14
26. Teresa's decapitated head is embedded into her torso and is literally her source of power; she attaches Irene's arm to her shoulder after she loses her sword arm in a battle against Ophelia. Claymore can heal and reattach limbs to a certain degree, which is also why Ophelia partially regenerates her human parts before dying.

27. Reiterated at length by Magda Romanska in "Ontology and eroticism: Two bodies of Ophelia." *Women's Studies* 34.6 (2005): 485-503. See also, "NecrOphelia: Death, Femininity and the Making of Modern Aesthetics." *Performance Research* 10.3 (2005): 35-53.

28. literally, Queen of the Fairies.

29. They refer to Chise in several ways: as Elias' apprentice, as Elias' child /their grandchild, as a hatchling, (also from her family name: 羽鳥) as their Robin 蜂蜜酒 (furigana provided: ロビン, but the kanji reads *hachimitsu sake*, or Mead) as Elias' bride / wife / partner (嫁)

