The "Rebellious" Ophelia: An Analysis of Film Adaptations of *Hamlet*

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Abstract of Thesis

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Ophelia, an iconic figure of a madness-afflicted woman, has been commonly regarded as a signifier bearing cultural and social significance within changes of cultural context over the duration of the play's performance history. Building upon David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's "narrative prosthesis" theory, which views disability as a pervasive metaphorical narrative device signifying social and personal crisis, this thesis argues that Ophelia's madness serves as a metaphor for moral degeneration, patriarchal oppression, anxiety about alienation in modern society, and self-identity crisis. Furthermore, this thesis argues that madness offers a channel for Ophelia to express her thoughts.

In Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000), Ophelia is self-conscious of her objectified position as an erotic spectacle among men. In Sherwood Hu's *Prince of the Himalayas*, Odsaluyang (Ophelia) is able to utilize madness as a disguise to help her escape from patriarchal moral judgment and violence. In Feng Xiaogang's *The Banquet*, Qing Nü (Ophelia) notably does not go mad. Her pure and passionate love for the prince frees her from the relentless patriarchal system. However, this love and passion, as the only iconic identity of Qing Nü, perpetuates the dangerous stereotype that woman can only be the subject of romanticized love, subservient to masculinist cultural imagination. Finally, Ophelia's death indicates that the patriarchal system cannot allow an individual to break free of its myriad restrictions and move about unfettered; therefore, it eradicates the freed body within the system for the purpose of maintaining the established order.

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Introduction

Ophelia is one of the most recognizable and representative heroines in Shakespeare's oeuvre as her madness, songs, and mysterious death make her exceedingly popular in visual and performing arts. She has become a cultural icon whose meanings evolve in different cultural and historical conditions. In the last half-century, film productions such as *Hamlet* (1947, directed by Laurence Olivier), *Hamlet* (1990, directed by Franco Zeffirelli), and *Hamlet* (1996, directed by Kenneth Branagh) delineated Ophelia as a victimized female character with vulnerability, purity, and compliance. More recent film adaptations from both Western and Eastern cultures, including Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet*, Sherwood Hu's *Prince of the Himalayas*, and Feng Xiaogang's *The Banquet*, have attempted to construct a more "rebellious" Ophelia who counters the oppressive system while maintaining a high level of self-awareness.

Two Chinese cinematic adaptations of *Hamlet* were released in 2006: *The Banque*t, a historical drama and martial arts film adaptation with an all-star cast set in the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period in fifth-century China, and *Prince of the Himalayas*, a historical epic with an all-Tibetan cast set in the highlands of ancient Tibet. *The Banquet* received worldwide circulation through various film festivals as well as DVD production. As a result, it enjoyed mass-market attention. Meanwhile, *Prince of the Himalayas* was mainly distributed among domestic Chinese audiences and did not

achieve commercial success.

The Banquet's director, Feng Xiaogang, is an acclaimed Chinese director, famous for his dark urban comedies released during the Chinese New Year that became highly successful at the box office. His black comedies usually depict the lives of common people and the rapidly changing China. *The Banquet* is his most recent attempt to break out of his old mold with a new genre.

Sherwood Hu, the director of *Prince of the Himalayas*, was born in Shanghai and grew up in an artistic family, including a theater director father. Hu finished his traditional theatrical education in China and then completed his MA and Ph.D. studies in America, majoring in directing. His educational background familiarized him with both Chinese and Western culture and theatre traditions, which led him to produce a hybridized film balancing between Western and Eastern cultures.

A third film, *Hamlet (2000)*, comes from a very different cultural background from Hu's and Feng's films. This American drama film is based on Shakespeare's text and set in contemporary New York City. In this adaptation of *Hamlet*, Claudius is the "king" of the Denmark Corporation, with Hamlet as a film student. *Hamlet (2000)* is the most well known film of Michael Almereyda, who is experienced with literary film adaptations, ranging from D. H. Lawrence and F. Scott Fitzgerald to Shakespeare. His film adaptation of *Cymbeline* was presented at the Venice Film Festival in 2004.

Tracing the unarticulated connections among cinematic representations of Ophelia

from historical to modern settings, from Eastern to Western cultures, this paper aims to tap into the potential possibilities of reimagining Ophelia that render her a new potency to escape from or protest against a suppressive patriarchal system rather than remaining confined in her traditional role as a weak, submissive, and victimized woman serving masculinity-defined goals.

Ophelia in Western Film

According to Amanda Kane Rooks, "the majority of modern filmic renditions of Ophelia expose the enduring influence of the ideological alignment among femininity, docility, weakness, and hysteria that underpins far earlier representations of this character" (475). Among various cinematic adaptations of *Hamlet*, films directed by Laurence Olivier, Franco Zeffirelli, and Kenneth Branagh confine Ophelia to her conventional gender role, objectified and oppressed under patriarchal hegemony. In these films, "Ophelia's scripted role has served as a structural device in the construction of an absolutely masculinist *Hamlet"* (Rutter, 299).

Olivier's Ophelia (Jean Simmons) is both sexualized and infantilized. With loose, long blond hair and white Victorian dress, Simmons' Ophelia's appearance is "pure Hollywood"—"the platinum blond of cult and cliché and which, in combination with her heavily lined, kohl black eyebrows, denotes her undeniable sex appeal" (Rutter, 303). When Laertes, is talking seriously with their father, Ophelia hugs him from behind, and

grabs at his clothes like a naughty child. In this film, Ophelia is infantilized, and is dominated by her father and brother.

In the "get thee to a nunnery" scene, Olivier's Ophelia is neurotic in the face of Hamlet's attack. After hearing the accusation, Ophelia desperately embraces Hamlet, who forces her to the ground. Her helplessness suggests that abandonment and contamination from Hamlet have rendered her insane. Simmons's Ophelia is distinguished by her empty gaze, which Rooks states is indicative of "a disturbingly pitiful ignorance" (478). In this film version, the drowning scene is evidently inspired by Millais's 1852 painting, "Ophelia," in which a narrow brook carries off her body that has been caught in tree branches. A long shot shows the tranquil brook, which naturalizes Ophelia as part of the landscape.

Like Olivier, Zeffirelli also keeps Ophelia's (Helena Bonham Carter) eroticized and childlike image. Portrayed as a teenage schoolgirl, Bonham-Carter's Ophelia wears Victorian dress. She has long bond braids and a bonnet on her head, suggesting her infantilization and sexual repression. In addition, Bonham Carter's Ophelia is noticeably silent. When Ophelia is warned by her brother about Hamlet's dangerous love, Ophelia listens quietly. Also, The "go to the nunnery" scene is Hamlet's monologue, while Ophelia stands mutely at the center of the frame. Zeffirelli's defenseless Ophelia surrenders completely to masculinist violence. However, in her madness, Ophelia becomes extremely expressive, talking nonsense to everyone, which hints that it is her

oppression that had caused her insanity. Although her madness makes it possible for her to protest against an oppressive system, she is still not capable of fully expressing herself.

In *Hamlet* (1990), Ophelia's insanity is "erotically inspired" (Rooks, 479). Ophelia approaches a soldier, caresses his face and body, and holds his belt. This interaction indicates, "sexual frustrations and oppressions were among the reasons for her madness" (Teker, 117). Rutter sees the drowning scene as romanticized and Ophelia's death as "comfortable" to the spectators (308). Ophelia runs to a plot of grass, sits on a wooden bridge and throws yellow flowers into the river. With Gertrude's voiceover, a close-up of Ophelia's face dissolves into Gertrude's, which serves as a visual disturbance, leaving the audience to ponder the inner connection between the two women.

In *Hamlet* (1996), Ophelia (Kate Winslet) has curly blond hair, a full bosom and tight-fitting clothes. Rutter calls this film an "erotic thriller" (253). Rooks points out that Winslet offers a distinctively "romantic" or "star-like" performance, which objectifies Ophelia and denies the potential of the reimagination of the character (478).

In Branagh's film, the relationship between Ophelia and Hamlet is shown in flashbacks when Polonius queries Ophelia about her relationship with Hamlet. The camera switches between a close-up shot of Ophelia's unnerving countenance and her memory of their love-making. Ophelia says, "my lord, he hath importuned me with love in honorable fashion." Their vigorous love-making is what Rutter describes as "the classic move of denying her subjectivity in the process of objectifying her" (316). In

another erotic scene, Polonius forces Ophelia to read Hamlet's love letter aloud to Gertrude and Claudius. In a flashback, the two lovers read the love letter while in bed, a scene that Julie Sander calls "a series of voyeuristic intrusions" on Ophelia (153).

The mental deterioration of Winslet's Ophelia manifests early in the film. Before Hamlet orders Ophelia to "go to the nunnery," she recalls Hamlet's violent behavior in front of her father, which parallels both characters' mental instability. Winslet presents an infantilized Ophelia, with her notably childish way of speaking. Teker attributes Ophelia's madness to the end of her affair with Hamlet and her position as "a pawn of all the men in her life" (117). Her childlike behavior underscores her dependence on men.

Unlike her predecessors, Almereyda's Ophelia (Julia Stiles) in *Hamlet* (2000) offers "a far more progressive and innovative interpretation of the play," which characterizes Ophelia at "a level of ideological potency that would appear to rival Hamlet himself" (Rooks, 476). This Ophelia wears colorful sport clothes. She lives in her own apartment with a darkroom. When Hamlet calls her on the phone and tells her to "go to the nunnery," Stiles's Ophelia remains calm, and burns her photos of him. Almereyda's Ophelia is assertive and independent. At the same time, she is infantilized by her father who ties her shoelaces and by her brother who takes her butterfly hair clip (Rooks, 477). *Hamlet* (2000) gives Ophelia room to protest against the patriarchal order in her madness by her piercing scream and refusal to be silenced by the men around her, providing a rebellious Ophelia who is self-conscious of her suppressed position.

Ophelia in Eastern Film

Until the end of 1990s, Shakespeare films in the Anglophone world seemed to perpetuate Ophelia as a compliant victim of a masculinist Hamlet. More recently, Asian cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare's work have proliferated. The best-known film adaptations of *Hamlet* are Sherwood Hu's *Prince of the Himalayas* (2006), Feng Xiaogang's *The Banquet* (2006) and Lee Joon-ik's *King and the Clown* (2005). As Alexa Joubin points out, "while Western Ophelia seems more muted, Asian incarnations of Ophelia occupy a broad spectrum of interpretive range and possess more moral agency" (80). The Asian adaptations of *Hamlet* with localized cultural elements offer a wider space for the reimagining of Ophelia. These representations range from docile Confucian daughter, to innocent and dedicated lover to rebel against social hierarchy.

