

The Ophelia Motif in the Work of Iberian Galician Writers

María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar  
*University of Santiago de Compostela*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, **Purdue University Press** selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: [<clcweb@purdue.edu>](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)

---

### Recommended Citation

Rábade Villar, María do Cebreiro. "The Ophelia Motif in the Work of Iberian Galician Writers." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.5 (2011): [<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1910>](https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1910)

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

*CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <[clcweb@purdue.edu](mailto:clcweb@purdue.edu)>

---

**Volume 13 Issue 5 (December 2011) Article 12**  
**María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar,**  
**"The Ophelia Motif in the Work of Iberian Galician Writers"**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss5/12>>

---

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 13.5 (2011)**  
Special issue **New Trends in Iberian Galician Comparative Literature.**  
**Ed. María Teresa Vilariño Picos and Anxo Abuín González**  
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss5/>>

---

**Abstract:** In her article "The Ophelia Motif in the Work of Iberian Galician Writers" María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar attempts to arrive at an idea of character through a comparative analysis of various artistic versions of William Shakespeare's Ophelia. Rábade Villar employs Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notions of transversality and devices of analytical enunciation in order to understand the feminine literary character. Rábade Villar's corpus of the Ophelia motif include Iberian Galician authors's work such as by Álvaro Cunqueiro, Xohana Torres, Chus Pato, and Marta Dacosta.

## María do Cebreiro RÁBADE VILLAR

### The Ophelia Motif in the Work of Iberian Galician Writers

Translated from the Galician by Manus O'Dwyer

Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze developed the concept of "transversality" in their *Rhizome* (1976). Based on psychoanalytical praxis, transversality can be substituted for transference as the operating notion in analysis as it transcends vertical approaches (where the principle of hierarchy rules) or horizontal approaches (where the possibility of substitution presents itself). Guattari and Deleuze recognized the analytical potential of literary works with regard to Kafka, Proust, Joyce, Artaud, and Beckett as being more decisive to a cartography of subjectivity than the works of Freud, Jung, or Lacan. In Deleuze and Guattari's *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie*, transversality is conceived to uncover the mechanism of analytic enunciations. I postulate that this presents itself as an ideal concept for a comparative study of character, in particular for the analysis of the feminine character, in this case that of Shakespeare's Ophelia.

I employ the notion of transversality in at least two senses of the concept: in the ontological sense with the goal of questioning the one-dimensionality of character, particularly the feminine character and in the methodological sense with the goal of method in comparative literature. We must wonder to what degree the category of character resists the conception of written genres as a tree of knowledge expressed in a linear and hierarchical manner. It is in this context that Deleuze's and Guattari's thought are applied to the subject's rhizomatic cartography: the character transcends genre, it appears in plays, novels, and in poetry (even if the poetic characterization has not received as much critical attention as the dramatic or narrative one), and it appears in film, sculpture, painting, and video art. Character can be used as a critical category revealing the mechanisms of sexual differentiation which establishes a system of privileges. In this context, we might then ask, "what is a feminine character?" or, as a figurative specification of this general enunciation, "who is Ophelia?" The choice of Shakespeare's character as a starting point for this reflection is owing to her ambivalence and ambiguity. These characteristics perhaps explain why Ophelia is both the starting point and model for such an ample corpus of works not limited to literature only.

In his version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, originally published in 1959 and re-published with modifications in 1974, Álvaro Cunqueiro presents Ophelia as the object of song, as the recipient of the poems Hamlet composes. This is how the chorus explains: "Ever since they dressed her up as a woman, she became his beloved. She is extremely pampered. She sleeps on embroidered pillows. He brings her rings back from his travels and wavy hairpins for her hair. He used to sing verses to her" (unless indicated otherwise, all translations are by Rábade Villar and O'Dwyer) ("Desde a vestiron de muller, xa se puxo por súa namorada. Está moi herdada. Dorme en almofadas bordadas. Traíalle anelos das viaxes e forquiñas rizadas para o pelo. Cantáballe versos" [32-33]) and to which Ophelia responds singing: "He sang verses to me! / Darling, my heart that desires roses / desires oranges and is an lonely nightingale / Darling, he is your master!" ("Cantábame versos! / Amiga, meu corazón que pide rosas, / laranxas pide e é isolado reiseñor, / amiga, tente el por señor!" [33]). In this way, Ophelia's singing of verses changes her into a singing subject, into a subject that bears witness, with her own voice, to the preceding song by the chorus. In addition to taking refuge in song, Ophelia takes refuge in insanity, a codeless language. The distinction made by Guattari and Deleuze between insanity and illness is useful for my application to analyse the Ophelia motif. Ophelia is the madwoman who refuses to subject words to things. As in the fable of the emperor's new clothes, the insane woman, in her resistance, shows the world that the powerful one is naked and that reason is the name of the suit he is not wearing. Compared to Ophelia, Hamlet is the neurotic one, the figure of Oedipus, whose twisted reasoning generates the ambiguity between "convent" and "brothel" and whose use of words reveals an opportunistic linguistic economy. Ophelia, on the other hand, chooses the vocal language of song, not the consonantal language of reason. She chooses the lullaby, the means through which the mother tongue was transmitted.