Joubin describes three ways of analyzing the Eastern Asian versions of Ophelia. The first emphasizes her innocence, which "is informed by the fascination with and reaction against the Victorian pictorialization of Ophelia" (80). The second stresses the engagement of local values, and even criticizes traditional Victorian morality (80). The third underscores "an objectified and sexualized Ophelia," associated with Eastern idealized femininity, and violates Victorian strictures on sex (80).

Besides *Prince of the Himalayas* and *The Banquet*, *King and the Clown* (directed by Lee Joon-ik) is another Eastern adaptation of *Hamlet* that "grafts the play onto Korean

history and retells the story from the perspective of the traveling player" (Lee, 1). Set in the fifth-century Joseon Dynasty and based upon the life story of the infamous King Yeonsan, who is traumatized by his father's ruthless behavior of killing his mother, *King and the Clown* is influenced by *Hamlet* in terms of its "plot, style, structure, themes to its characterization" (Lee, 3). The film illustrates the "homoerotic entanglement" between King Yeon-san (Hamlet figure) and the effeminate acrobat performer Gong-gil (Ophelia figure) (Joubin, 3). The innocence of Gong-gil traps him into the object of male gaze, and the delicate appearance of Gobg-gil makes him an exotic object to the king. In addition, as Alex Joubin points out, Gong-gil's femininity not only stems from his performance, but also from his commitment to remaining in his female characterization in his daily life, which offers an important representation of "the idea of the artificiality of performance—of gender, history and genre" (4).

Madness and Disability Narrative

In the foreword of the first English translation of Michel Foucault's *History of Madness*, Jean Khalfa points out that, whether madness is described as "a religious or philosophical phenomenon" or as having "an objective medical essence," the concepts of madness are "not discoveries but historical constructions of meaning" (xiv). In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault also establishes the fundamental point that madness "must be understood not as a natural fact, but as a cultural construct, sustained by a grid of

administrative and medico-psychiatric practices. The history of madness properly written would thus be an account not of disease and its treatment but of questions of freedom and control, knowledge and power" (Porter, 3). Madness, especially when discussed in the field of cultural critique, is a term constructed on an intricate and conflicting relationship between the individual and the outside world, and is consistently associated with the concept of otherness within a meaning-making system.

In Western tradition previous to the European Enlightenment, madness was viewed as the state of mind of people who had "lost their reason" or did not have it to begin with. Therefore, people with madness were characterized by unreason (Fernando, 21). Foucault indicates that unreason was recognized as a positive characteristic of madness in Europe from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries. It was only later that unreason was regarded as pathological, and madness was seen as illness (Fernando, 20). As a result, social institutions for the confinement of "the mad" were created and the development of these institutions accelerated in the eighteenth century. Foucault defines "the mad" as "those who, against the code of language, pronounce words without meaning (the 'insane,' the 'imbeciles,' the 'demented'), or those who utter sanctified words (the 'violent ones,' the 'furious'), or yet still those who bring forth forbidden meanings (the 'libertines,' the 'headstrong'; 295)". The mad and "the other socially undesirable people" were eliminated from society. The mental hospital became a place to "cure" the mentally disabled and protect society (Fernando, 21).

Under the influence of Darwinism in the nineteenth century, society tended to view the mind as something biological. Mental illness was seen as influenced by hereditary factors, which was contrary to the view of evolutionary advantage and survival of the fittest (Fernando, 22). In the early twentieth century, Freud and his followers coined the term "unconsciousness" and "breathed new life into defunct metaphysics of the mind and theologies of the soul" (Porter, 2).

The conceptualization of madness in Chinese cultural tradition developed differently from that of the Western tradition. Birgit Linder points out that madness in Chinese culture is defined as "eccentricity of speech and behavior, feigned madness and madness as a voice of trauma and truth" (291). In the pre-modern context, Confucianism plays a central role in defining social norms and its disorders. In the preface to the book *Madmen in Chinese History* (*Zhongguo lidai kuangshi* 中国历代狂士), Yang Chunqiu terms a "mad gentleman" (*kuangshi* 狂士) as someone who exhibits "speech and behavior that violate common sense and rationality," and who "shows an unbending spirit that 'does not yield to power or force, and is not swayed by poverty or lack'" (Linder, 292).

In many cases, madness was seen as a sign of "willful defiance that was not commonplace, but was looked upon as a manifestation of personal or social distress" (Linder, 293). In the Han dynasty, the poet Ruan Ji was often seen as a "loner" or "drunkard" who had mental deficiencies and possessed extremely high self-awareness. His poetry collection *Poems from the Heart* (*Yonghuai shi* 咏怀诗) "expresses the mania

in his heart and the chaos he faces in the world" (Meng and Xu, 23). In Taoism, madness is often related to "mystical experiences, playful freedom, and divine frenzy" (Linder, 292).

As Zhu Ping summarizes, in the Western literary tradition madness is often illustrated as an expression of self-alienation, while in Chinese tradition madness is usually portrayed as an expression of social alienation (151). Linder claims that in modern Chinese literature, madness shares a close link with national, historical, and social trauma. Madness reflects how the human mind transforms experiences and implies the demand for social transformation (301).

In contrast to Western and Chinese literary traditions, religion is at the root of cultural and social formations in Tibetan culture, which conceptualizes madness through the lens of Tibetan Buddhism. In the seminal and poetic Tibetan medical text, *rGyud bZhi* (*Four Tantras)*, the word *sems nad* (illness of the mind) is used to describe any sort of mental illness, with the term *smyo nad* denoting "madness" or "insanity" (Deane, 446). In Tibetan Buddhism, "a mind free from the influence of the afflictive mental factors" is the definition of "being mentally healthy" (Epstein and Topgay, 68). The afflictive factors (greed, hatred, pride, envy, lack of insight, etc.) are viewed as the fundamental cause of both mental and physical illnesses, and they "serve as the basis for birth in cyclic existence". Among these factors, desire, hatred, and ignorance are seen as three roots that determine one's health condition (Epstein and Topgay, 68).

In addition, *rGyud bZhi* discusses "madness-causing spirits," indicating that in Tibetan culture, madness, as people believe, could also be caused by the possession of evil spirits (Deane, 448). Terry Clifford clarifies that "demon" is a symbolic term to Tibetans and "represents a wide range of forces and emotions which are normally beyond conscious control" (148). Tsering contends that "controlling the mind" is regarded as a method to prevent mental illness, and failure to do so could cause madness or depression (59). Moreover, in Tibetan culture and Buddhist concepts, mental disability offers people an opportunity to seek the inspiration to develop awareness, compassion, and release from pain and unhappiness (Clifford, 83). As in the film *Prince of the Himalayas,* which relates to aspects of Tibetan Buddhist culture, Odsaluyang shows her self-consciousness as a woman oppressed by the patriarchy during her madness, and the film emphasizes the notion that her madness provides a chance for her to escape from the violence generated by a male-dominated society.

In Shakespeare's works, madness is a heavily gendered term. Luce Irigaray points out that madness contains "specific linguistic disturbances according to sexual differences" (94). A woman in madness is incapable of articulating her situation as explicitly as a man can. For example, while Hamlet is able to control his insanity and make use of it, Ophelia still struggles to express herself in words during her madness.

Similarly, melancholy is a distinctively masculinist term correlated with Hamlet's mental instability within the Renaissance cultural register. As Rosalie Littell Colie claims,

Hamlet's melancholy is "no single stable stereotype" (210). The unexpected death of his father precipitates Hamlet in a traditional and explicable form of melancholy, which is exacerbated by the frustration of his legitimate hope to inherit the throne (210). The ghost of the old king becomes a further cause for a deeper kind of melancholy, which leads him to question his relationship with other people (213). In his soliloquies, Hamlet engages himself in courageous introspection, forcing the audience to realize how complicated his personality is (214), thereby demonstrating that the melancholic is related to the notion of intellectual greatness (209). Melancholy demonstrates Hamlet's mental state in its ambiguity and intricacy, echoing Hamlet's inner turmoil and irresolution, while at the same time characterizing Hamlet as intellectual and noble. Melancholy allows Hamlet to maintain a balance between the breakdown of rationality and governance of his own insanity, which provides him with the opportunity to construct his own experience of madness.

Ophelia does not have Hamlet's ability to cope with her mental collapse. In her madness, Ophelia has very limited access to verbal articulation to deliver accurate information and is only capable of expressing confused discourse through cited poems and songs. Phyllis Chesler is the first to highlight the "double standard" of mental health, which disadvantages women and views masculinity as the mental wellness's standard (75). In *Hamlet (2000),* Ophelia's piercing screaming at the Guggenheim Museum during her madness unlocks her tongue from silence, but she is still not given a full voice to

illustrate her suppressive situation. In *Prince of the Himalayas*, the insane Odsaluyang's (Ophelia) songs give clues to the factors causing her distraction as the forced masculine dominance from all the men around her. However, she still does not find a way to unpack her heart clearly in verbal communication. Only in *The Banquet* does Qing Nü—an Ophelia who does not go insane—expresses herself thoroughly and accurately through the love songs she sings to Wu Luan (Hamlet); the strong agency she builds up for herself is based upon her simple but dedicated love to Wu Luan.

However, Annette Schlichter challenges the thesis that the trope of a madwoman is contrary to the feminist struggle. She indicates that the image of the madwoman could represent "a paradoxical politics of enunciation" that criticizes and resists masculine domination (312). Foucault identifies the combination of truth and illusion in theatre performances of madness as "tamed" madness: "theatre develops its truth, which is illusion" (35). In other words, as madness carries its illusion to the point of truth, it provides the ideal expression of the protagonist's inner conflict (Findlay, 193). Both Almereyda's Ophelia and Hu's Ophelia are able to take advantage of their madness, regardless of whether it is genuine or performative, to fight against a patriarchal system. In her madness, Almereyda's Ophelia struggles against a security guard who attempts to drag her away while she is screaming at the Guggenheim Museum. Hu's Ophelia is able to use her madness as a disguise to protect herself and her child from the moral judgment and patriarchal violence, as in *Prince of the Himalayas,* Odsaluyang (Ophelia) develops a

sexual relationship with Hamlet, and becomes pregnant with his child.

Madness's connection to disability critique rests in its ambiguity in the meaning-making process. Madness functions as a "metaphorical signifier of social and individual collapse" (Mitchell and Snyder, 47). In *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder contend that disability is an extremely productive metaphoric implement to use to reflect other, larger social crises. They call this technique "metaphorization." In other words, disability provides a way to represent personal and social crises through a different register, thereby allowing the authors to communicate various oppressive social norms in a different but more effective manner. Ophelia's madness becomes a ubiquitous apparatus to demonstrate the multifarious metaphorizations of moral degeneration, monarchal disorder, and masculine-dominated hierarchy, in tandem with the actual broad social and self-crisis represented in different film adaptations.

The connection between the madness and disability critique also lies in its "unruly resistance to the cultural desire to enforce normalcy" (48). In literary works, disabled characters, while being used as "potency of an unsettling cultural commentary" (Mitchell and Snyder, 8) in texts, are usually sequestered, excluded, or wiped out in the end of the narration, which parallels cultural imperatives of normativity in disabled people's real lives, as Mitchell and Snyder conclude that "disability cannot be accommodated with the ranks of the norms, and, thus, the options for dealing with the difference that drives the

story's plot is twofold: a disability is either left behind or punished for its lack of conformity" (56).

Adapting Adrienne Rich's concept of "compulsory heterosexuality," Robert McRuer coined the term "compulsory able-bodiedness," arguing that compulsory able-bodiedness, with the appearance of choice, is in fact a system without choice (92). Using "compulsory able-bodiedness," Alison Kafer came up with the concept of "compulsory able-mindedness" defining able-mindedness as an absence of mental illness and intellectual disability (16). This compulsory able-bodied/able-mindedness concept indicates that only a future without physical and mental disability is worth living and desirable, which leads to the insane Ophelia being written out of the future by the end of the narration.

Chapter 1 provides a close reading of the madness and death of Ophelia in *Hamlet (2000)*, claiming that, with a parallel narration between Hamlet and Ophelia in their shared existential dilemma, madness in the film functions as a litmus test showcasing the differential effects on heavily gendered roles. Madness also serves as an opening for Ophelia to take assertive action to express her oppressive status under patriarchal orders, although her articulations remain obscure and demand decoding. Furthermore, Ophelia's death is predestined, as the madness of Ophelia indicates her unbounded status under the patriarchal dominance, but the mechanism of the suppressed system could not allow an unfettered woman wandering freely within its range of control.

Chapter 2 of this paper argues that, in *Prince of the Himalaya*, Odsaluyang is able to use madness as a protection for her and her child to escape from the patriarchal power and moral judgment, thereby allowing the film to break the original frame of narration and bring a completely new theme of forgiveness and love to the narrative. Further, the death of Ophelia during the delivery and birth of her able-bodied and able-minded child reinforces the exclusion of disabled people in a narration based upon "compulsory able-bodiedness" ideology.

Chapter 3 offers an analysis on a remarkably different Ophelia (Qing Nü) who is decisive in action and does not go into madness. This chapter emphasizes that the film *The Banquet* enables Qing Nü to create a world of her own based on her self-assertive agency with her devoted love to Wu Luan (Hamlet), in which she is able to firmly protest against the patriarchal control of her father and brother. Significantly, *The Banquet* affords an Ophelia who, in this case, is capable of fully articulating herself, especially through her singing, which compels the audience to reflect upon different representations of Ophelia over time and catch sight of a reimaged Ophelia who is able to construct and contain her own experience without going through mental crisis.

Chapter 1：Ophelia in *Hamlet (2000)*

This paper analyzes how the madness of Ophelia functions as a narrative prosthesis in the film adaptation of the play, *Hamlet (2000)*, directed by Michael Almereyda. The paper argues that Ophelia's madness becomes a ubiquitous apparatus to demonstrate the multifarious metaphorizations of moral degeneration, monarchal disorder, in tandem with the actual broad social and self-crisis that is represented in the film *Hamlet (2000).*

In the film, *Hamlet, (2000)*, Ophelia and Hamlet both struggle against existential dilemmas and complicated social crises. Madness thus serves as a barometer to demonstrate the different consequences of heavily gendered roles. While madness functions as a disguise for Hamlet to let him lunge forward his revenge plan, insanity destroys Ophelia in an overwhelming manner, wherein she finds no opportunity to return to the sane. Ironically, however, madness opens up space for Ophelia to express her oppressed situation, thereby enabling her to step out of her stereotypically gendered characterization. Moreover, Ophelia's demise in a semi-circulating indoor fountain mystifies her death scene. However, regardless of whether Ophelia's death is an accident or premeditated, her death is predestined because her madness marks her as an unfettered body, and an oppressive hierarchy always attempts to exclude the uncontrolled member. When Ophelia loses the last remnant of her sanity, she is wearing a long, black overcoat with a black-feathered collar, and this dress foreshadows her doomed destiny.

Mitchell and Snyder define the functions of disability in literary discourse as being

twofold, namely, first that, "disability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterization, and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device" (47). The characterization of Ophelia's body, seen with its purity, is defined by a patriarchal hierarchy and resists any personal imprinting, which makes it ideally metaphorical equipment to use to reflect the social crisis all around her. This particular characterization of Ophelia prepares the viewer for her madness and lets her become an omnipresent tool within which her own disorder mirrors the disorder everywhere surrounding her. In this way, the movie functions as a disability narrative in that the disheveled materiality of Ophelia's characterization lends the viewer a broader discordant access to a wider social diagnosis that is also discordant.

Furthermore, in *Aesthetic Nervousness: Disability and the Crisis of Representation*, Ato Quayson claims that rather than race and class, gender always is capable of bringing a particular ontological difficulty into direct view, "especially when it is coupled with some form of violence or violation of the disabled female character" (48). Quayson introduces the Prometheus-Io complex to exemplify the disabled female character who tragically echoes the unfolding action in a narrative. Hera transforms Io into a cow because of Zeus's affection toward her. Io's moans, because of the gadfly's stings, represent the echoes of the forthcoming tragedy that she bears witness to. She is not capable of fully articulating the terrible tragic knowledge she knows by heart. Instead, she is condemned to a variety of desperate questions, which compels Prometheus to

reveal a prophecy about the coming tragic collapse of Zeus's reign (48). Similar to Io's situation, in *Hamlet* (2000), Ophelia's piercing screams show that although madness provides a way for Ophelia to express her internal struggle, she is unable to convey her full insight of the approaching tragedy.

Parallel Narration and A Narrative Prosthesis

Mitchell and Snyder argue that, "By contrasting and comparing the depiction of disability across cultures and histories, one realizes that disability provides an important barometer by which to assess shifting values and norms imposed upon the body" (51). They claim that in most cultural representations, disability serves a fundamental role by challenging normalized ideals. Disability thus can function as a metaphor of the "body's unruly resistance" to a culturally enforced normalcy (48).

Madness, as it relates cultural and literary discourses, is constructed by reflecting the complexity that exists between the individual and the external world. People with madness are usually regarded as alien from the typical hegemonic meaning-structuring systems. Madness is a form of resistance in that of one's body is pitted against a presumed social normalcy. At the same time, madness provides a useful, even possible, platform for an individual to reject those coercive social norms. The connection of madness to any disability critique rests in the collision madness creates between an individual's body and compulsory social norms, and its inherent recalcitrant nature

regarding any constantly changing social normalcy. In the history of the madness of female characters, madwomen are ubiquitously read as being abnormal bodies existing outside of the societal norms. Eunjung Kim points out that the madness of women is a metaphor that "can provide an opportunity to examine what they conceal in order to stably deliver salient messages" and how those messages allowed deliverability via their madness can lead to what Elizabeth Grosz calls 'the patriarchal effacement of women'" (158).

This paper, therefore, argues that in the film *Hamlet (2000)*, madness functions as a barometer for the differential effects delivered onto heavily gendered characters. While Hamlet still has control over his own experience of insanity in order to disguise himself and uncover the murderer of his father, and the infidelities committed by Claudius and Gertrude, Ophelia is overcome by her own insanity in a irreversible manner—no opportunity is offered for her to return to live among the sane. Madness as a metaphorical device in this narration thus clearly reveals disproportionate levels of violence directed toward female characters that stems from a patriarchal social system. However, rather ironically, madness also acts as a unique open pathway for Ophelia to express her dissonance regarding the patriarchy's strong dictates to femininity.

In the film, *Hamlet (2000)*, the "to be, or not to be" dilemma of Hamlet (played by Ethan Hawke) is interpreted as "to be with others or not", and that different interpretation underscores the post-modern approach to Shakespeare's play. Setting the background of

the play in contemporary New York, Hamlet is now a young man isolated from the outside world because of his obsession with electronic devices. Alongside Hamlet, Ophelia (played by Julia Stiles) is a young woman who finds herself being objectified by the same electronic media and thus lost in her own sense of identity.

Hamlet (2000) recounts the parallel story lines between Hamlet and Ophelia, with their shared existential crisis, namely, being abandoned in the artificial ocean of electronic media and commercialism. In the film following a fight with Ophelia, Hamlet, now fully immersed in his disappointment, goes to a DVD shop where he buys dozens of DVDs. Exiling himself by watching these DVDs illustrates his desire to escape from the real problem he needs to face. For Ophelia, at the beginning of the film, a close-up shot of her face is shown on Hamlet's black-and-white DVD player. Hamlet seems so fascinated by Ophelia's face and its imagery that he plays it back and forth several times, suggesting his objectification of her, which becomes then an erotic spectacle for the viewers.

This perpetual surveillance of Ophelia runs parallel to the circumstances of Hamlet, who is also presented as a target and is being watched. Before Hamlet intrudes into Claudius' office to try and kill him, Hamlet's image is also shown on a black-and-white monitor. That tactic suggests that his actions are under constant supervision all the time. The extensive use of video surveillance in this film serves as a motif that indicates the controlled life circumstances of the protagonists. Hamlet must behave according to the

patriarchal ideology and chivalry code, a duty that triggers his dilemma about killing his uncle and punishing his mother, and thus fulfill his role as a King's son. The video surveillance on Ophelia symbolizes her situation under the governance of her father and brother, who represent the masculine-defined social norms she believes she needs to obey.

Video recording is utilized by Hamlet as a platform to express his internal conflict, but there is little opportunity for Ophelia to do the same, as she lacks the privilege of agency to use video as a personal space to have her voice heard. Hamlet's most significant "to be, or not to be" soliloquy and "what a piece of work is a man" monologue are both delivered through video recording; however, Ophelia is silenced and kept from both the video platform and photographs. In these moments, Ophelia is objectified as an erotic spectacle only there for the male gaze.

Nevertheless, Almereyda provides potential space for Ophelia to reject being objectified and only the erotic contemplation of male gaze, and that rendering is different from earlier versions of Ophelia that have been portrayed in other films. On Hamlet's black-and-white DVD player, after being presented as a stereotypical beauty under the male gaze, Ophelia stares back into the camera lens disparagingly. On Hamlet's DVD player, Ophelia is objectified as a silent image, with whom Hamlet, as a heterosexual male figure in a patriarchal culture, is obsessed. As an objectified voiceless woman under this male gaze, Ophelia, unlike Hamlet, cannot take an active role in this

masculine-dominated representation system; her body is controlled by the power of the male protagonist. Almereyda's Ophelia thus finds a way to rid herself of the shackles of male power by gazing back, a choice that shows her self-awareness and the realization that her status is one of objectification in a patriarchal system.

This film also constructs a parallel image of Ophelia and Hamlet in their mutual suicidal intentions, showing both Ophelia and Hamlet as being bewildered by their intellectual and emotional crises. The daydream-drowning scene in the film distinctly suggests Ophelia's suicidal intention as a way to escape from the control of her father, the person who oppresses her the most in the patriarchal society. When Polonius tells Claudius and Gertrude the cause of Hamlet's madness besides the pool, Ophelia stands on the edge, and stares at the water in the pool. She glances at her father and then turns her attention back to the pool, which reflects her own image. In the following scene, she drowns herself in that water, an act that foreshadows her own death. Her body is embraced by the water. The loudness of the flowing water also silences Ophelia's world, thereby freeing her from her father's intolerable recitation. The close-up shot of Ophelia in that water only shows her unshakable frustration and unsolvable confusion, rather than presenting her as a beautiful image underwater likened to a male-dominated definition.

The significance of Ophelia's fantasy of committing suicide is that it links Ophelia's existential crisis to Hamlet's "to be, or not to be" existential dilemma. In the "to be, or not to be" monologue scene, Hamlet tries to end his life with a gun in a video recording.

Compared to Hamlet's suicidal scene, however, the long sequence of Ophelia's suicidal attempt in Almereyda's film suggests that Ophelia sees suicide as a way to escape the patriarchal system, which Hamlet fails to accomplish because of his own concerns about mortality. By imagining herself plunging into the water, Ophelia prevents herself from hearing her father sharing secret information with Claudius and Gertrude and instead simply escaping to a quiet world created by herself. Instead of stereotyping Ophelia as a beautiful, pure, and vulnerable object based on a masculine-dominated definition, the film of *Hamlet (2000)* highlights the inner struggle and contradictions in the character of Ophelia, thereby creating a parallel narrative to that of Hamlet in terms of their concurrent dilemmas.

Given the parallel narrative structure, taking place between Hamlet and Ophelia, what becomes truly salient is how madness as a barometer for heavily gendered roles functions differently on the female body than it does on the male body. While Hamlet's madness is used as a mask to buy him time and allay suspicions of him building in the minds of others, there is little opportunity for Ophelia to act in a similar way. Madness for Ophelia is massive, despotic and unshakable, and it leads her toward her own death.

In the film *Hamlet (2000)*, there is indeed a stark contrast between Hamlet's latent melancholic status and Ophelia's incontestable madness. For example, in the film, Hamlet's mental instability culminates in his denunciation of his mother for her immorality. Hamlet shouts to his mother, "Oh, shame! Where is thy blush?", and tries to

throttle Gertrude with the quilt on the bed. After seeing Hamlet trying to talk to the ghost image of his father that is sitting on the sofa, however, Gertrude just announces, "Alas, he is mad". On the one hand, madness is a practical way for Hamlet to interrogate his mother about her conjugal infidelity and also investigate the murder of his father. Also, madness is also utilized by him as a safe zone where he can project his anger and violence toward his mother. Further, madness provides Hamlet with a reasonable excuse to escape any responsibility for murdering Ophelia's father.

In the "go-to-the nunnery" scene, Hamlet accuses Ophelia of disloyalty and stigmatizes her as impure under the useful disguise of his own madness. This part proves that madness is a useful facility for Hamlet to implement violence toward female bodies and free himself from any moral accusations. However, in the final scene when Hamlet stands at the rooftop and duels with Laertes, his madness vanishes, and he becomes a defender of both idealized righteousness and dignity, thereby accomplishing his masculine duty. This scene strongly suggests that he was simply acting out madness rather than being fully subjected to that experience.

The striking disparity between Ophelia's explicit madness and the skillful, but ephemeral, appearance of Hamlet's melancholic condition triggers certain short circuits or disruptions in what Quayson calls the "formal protocols of narrative". This process of narrative stumbling is termed "aesthetic nervousness" or "narrative prosthesis". Quayson explains that the primary mechanism of aesthetic nervousness occurs "in the interaction

between a disabled and nondisabled character, where a variety of tensions may be identified" (15). Hamlet simply uses his madness as a disguise to evade Claudius's surveillance. This madness of Hamlet is also an expedient device for him to use to project his anger and violence toward women, although the madness does display its actual dominance during his condemnation of his mother, Gertrude, and, toward Ophelia for her moral impurities. Hamlet's dexterous wielding of madness indeed validates the Renaissance's interpretation of melancholy as one form used for the expression of intellectual greatness (209).

However, for Ophelia, her madness is irresistible, perpetuating, and destructive and becomes a metaphor for her insertion into the ruthless hierarchy of patriarchy and her fatal destiny. Ophelia is labeled with insanity and she is not allowed to return back to sanity. The patriarchal oppression, which results in violence directed against her body, offers few affordances for agency, while Hamlet, although also suppressed, enjoys a relatively elastic space wherein he can push his plan forward and through it. The dynamic interaction between Hamlet and Ophelia, given their different statuses of madness, evokes an aesthetic nervousness, which forces the audience to realize the systematic disabling violence towards women that exists under the patriarchal system in medieval times and still seen in today's modern society. This imbalance of severity and the ability to control or completely surrender to madness is an essential metaphor for the vastly differing gender effects found in a patriarchal system. Thus, hysteria becomes a disorder

solely associated with women, never men.

The Rebellious Ophelia in *Hamlet (2000)*

Although madness surmounts Ophelia in an absolute way, it also functions as a threshold for Ophelia to express herself and protest against the patriarchy's dictatorial actions towards women. In the film of *Hamlet (2000)*, Ophelia's madness scene takes place in the modernized architectural Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Inside this tremendous, empty white building, Ophelia stands at the edge of a long corridor, screaming both piercingly and persistently over the ramped ledge. Her screaming is violently interrupted by Claudius who uses his hand to cover her mouth, a gesture akin to stifling her. Afterward, a long and low-angle screenshot shows her insistent struggle against Claudius' forcible grip and a security guard who attempts to move her away from the crowd per Claudius's orders.

In the film, Ophelia's madness is not caused by the ruthless refusal of Hamlet, nor by the accidental death of her father. The madness of Ophelia is attributed to the unalterable shadow of the patriarchal system that is engulfing her and her self-awareness of that situation from which she can never escape. Rather than only highlighting Hamlet's existential dilemma, Almereyda's adaptation parallels Ophelia's inner struggle to Hamlet's internal crisis. In addition, different from Hamlet's vacillation and inability to take clear action, Ophelia does take assertive action, thereby showing her resistance to

systematic oppressing power. Madness indeed frees her from behaving according to the designated social norms of femininity, and madness acts as a new threshold for Ophelia where she can challenge the patriarchal hierarchy and express herself freely.

Ophelia's long and acute screaming manifests her desire of being acknowledged. Madness gives Ophelia a way to express the pain that her body bears, shows her complex self-struggle, and informs others that she is fully self aware of her oppressed status. Claudius' swift action taken to stifle Ophelia, as well as Gertrude's embarrassed smile, reveals their fear of the mad Ophelia. She is free of their control and indeed is trying to disclose the truth they want to conceal. A long, low-angle shot shows her struggle against the security guard, and her attempt to hit Claudius; an action that Hamlet wants to take, but fails in doing so. In this example, her madness does not frame Ophelia as a sexualized, frustrated, and vulnerable female. Instead, Ophelia is strongly expressing her anguish towards the system that suppresses her and her knowledge of what has happened to her, all of which she does via her madness. In other words, the piercing screaming, which her madness enables her to do, is a way of questioning her own status as a woman who is living under constant control.

Ophelia's "mad" behavior in the Guggenheim Museum, with her piercing screams and violent resistance at being dragged away, demonstrates a critique of the Western artistic tradition's objectification of women. As Mulvey points out, "Women then stand in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in

which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning" (15). Ophelia's fiercely resistant behavior shows her refusal to be silenced and her desire to be recognized. Rather than sexualizing Ophelia's madness in this scene, Almereyda employs Ophelia's "madness" in a way that renders Ophelia as an independent identity with her own existential dilemma instead of objectifying her to merely serve as by-product in the construction of men's masculinist image.

Additionally, Her struggle against the security guard and even Claudius shows that her self-consciousness is the essential cause of her self-struggling and unyielding attitude. In fact, while Hamlet is able to hold on to a semblance of social acceptability while out for rehabilitation, madness pushes Ophelia even farther into her experience where she can probe her self-existential question and then takes affirmative action.

Ato Quayson defines one of the typologies of disability as "inarticulable and enigmatic tragic insight" (49). He uses the Prometheus-Io complex to suggest that disabled female characters often serve as bearers of tragic knowledge that they are unable to articulate in any other way. In Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet,* Prometheus foresees the coming apocalyptic end of Zeus's reign and secretly knows of his mother's infidelity and complicity with his uncle in his father's murder (48). Hamlet projects his anger violently towards Ophelia by accusing her to "Get thee to a nunnery", words that indicates a moral judgment of Ophelia. Ophelia's existence is thus the epitome of his mother's treachery

behavior. Although clearly misconstrued, Ophelia, as a woman, is indeed rigidly shaped by the patriarchal codes of her time, but knows in her heart that a tarnished woman is always intolerable within the masculine-dominated hierarchy. This knowledge drives her to insanity. The madness of Ophelia thus becomes a metaphor for the traditional patriarchal system, which requires women to stay innocent, submissive and vulnerable, and refuses to accept the presence or societal inclusion of any blemished woman.

In addition, Almereyda's Ophelia is always self-aware of the oppression she experiences under the control of her father and brother. The contradiction between the public definitions based on a patriarchal ideology and her internal self-conception results in her psychiatric disorder. The first view of Ophelia appears in the press conference, where Claudius and Gertrude announce their marriage. In this scene, Ophelia tries to pass a slip of paper to Hamlet using Laertes, but Laertes refuses to help. The close-up shows Ophelia's obstinate facial expression and her eyes rolling at her brother. At the beginning of the film, Almereyda characterizes Ophelia as a self-conscious character, who is fully aware of her confined style life, and indeed Almereyda foreshadows Ophelia's rebellious behavior as the storyline unfolds. Indeed, her very insanity offers her a welcome chance to take action through actual resistance.

Stiles' Ophelia wears little makeup and frequently wears chic jackets, bulky pants, Bohemian skirts, and sneakers. She is flat-chested; however, sometimes she wears a tight cropped top, which also signals her sexual appeal. Ophelia's costume in *Hamlet (2000)*

portrays her as a contradictory image, indeed as both desexualized and sexually suggestive. The stylish clothes stress her struggling position as she is trying to resist possession by the impositions of an external world's definitions of normative femininity and instead build her own identity by herself.

Ophelia's insanity reaches its climax when she is screaming piercingly in New York's Guggenheim Museum. Her madness serves as a platform for her to utter her anguish toward the entire patriarchal system, which embodied in her suffering, and also to express the tragic ethos of the unfolding action in the ensuing plot.

However, although insanity provides Ophelia a way to express her pain and indignation outright, the knowledge she still bears of why she is so suppressed and her lack of choice both still remain for her impossible to demonstrate. The articulation of her being is encoded as the screaming or quoting of verses, which still remain obscure and unreadable for all those who hear them. Although madness offers Ophelia an opportunity to utter her being, she still cannot express herself to the fullest extent, so what she articulates becomes endless questions and unsolvable puzzles, which do not provide the people around her and the viewers of the movie accurate information.

In *Aesthetic Nervousness*, Quayson points out that disability, when serving as an apparently inarticulate burden of the tragic ethos, is usually found replicated in female characters, because "the dialectical coupling of tragic insight with loss of articulation seems to be a structural feature generated through the prism of gender as opposed to the

prisms of race and class" (48). The patriarchal society produces systematic violence toward Ophelia's body, which drives her to insanity, and then ironically opens a channel for her to denounce the patriarchal violence being imposed on her body. Madness actually enables Ophelia and lets her freely articulate her inner personal struggle, and have it heard by the people around her. However, her utterance is still only a series of fragmented enactments of herself, which become an enigma for the viewers to resolve.

This focus proves that the patriarchal system remains an irresistible power that is taking control of Ophelia's body. As a female character, Ophelia finds the chance to express herself because the madness liberates her from the patriarchal oppression that has silenced her, but the knowledge she bears still remains very fragmented and encoded. Ophelia remains unable to deliver the knowledge she has gained in an accurate way, because the patriarchal system will not provide a female character complete freedom to articulate the knowledge she knows and bear witness to it fully.

The Death of Ophelia

In Almereyda's *Hamlet (2000),* an extremely elongated shot captures the conversation between the mad Ophelia and Gertrude, as they walk along the corridor of the Guggenheim Museum. When Gertrude hears Ophelia's murmuring and asks, "How should I your true love know from another one?", a close-up shot shows Gertrude's embarrassing face as a blue funk, worrying that Ophelia's question is a connotation of her

debauched behavior, and that she will divulge it to everyone in the museum. Next, Claudius comes into the scene, smothering Ophelia with his hand to stop her screaming. In the scene where Gertrude tells Laertes about Ophelia's death—using a flustered facial expression, she merely whispers, "drowned, drowned" without any further explanation of the situation for Ophelia's death. The camera instead shifts to a large, semi-circulating fountain in the museum, where Ophelia's dead body lies. When a faceless staff member enters the fountain to retrieve Ophelia's body, the water turns out to be suspiciously shallow, only rising to the staff member's calf, thereby placing the audience in the middle of a dispute as to whether such a small depth of water could actually drown an adult.

Previous film adaptations of *Hamlet* tend to present Ophelia's death as a redemptive moment and portray her dead body as " both a source of visual production and an identificatory beauty model of desirable femininity" (Romanska, 486). Almereyda's representation of Ophelia's death, however, does not confine Ophelia's body to only a visual spectacle as a beautiful, fragile and tranquil image based on men's expectations. An overshot in Almereyda's film shows Ophelia wearing a red long-sleeve coat and a long black dress. Her conservative style of dress neither sexualizes nor purifies her, but rather grants her an opportunity to construct her own image fully divorced from all masculine artistic viewpoints. The following close-shot presents Ophelia's small box and its swirling red pattern that contains the letters Hamlet wrote to her. The childish swirling pattern on the box, as well as the red messenger bag Ophelia wears at every occurrence,

indicates her infantilized situation and reveals her powerlessness and own loss of individual agency under the control of her father and brother who always have treated her like a child.

The montage strategy used in the film also leaves enough space for the audience to introspectively consider other possibilities for Ophelia's death, which then explicitly suggests a preordained doom and inevitability of Ophelia's fate. In fact, no matter whether Ophelia's death was suicidal, premeditated or accidental, her death is predestined because of her madness. Mitchell and Snyder indeed underscore a similar point, namely, "disability cannot be accommodated within the ranks of the norm (also), and, thus, the options for dealing with the difference that drives the story's plot is twofold: a disability is either left behind or punished for its lack of conformity" (56). In Shakespeare's play, the madness of Ophelia becomes the embodiment of a relentless patriarchal hierarchy. Ophelia's madness alludes to the essential desire of women to refuse to be dominated by the patriarchal codes within masculine ideology. Madness suggests the unruliness of the body, which is ultimately thrown out of control and away from control by the patriarchal order.

The mechanism of the patriarchal system does not allow for the existence of an unfettered body that can wander free of its myriad of restrictions; therefore, that system must eradicate all disabled bodies to ensure full conformity. Additionally, the patriarchy ideology could not permit a marred body to remain unscathed. Thus madness marks

Ophelia's body as having impurity and degeneration. The patriarchy and ableist system in and of itself erases all bodies with deviant marks. Thus, Ophelia's madness functions as a prophecy, indeed one regarding the tragic demise of the aristocratic family from which she comes. Ophelia's death, thus foreshadows the destruction of the whole family.

In *Hamlet (2000)*, Gertrude's trepid facial expression and Claudius's fretted behavior to prevent Ophelia from screaming, when they encounter her insanity implies they fear Ophelia's open disclosure of their immoral intrigues and conspiracies. A person with madness suggests a body apart from the social norms and out of control. Ophelia becomes a time bomb for Claudius and Gertrude because Ophelia could expose their immorality whenever and wherever she chooses. Madness here then functions as a bared and dangerous loophole in the corrupted social system. The only approach is to silence Ophelia, as she has the potentiality of truthful revelations of their corruption, so she must be suffocated to a silent death.

Mitchell and Snyder contend "disability inaugurates narrative, but narrative inevitably punishes its own prurient interests by overseeing the extermination of the object of its fascination" (57). The anonymity of normalcy always has no story to tell. Deviance demands display, and display suggests there is a story to tell. In this sense, madness differentiates Ophelia from those living under and obeying the social norms. Ophelia embraces the opportunity her insanity offers her by allowing her truthful narration to come into being; yet she remains enigmatic to the people around her, for the

patriarchal hierarchy could never provide her room in which to articulate the knowledge she is so conscious of to the fullest. The utterances of Ophelia during her insanity divulge the prophecy of her own tragic destiny and the collapsing of the whole Royal family. The narrative ineluctably punishes this character for her own anticipated obliteration of her own destiny.

Chapter 2: Ophelia in the *Prince of the Himalayas*

Sherwood Hu's *Prince of the Himalayass* is set in ancient Tibet and has an all-Tibetan cast. This film adaptation follows Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet*, quite closely in many key respects, including the appearance of the old King's ghost, the respective madness of Lhamoklodam (Hamlet) and Odsaluyang (Ophelia), Lessar's (Laertes) warning of Lhamoklodam's romantic pursuit of Odsaluyang, and Polhanyisses (Polonius) divulging of Lhamoklodam's love letter to Nanm (Gertrude) and Kulongam (Claudius). However, many other aspects of *Hamlet* are rewritten and adapted in *Prince of the Himalayas*. The film includes facets of Tibetan culture, such as rituals, dances, and Buddhism. Additionally, the young Nanm falls in love with Kulongam before her marriage to Kulongam's brother, King Tsanpo. The Old King forces Nanm to marry him, which keeps Nanm in an unhappy marriage for 17 years. Before Nanm's marriage, however, she gave her virginity to Kulongam. Therefore, Lhamoklodan is his Uncle Kulongam's biological son. By the end of the marriage, the Old King has discovered Nanm's affair with his brother, and threatens to kill Kulongam and Nanm.

The movie characterizes Nanm as a typical Chinese wife who suffers from and endures a bitter marriage life, and Kulongam's killing of his brother becomes a choice he makes to free Nanm from her miserable marriage and to protect his son, Lhamoklodan. Instead of demanding that the Prince avenges him out of justice, the ghost of the old King deceives and manipulates the vacillating prince to take cruel revenge against Kulongam.

Further still, Lhamoklodan and Odsaluyang develop a sexual relationship in the film, and Odsaluyang becomes pregnant out of wedlock. In the film's representation of Ophelia's death scene, Odsaluyang walks into Namtso Lake, and dies during childbirth. Lhamoklodan's son has a significant role to play that changes the tragic tone of the film and underscores the theme of forgiveness and the ongoing cycle between life and death. The film also introduces a new character, the Wolf Woman, who is both narrator and prophet with supernatural powers. She prophesizes that the river will be stained with blood, tries to reveal the truth of the old King's death to Hamlet, leads the theater troupe, and saves the life of Hamlet's son when Odsaluyang delivers the baby in the river. The Wolf Woman adds another layer to the storytelling as an authoritative narrator who already knows the past and is clearly able to predict the future.

The Madness of Ophelia and The Nature of Narrative Prosthesis

In *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse,* its authors, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, emphasize the importance of disability as a productive metaphorical device to help signify the social and individual crisis of the "Other." In narration, disability functions as "a character-making trope in the writer and filmmaker's arsenal, as a social category of deviance, and as a symbolic vehicle for meaning-making and cultural critique" (1). Disability and disabled bodies are often introduced in stories as representing the resistance against the cultural scripts written for

them (49). In other words, disability is fundamental in that it challenges normalizing any prescriptive ideals in both cultural and literary discourses.

This paper argues that in *Prince of the Himalaya,* madness effectively marks Odsaluyang's body as an outsider and not part of the societal normalcy, and that frees her from the patriarchic judgmental system and helps her escape from any moral punishment in a male-dominated social hierarchy. Instead of being presented as a weak and docile female figure, Odsaluyang achieves an every increasing agency by using her madness as a useful mask to protect herself and her baby from any lethal moral discipline, which accordingly allows the film to tap into a second possible narration, namely, the themes of hope and forgiveness, which are actually absent in the original play, *Hamlet*.

In *Prince of the Himalayas,* after Odsaluyang goes to insanity, her soliloquy on her madness revolves around the death of her father and Lhamoklodan's departure. She sings the strange song, "He is dead, and will never come back." When Laertes comes to visit her following her madness outburst, she asks Lessar, "Who are you? Are you the body of my father? Or the soul of my love?" The film explicitly aligns Odsaluyang's insanity with her inner struggle when faced with the death of her father and the self-exile of her love. This is exacerbated by the three dominant social codes (*sancong*) that constrain women in the Chinese culture. A woman must first to obey her father, followed by her husband, and if she outlives her husband, then her son. According to the *sancong,* Odsaluyang faces a difficult dilemma. She must fulfill her filial duty as a daughter and

replace her love for Lhamoklodam with hatred toward him because he is her father's murderer. Lhamoklodan is also very cognizant of his society's social codes, for once he realizes that he has killed Polonius, the first word he murmurs is "Odsaluyang".

Similar to Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet (2000)*, the madness in *Prince of the Himalayas* affects the members of each gender quite differently. While Lhamoklodan uses madness as a useful ploy to investigate the murder of the old King and buy him more time to prepare his revenge, insanity is ineluctable for Odsaluyang, and there is little to no opportunity for her to return to sanity. Lhamoklodan and Odsaluyang's respective insanities in this film are presented in a parallel manner. Lhamoklodan runs over a stone bridge, undressing while vociferating in incomprehensible language to attract people's attention. Instead, Odsaluyang walks across the same stone bridge while unbuttoning her dress and singing songs. The next shots show the people in the village staring at them with confused gazes. Lhamoklodan's "insane" behavior is seen more as a performance used to try and convince the bystanders that he is mad; thereby also proving his madness is under his personal control.

In contrast to Ophelia in Almereyda's *Hamlet (2000)*, Odsaluyang in *Prince of the Himalayas* has a more assertive and active role to play even after going insane--she is still able to employ her madness as a disguise to protect herself and her baby during her pregnancy. In the first scene showing Odsaluyang's madness, her bulging abdomen makes her pregnancy obvious, as it is nearly impossible for her to hide. When she walks across

the stone bridge and sings the strange songs, people stare at her as if she is a monster. However, their judgmental reactions seem to focus on her insane behavior rather than her pregnancy, as she is an unmarried woman. Therefore, her madness becomes the perfect means for her to escape from any patriarchal judgment and moral punishment in her masculine-dominated society.

Further, when Kulongam asks her who the father of her child is, Odsaluyang replies, "I will not tell you. It is a secret between him and I." Insanity, in this way, creates a unique safety for herself and her child, as her pregnancy as an unmarried woman puts her and her child in a dangerous position in a patriarchal society that will only rage in rigid moral criticism at her. Odsaluyang's madness thus emancipates her from any moral punishment and provides her with an opportunity to give birth to her baby.

Mitchell and Snyder contend that disabled bodies often "show up in stories as dynamic entities that resist or refuse the cultural script assigned to them" (49). Disability thus functions as a metaphor for the body's resistance to culturally enforced normalcy (48). The disabled body serves as a body existing outside the social norms and thereby an effective symbol for literary investment in Odsaluyang's madness signals that her body is a being outside of the expected and enforced social normalcy, and that environment sets her free from the control of the patriarchic system and allows the birth of her child. This setting changes the story's plot from tragedy to forgiveness and hope, as well as changing the themes for the cycles of life and death that based in Tibetan Buddhism ideology.

Intellectual Disability and Self-Awareness

Prince of the Himalayas depicts Odsaluyang as a paradoxical character who is, on the one hand, innocent and feminine in her love for Lhamoklodam, and on the other hand, is full aware of her oppressed role as a woman living under patriarchic dominance, but well able to act decisively and resist it. This contrast is especially apparent in the sex scene between Hamlet and Ophelia in Kenneth Branagh's film, *Hamlet* (1996). While Branagh's *Hamlet* "promotes Ophelia's objectification" (Rooks, 478) and sexualizes Ophelia as an erotic object for a masculinized Hamlet, *Prince of the Himalayas* presents the sexual relationship between Odsaluyang and Lhamoklodam in *Prince of the Himalayas* as one of mutual affection between the two lovers. When he feels overwhelming sorrow at the death of his father and the remarriage of his mother, Lhamoklodan runs to Odsaluyang's chamber to meet her. Odsaluyang is able to console her sorrowful and perplexed lover by engaging in sexual relations with him and is thus portrayed as a young woman also silently protesting a relentless oppressed system by sexually liberating herself at the same time.

Before Lhamoklodan's self-imposed exile, he asks Odsaluyang's forgiveness for killing her father, saying, "Only your love could save me." Odsaluyang dramatically throws the ivory blade, which was given by Lhamoklodan as a remembrance of their love, to the ground, a gesture showing her strong resolve now to end their relationship. On the one hand, her refusal to forgive Lhamoklodan suggests that she is fulfilling her position as

a filial daughter in a patriarchal society. On the other hand, her statement, "I do not need it anymore. It is full of your sin and insanity", is asserting herself in spite of her victimized position as a woman living in a masculine-dominated hierarchy system. When Lhamoklodan reproaches her to "marry to a fool" and abandons her, Odsaluyang realizes she is also a victim of Lhamoklodan's masculine power, which raises him to the top of the hierarchy, and produces violence towards her body. Odsaluyang's refusal to continue her relationship with Lhamoklodan also reflects her lucid understanding of her gender identity within a larger system where in women are always ruthlessly oppressed.

However, the following scene shows Odsaluyang returning to where she left the ivory blade, and in her death scene, she uses that same blade to cut the umbilical cord of her newborn child during her delivery in the river. The reappearance of the ivory blade suggests that she has not abandoned her love for Lhamoklodan and has a distinct awareness of herself as only a suppressed object in a masculine-dominated society. Odsaluyang thus escapes from unequal relationship in a patriarchal system by refusing to reconcile with Lhamoklodan and liberates herself from her obligation to be an obedient daughter constrained by patriarchic moral codes by secretly maintaining her affection toward the man she truly loves.

Michael Bérubé believes that disability narrative theories need not only focus on the metaphorical function and characterization of disabled characters, but also be very attentive to the structure of the narration with its significant impact on the textual

disturbances. One of Bérubé's key questions is how much does the disabled character know about the narrative within which she or he is operating? Bérubé then points out that "the narrative irony at work in stories can tell us something important about irony, self-awareness, and self-reflexivity as well as about intellectual disability" (128). The self-reflexivity in the narration of disabled stories raises the key question of whether any intellectually disabled character can serve as a "fully qualified" narrator (138).

In *Prince of the Himalayas,* Odsaluyang is already pregnant in the first scene depicting her madness, and throughout the film, her madness and pregnancy are portrayed as a parallel narration. When Kulongam asks Odsaluyang who the father of her child is, her insanity allows her to provide an answer "I will not tell you", which frees her from moral punishment, thereby ensuring safety for both her and her child. However, at the same time, her intellectual disability deprives her of the authority of her own narration to let her claim the identity of the child, which thus raises a question of how this mentally disabled character can ever understand the larger parameters of the story that she is narrating. To solve this problem, the film invents the character of the Wolf Woman, who as an authoritative narrator knows the past and the future of the story. In the ending scene, the Wolf Woman reveals the identity of the child as Lhamoklodam's son and also the future King of Jiabo.

Bérubé argues that the self-consciousness of a human being is usually only recognized as being cloying or trivial in narration, similar to a person who is staring in the

bathroom mirror and saying his/her name over and over. However, when intellectual disability is implicated in the context, that focus allows for a re-imagining of the parameters of the entire narration and raises the question of how intellectually disabled literary characters can actually compel their audience to "think about our social relation with humans of all varieties and capacities" (160). Intellectual disability demands non-existent space for representation, which then naturally breaks the original frame of traditional narration and offers another possibility to reframe the world.

As Viktor Shklovsky contends, "the technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (12). In *The Prince of the Himalaya,* Odsaluyang's intellectual disability lulls the audience into a world where familiar objects become unfamiliar, and what is normative becomes deviant. Odsaluyang's madness creates a delusional world for herself and the audience, a space where she is away from patriarchal social constraints and freely able to give birth to her child as an unmarried woman. Her surviving child represents the eternal ongoing cycle of life, death, and birth that is influenced by the local context.

The Death of Ophelia

Building upon Adrienne Rich's analysis of compulsory heterosexuality, which is established as the "foundational sexual identity for women," Robert McRuer puts forth

the theory of compulsory able-bodiedness. McRuer argues that the systems of compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality are intertwined with each other (89). McRuer claims, "the cultural management of the endemic crisis surrounding the performance of both heterosexual and able-bodied identity effects a panicked consolidation of hegemonic identities" (94). The most recognizable heterosexual identity is the one "whose sexuality is not compromised by disability," and the most acceptable able-bodied identity is the one "whose ability is not compromised by queerness" (94).

For Odsaluyang, pregnancy is the most distinguishable heterosexual identity for a woman. However, her madness, which labels her as mentally disabled, jeopardizes her normal heterosexual identity. After she gives birth to her child, pregnancy can no longer serve to maintain her normalized heterosexual identity. Her disability also asexualizes her, which leads to her obliterated demise in the narration.

Using McRue's study and Judith Butler's term, "normative violence" that emphasizes the institutional power to normalize certain bodies (15), Eunjung Kim develops the concept of "curative violence", defined as the exercise of force to eliminate differences for the assumed betterment of the Other (14). Curative violence happens when the presence of disability framed by a cure is still a problem, and thus, the curative process then becomes a destructive force for the subject. Curative violence exists at two levels. First, disability and illness are denied as different ways of living; secondly, the physical violence against disabled people is justified under the guise of cure.

Prince of the Himalayas introduces a future without disability, implying that the only desirable and meaningful future must be one of only able-bodiedness and able-mindedness. Lhamoklodan and Odsaluyang's able-bodied and able-minded child is used to buttress able-bodied and able-minded heteronormativity, since the future is almost always depicted in society in terms of reproduction. The compulsory able-bodiedness and able-mindedness in actual reproduction establishes a belief that disability destroys the future, so a future with disability must be avoided at any cost. Eunjung Kim considers this perpetuated, forward-looking gaze of a "curing" future for disabled people as committing violence toward people with disability. People with disabilities are forced to live in a future where they are not wanted, instead of living in the present moment, and they are always under the relentless pressure of being corrected or "cured".

In *The Prince of the Himalaya,* Odsaluyang drowns in the river while giving birth to Lhamoklodan's son. After a close-up shot of Odsaluyang's face now contorted in pain during her delivery, the camera cuts to a shot of the river, which is now dyed red, signaling that Odsaluyang's death is caused by the birth of her son. Eunjung Kim defines such "curative violence" as a denial of the disabled body's presence and a destructive process being taken toward the body itself (14). Odsaluyang's death while still in the throes of madness following the birth of her son symbolizes a disabled body being replaced by an able-bodied/able-minded body. Odsaluyang is still able to give birth to an

able-bodied and able-minded child despite her mental illness; however, during this process, Odsaluyang as self is obliterated because of her disability. This process of reproduction and birth that destroys Odsaluyang and her disability is an exercise of violence toward Odsaluyang's body.

Eunjing Kim argues that such "attempts to cure physical, mental, and sensory disabilities and certain illnesses unveil the ways in which disability is enmeshed with gender and sexual norms that serve individual, state, and activist purpose" (15). Curative violence is frequently associated with a gendered role like reproduction. According to the logic of eugenics, human must make greater efforts to control reproductive outcomes in order to create a future without disability. This view creates an environment in which a mother is forced to shoulder the full responsibility of preventing disability for future generations. A baby born with a disability is recognized as that baby's mother's failure to prevent the disability.

In *Prince of the Himalayas,* an insane Odsaluyang is able to give birth to an able-bodied and able-minded baby, thereby reinforcing the normative idea that reproduction creates a potential future for disabled/ill women; but at the same time, still demands that their disability/illness be fixed through reproduction to achieve a normalized future. These women can only achieve their womanhood and thus motherhood by successfully delivering able-bodied and able-minded children.

However, the Director, Sherwood Hu, tries to offer a fuller picture of Odsaluyang

during her death scene by focusing on her facial expressions of excruciating pain during her labor and then cutting to a broader view of her blood dying the river's waters red. The film uses these scenes very explicitly to accentuate Ophelia's gender role as the cultural circulation of feminist consciousness. Even though the obliteration of the insane Odsaluyang is unavoidable due to a compulsory able-bodied and able-minded ideology and the relentless patriarchal system, Hu's film still focuses on the painful process of Odsaluyang's death by elaborately showing the cruelty of the patriarchal order, which eventually only disempowers and exploits a mentally disabled female character to desire death.

Further, *Prince of the Himalayas* also depicts elements of the local culture clearly during Odsaluyang's death. In Tibetan Buddhism, humans are seen as a part of nature, and death is not considered to be the end of life; instead, life goes on in an eternal cycle of death and birth. This film naturalizes Odsaluyang's death by allowing her body to become one with the body of the lake and nature. In the funeral scene that follows, Odsaluyang's corpse is wearing a light blue dress and lying on a raft, drifting with the river. Integrating Odsaluyang with nature can be seen as the way for Odsaluyang to become free from the patriarchal social order. As Alexa Joubin points out, the more traditional depictions of the drowning scene take "Ophelia's association with the cyclic quality of nature in Millais to a different level, hinting at the necessary, if cruel, procession of fading and emerging generations" (87). Engaged thusly with the local

cultural elements, the film is able to offer an alternative of a free-spirited Odsaluyang, indeed an adaptation of Ophelia that moves away from societal oppression to highlight the theme of the cycle of life and death, instead of simply portraying Ophelia as fragile and objectified in her death.

Chapter 3: Ophelia in *The Banquet*

Set in the strife-ridden Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms of fifth-century China, *The Banquet* (released in North America as *Legend of the Black Scorpion*) is a martial arts adaptation of *Hamlet,* directed by Feng Xiaogang. The film re-centers the *Hamlet* narration by switching the focus from the male characters to the traditionally minimized and silenced characters, like Gertrude and Ophelia. As Alexa Joubin contends, Anglophone cinematic traditions relegate Ophelia to a subordinate role as someone who merely relates information about Hamlet (78). Similarly, instead of being a structural device to develop the plot around Hamlet and Claudius, Empress Wan (Gertrude, played by Zhang Ziyi) becomes a "narrative and visual object of desire that both propels and deconstructs the male lineal right to the throne" (Chapman, 2).

The film *The Banquet* portrays a unique image of Ophelia, who possesses a self-affirming agency from the strength of her unshakable love to Wu Luan (Hamlet, played by Daniel Wu). Ophelia (Qing Nü), destabilizing the conventional gender role of being inarticulate, is allowed to speak as the author of herself, especially through the songs she sings. Other than finding her own voice from quoted or incomprehensible verses, Qing Nü (played by Zhou Xun) is able to directly utter her affection for Wu Luan and argue with her father and brother, who represent the patriarchal dominant power oppressing her. Moreover, *The Banquet* enables Qing Nü to control her own narration, affording her a possibility to transfer the violence toward her body into a chance to show

sympathy for the perpetrator of violence. However, paradoxically, her strong agency, based on her pure love for Wu Luan, also entraps her in a confined situation, in which she is not permitted to have a desire as equally as a man could have.

Although loyal to Shakespeare's play in some respects, *The Banquet* shows several distinctive revisions of *Hamlet*. Prince Wu Luan flees the imperial court for a remote theatre to study the performing arts, after his father decides to marry Little Wan (Gertrude). Later, the emperor dies, apparently from a scorpion's sting, but what was actually part of his brother's conspiratorial scheme to usurp power. The emperor's brother Li (Claudius, played by Ge You) makes Little Wan his empress when he takes the crown. In the film, Little Wan is not Wu Luan's mother, but his lover. The sexual tension between Wu Luan and Empress Wan makes the Oedipal dynamic between Hamlet and Gertrude salient. As Chapman points out, "Wan represents an adaptive amalgam in the filmic fusion of Shakespeare and *wuxia* by performing the functions of Queen Gertrude and the Chuh fiancée, a strategy that retains the Oedipal dynamic often exploited in filmic adaptations of *Hamlet* by figuring Wan as both Gertrude and Ophelia, mother and lover" (2).

Unlike the Anglophone cinematic representation of Ophelia, who is often depicted as submissive and weak, *The Banquet* provides a more assertive Ophelia who is both innocent but bold in love. Remarkably, Ophelia is not insane in the film. As the only character who is not adept at swordplay, Qing Nü possesses "perseverance in the face of

insurmountable obstacles" and "headstrong adherence to her love for the prince" (Joubin, 89). Compared with the previous film adaptations of Ophelia who is generally soft-spoken, Qing Nü is eloquent in expressing her love to the prince. When her father attempts to persuade Qing Nü to end her relationship with Prince Wu Luan, Qing Nü declares, "I will never change," demonstrating her unswerving loyalty to the prince. Even after being whipped on the order of Empress Wan, Qing Nü insists that Empress Wan is jealous of her ability to love the prince, something that Empress Wan cannot do. Qing Nü acquires an invincibility built upon her passionate and undoubted love for the prince, which precludes her from going mad in a world of turmoil and conspiracy.

In a court of calculation and schemes, Qing Nü stays innocent, since her world centers on the prince, and she is blind to the political conflicts around her. When Wu Luan asks Qing Nü about the death of his father, "there are scorpions in the palace?" Qing Nü simply answers, "they say you can find everything in the palace," which infantilizes Qing Nü for her lack of knowledge of political intrigue. On the contrary, when Empress Wan is asked the same question by Wu Luan, she replies, "The pain in your eyes breaks my heart." The conversion denotes the emotional connection and mutual intelligibility between Empress Wan and Wu Luan, which Qing Nü does not share with Wu Luan, and presents Qing Nü's love for Wu Luan in a much self-assertive way. Qing Nü does not share the existential dilemma and emotional crisis with the prince since her own love and self-assertion frees her from any self-crisis.

When Empress Wan asks Qing Nü whether she has received any letters from Wu Luan, she answers proudly that she communicates with the prince in her dreams every day, discrediting Qing Nü's imagined relationship with Wu Luan. However, Joubin points out that Qing Nü is aware of this situation; when her brother reminds her that she is not in the prince's heart, she insists that she tries to stay with him and sing to him so that he will not feel lonely (89).

Banquet provides an Ophelia who does not go mad, but lives in her own world, in which she legitimates by her belief that the only value she holds is her love for the prince. She believes that she is able to escape patriarchal oppression, and becomes a fearless debater, who can fight against her father and brother's domination.

Ophelia Without Madness

In *Hamlet* (2000), with Ophelia's piercing scream in the corridor, madness acts as an opening for her to express the irrationality of her situation and her own existential crisis because of her lack of choice under patriarchy. In *Prince of the Himalayas*, where Ophelia is pregnant, her insanity is a disguise that allows her to disrupt moral judgments and to flee patriarchal violence against her body.

The Banquet offers Ophelia an option: she retains her sanity until her death. Unlike Almereyda's Ophelia and Odsaluyang in *Prince of the Himalayas,* for whom madness offers an escape from the patriarchal structure, Qing Nü flees the male-dominated

hierarchy by building a highly self-conscious agency with her devotion to the prince.

According to Charles Ross, Qing Nü "plays out her madness by singing, like Ophelia, to which she adds what Ken Kesey would have called 'dream wars' with Wu Luan" (3). Other than Almereyda's Ophelia, who can express herself obscurely in her insanity, Qing Nü expresses herself boldly and frankly by singing at different times. In the film's last scene, the coronation of Empress Wan, she sings a song in memory of Wu Luan who had faked his own death:

> What blessed night is this?
> Drifting down the river Qian.
> What auspicious day is this?
> On the boat with my Prince.
> Too bashful to stare,
> A secret I cannot share.
> My heart is filled with longing.
> Longing to know you, dear Prince.
> Trees live on mountains,
> And branches live on trees.
> My heart lives for your heart,
> But you do not see me.

In *Hamlet* (2000), Ophelia in her madness murmurs the poem "How should I your true love know from another one?" when she walks through the corridor in Guggenheim Museum. The verse is incomprehensible until it is decoded. The poem itself fails to deliver the message Ophelia tries to express, as a woman trapped in a patriarchal hierarchy.

In *Prince of the Himalayas,* after Odsaluyang goes insane, she sings on several occasions. When she sings in front of Nanm (Gertrude), "he is dead, and will never come back," Nanm asks, "What's the meaning of your song?" Odsaluyang responds with laughter, saying, "what did you say? You heard me singing?" The lyrics sung by Odsaluyang describe being left by men; the death of her father and Hamlet's abandonment are the causes of her madness. However, from Nanm's reaction, we can infer that her songs do not convey any information to the people around her. Like Almereyda's Ophelia, the accusation of the unrelenting violence acting upon Odsaluyang remains unfathomable.

Unlike the previous two versions of Ophelia, the songs Qing Nü sings are simple and easy to understand—Qing Nü expresses her love to the prince whenever possible, indicative of her faith that her love could save the prince from loneliness and melancholy. In addition, Qing Nü's singing at the Empress's coronation gives Wu Luan a chance to approach Emperor Li in his disguise as a member of the dancing group, to exact his revenge. Therefore, though Qing Nü is not connected with Wu Luan in his existential dilemma, the film sets up a connection between Qing Nü and Wu Luan for Qing Nü's love makes it possible for Wu Luan to take revenge.

The "get thee to a nunnery" scene has been cited as a cause of Ophelia's madness. Ophelia, confined by patriarchal power, is devastated when Hamlet turns violent against her. In *The Banquet,* an enraged Wu Luan shreds Qing Nü's white gown, a symbol of

chastity, and rapes her. Chapman claims that "in representing the Hamlet figure as sexually violent and wholly bent on forcing women into a system of signification that revolves exclusively around him, *The Banquet* points toward both the limits and the violence of these two parallel interpretative traditions" (5).

However, the rape does not make Qing Nü go insane. After the rape, the camera presents a still shot, in which Qing Nü holds Wu Luan in her arms, as a mother comforts her child. With the raining outside, Qing Nü is drenched with water, besides a fountain, echoing Ophelia's "drowning-in-the-stream" scene. As mentioned in chapter one, Ophelia finds redemption in drowning, which enables her to return to serenity and normalcy. Additionally, Qing Nü's willingness to endure complicates the Oedipal dynamics, since Wu Luan accuses Qing Nü is the same as Empress Wan, who is accused of infidelity by Wu Luan. In this rape scene, Wu Luan's violent behavior, making him across the boundary of being a man who hesitates to take action, results in a moment for Qing Nü to offer maternal care to the prince, which is her essential value.

The Banquet does not dramatize the rape scene explicitly. It starts with Wu Luan perpetrating violence toward Qing Nü, demonstrating his inner turmoil. However, it ends with the scene, in which Qing Nü consoles Wu Luan, providing him maternal care. Rather than objectifying Qing Nü as an erotic object for men and paralyzing Qing Nü under masculine violence, the film highlights the intricacy and conflict in Qing Nü's characterization, rendering Qing Nü the authority to retell her experience from her own

perspective. Qing Nü regains her agency because the camera affords her a central position in this scene's narration instead of minimizing her character to underscore Wu Luan's masculinity.

The Desire of Ophelia

Many of Shakespeare's works describe female desire. As Marianne Novy argues, "Shakespeare's women find that their own love gives them power to say and do things they otherwise would not" (36). She explains how different Juliet is when she falls in love with Romeo and surprises the friar about what she is eager to risk to maintain her love (36). *The Banquet* portrays an Ophelia who appears capable of stepping out of the objectifying restriction and building her own agency by using her desire for a male character as liberation. Qing Nü emancipates herself from the patriarchal oppression by showing her desire to the price, ignoring advice from her father and brother, and changing the physical violence against her into feminine solicitude.

Women's desire for love seems to liberate them; however, women's desire for pure love could also trap them in conventional gender roles. Qing Nü's innocence and devotion are confined by the male gaze as defined by Laura Mulvey (15), leading to Qing Nü's objectification and limited gendered role in the film. In contrast, as both Gertrude and Ophelia, mother and lover of Wu Luan, Empress Wan's desire is significantly different from that of Qing Nü. Qing Nü is allowed to express her attraction to Wu Luan

and act on it, indicating the only desire Qing Nü obtains is erotic. While Empress Wan also possesses erotic desire for Wu Luan, she is depicted as a woman who desires power.

In *Banquet*, Qing Nü and Empress Wan are erotic inspiration for men, in scenes with Empress Wan's naked body and the slow-motion rape scene of Qing Nü. As Wu Luan's lover, Qing Nü and Empress Wan contain shared desire for Wu Luan. The only difference between Qing Nü and Empress Wan is that the desire for Qing Nü is restricted by her love for Wu Luan, with which any other desire will stain her image. Empress Wan's desire shifts between her craving for Wu Luan's love and her lust for the crown, leaving the audience to ponder whether she is a dedicated lover for Wu Luan or an astute politician who schemes for power.

Woodrow B. Hood argues that though *The Banquet* concentrates on female characters, it is not a "gender-progressive" film. Instead, the film adopts a medieval view, in which women were either saints or whores (2). The gender norms in *The Banquet* are articulated in terms of medieval Chinese expectations, with which women need to stay chaste and docile. However, Qing Nü breaks the medieval expectations in the film, since she is sexually experienced, and also is bold enough to refute her brother and father's suggestions for her to be away from Wu Luan. The climax scene comes at the coronation of Empress Wan. The male protagonists' divergent reactions to Qing Nü and Empress Wan define Qing Nü's simple desire for man as encouraging and Empress Wan's ambition as malevolent. After Qing Nü drinks the poisoned wine Empress Wan had

intended for Emperor Li, she asks Wu Luan, who holds her in his arms, “do you still feel lonely?” Wu Luan answers, “with you, I shall never be lonely again.” Emperor Li orders a state funeral for Qing Nü because he is moved by Qing Nü’s devotion.

When staring at Qing Nü’s dead body, Emperor Li asks, “or, perhaps, a million calculations can not compare to one pure heart,” denouncing Empress Wan as venomous and calculating. Minister Yin (Polonius) also calls Empress Wan “a venomous woman,” blaming her for Qing Nü’s death. *The Banquet* characterizes Wu Luan as misogynist, because of his hatred of Empress Wan for her ambition, and expresses his willingness to see her return to her adolescence, when she seemed as innocent as Qing Nü.

However, Chapman indicates that, “ what can be gathered from the sequence and from Wan’s complex engagements with both Li and Wu Luan is that, like adaptation itself, she performs contradictory loyalties in ways that shroud a clear understanding of her sense of fidelity” (4). Both Emperor Li and Wu Luan tend to neglect Empress Wan’s loyalty to the deceased Emperor and dedication in love in her relationship with Wu Luan. In the first cinematic encounter between Empress Wan and Emperor Li, Empress Wan refuses to call Emperor Li “ Your Majesty”, saying “ it is hard for me to adapt so quickly, Brother-in-law”. Her facial expression suggests her disobedience and resistance against the new Emperor. Also, in the final scene of the film, after the death of Emperor Li, Empress Wan shows her willingness to support Wu Luan to become the new Emperor, giving up her own desire for power. However, Wu Luan is still reluctant to believe Wan’s

dedicated love to him, but misunderstands Wan as a villainous woman who is unable to provide him love anymore. Wu Luan's reaction reflects that a woman who has complicated desire for love and power is not acceptable in a male-dominated world. The only desire a woman is allowed to have is the desire of pursuing man.

The different reactions of male characters towards Qing Nü and Empress Wan reinforce the patriarchal view in defining women's desire for love as laudable, and their desire for power as villainous. Novy points out, "Equality/humanist feminist theory suggests that it (desire of women) can be liberating only if it involves similar possibilities for all, not just for men" (50). Qing Nü's desire for pure love establishes a world in which she can defend herself against patriarchal hegemony; at the same time, she is trapped by women's desires, which are validated by masculinist cultural and social inspection. When Empress Wan tends to power, her desire for control is defined as impure, which leads her to her death.

Toward the end of the film, Wan becomes the supreme ruler. She changes from a red to a black royal robe, which symbolizes her power, her malice, and her death. At the end of her long soliloquy, after she declares, "they will call me Her Majesty, the Emperor," an unknown assailant stabs her through the heart and kills her. Hood introduces "The Dragon Lady," a Western term for a powerful woman, who is often beautiful, seductive, but evil. "The Dragon Lady" is always punished for being too ambitious (2). In other words, the only legitimate desire for women in a male-dominated

hierarchy is for men, which keeps them submissive and innocent. Wan is punished with death for expressing the male desire for power.

Conclusion

The depictions of Ophelia in *Hamlet* (2000), *Prince of the Himalayas*, and *The Banquet* tap into the vast possibilities of reimagining Ophelia, rendering her in distinctively innovative and subversive ways to make her capable of protesting against or escaping from ruthlessly patriarchal oppression.

Hamlet (2000) affords Ophelia a level of self-awareness and revokes her mute status under the patriarchal order—namely, her madness serves as a way for her to articulate her inner struggle—though her utterances remain ambiguous and obscure. The death of Ophelia in the film implies that the mechanism of the patriarchal system obliterates her with madness because she cannot be allowed to wander freely within the restricted system. In *Prince of the Himalayas*, madness is used as a disguise by Odsaluyang (Ophelia) to hide from patriarchal moral judgment and violence against her body. By dramatizing Odsaluyang's death during the delivery of her baby, the film reinforces the disabled female body as undesirable in spite of its crucial role in the narrative. *The Banquet* offers a remarkably new re-envisioning of Ophelia (Qing Nü), where Qing Nü acquires notably strong agency through her dedicated love to Wu Luan (Hamlet), preventing her from going insane in a court of intrigue and turmoil. Interestingly, Qing Nü also demonstrates a significantly expressive Ophelia who is able to take assertive action to fight against the patriarchal suppressive power and articulate her affection for her beloved.

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