To die, the character chooses a connection with water and if there is one thing that characterizes Ophelia as a character, it is her death. This is what the pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais observed in his often reproduced painting (1851-52). The work inspired a large genealogy of texts —

many of these poetic texts creating a physical model of a character that would find its clearest manifestation, for example in Kate Winslet as Kenneth Branagh's *Ophelia* (1997). For a portrait of death, the artist paints the dead. Ophelia is there, immobile, in a liquid coffin, mouth half-open, with her last breath lingering on her lips: she is there, drowned, but with her hands out of the river. The hands, which the classic canon considered the most spiritual part of feminine beauty, survive watery death. The river that claimed Ophelia as she searched for flowers, for her song's object, is the river of time, the river of the end of time, a symbol of her desire to interrupt the course of the ages to immerse herself once again in its amniotic beginnings. But since it is impossible to float twice in the same water, each rotation of the real wheel reveals itself, in time, as a revolution. Ophelia's end could be accidental or voluntary. Literary works which draw inspiration in the character of Ophelia have a tendency to see her as a victim of an accident, interpreting suicide as the culmination of an imaginary fleeing that causes her to renounce *logos* in favor of poetry. Among the many characteristics of the subjective repertory designed by Shakespeare, writers tend to choose innocence — representing her as a girl rather than a woman — while assigning certain physical qualities such as whiteness, a symbol of purity, and that defines Ophelia. In Cunqueiro's *Don Hamlet*, when the prince reveals his jealousy in front of her, Laertes exclaims: "Don't speak like that in front of her! She has such a tiny heart!" This Ophelia of the tiny heart would also seem to be the motor for *As amantes de Hamlet* (2003), a collection of poems by Marta Dacosta, in which the character is converted into a collective subject because of her capacity to represent the female condition. This ground zero, whitewashed writing, breaks the silence but also perseveres in silence. Conversely, if we approach the Shakespearian motif from the perspective of schizoanalysis, we find another reading: Ophelia is not a victim in the way that her death represents a choice and therefore is of the order of reverted temporality. Marie-France Castarède explored the implications of musical time understood as a voluntary reversion of the real. Time in our lives, she maintains, is irreversible. On the contrary, music would construct a space of reversibility associated with the reconquest of time.

Harold Bloom notes up to what point it is Freud who writes the seminal psychological novel of our time. Designed as a thriller, so as to keep our attention, it is in large part influenced by Shakespeare's work: "Hamlet, Freud's mentor, goes about inducing everyone he encounters into revealing themselves, while the prince (like Freud) evades his biographers. What Hamlet exerts upon his fellow characters is an epitome of the effect of Shakespeare's plays upon their critics. I have struggled, to the limit of my abilities, to talk about Shakespeare and not about myself, but I am certain that the plays have flooded my consciousness, and that the plays read me better than I read them" (xix-xx). Just as there is a tragic irony, there is also theoretical irony. In his support of a text capable of interpreting us, Bloom seems to invoke Jacques Derrida, who wished to be psychoanalyzed by a text. It is necessary, in any case, that one does not overlook the fact that the prince celebrated by Bloom exists as he does in large part because of the entrance of Ophelia, who, almost literally pulls him outside of himself. In his transposition of Shakespeare's original, Cunqueiro takes advantage of the enunciative distribution encouraged by the dramatic form, which makes Ophelia an echo of the voice of Hamlet. While she thinks of herself as a "little tiny wind" ("pequeno ventinho"), Hamlet sees her as "a cup" ("un xerro") from which he can drink. And after the prince tells her: "don't mix with me: I'm a fermentation of low quality," Ophelia responds: "I love being your shadow," meaning that she loves his negativity, a figure of a divided conscience. Ophelia is not the cup desired by the prince; she is its emptiness. This problematic understanding of the subject is especially vibrant in the poem "Ophelia" by Xohana Torres, where personal identity acquires the visage of a shattered mirror and not even a restitution levied by the poetic word is enough to repair the initial breakage: "The mirror destroyed with one hundred faces of the other, / how difficult to keep within my chest / the promises not taken by the wind / smoke from fires, battle remains / Love, in this way, almost kills us" ("Roto o espello cos cen rostros do outro, / qué difícil manter dentro do peito / as promesas que non levou o vento, / fume de incendios, restos da batalla. / Dese modo, o amor, case nos mata" [316]). Thus, we see how the character of Ophelia, subject and object of art, can be interpreted, through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's ideas, as a means of analytic enunciation, verifiable in multiple discourses including theatre, cinema, poetry, painting, and the essay. The comparison is, at the same time, converted into a demand within the textual makeup activated by the "Ophelia" vector and not so much *a posteriori* to

the investigation. Transversality applied to character analysis can be understood as a micropolitical intervention that brings to light certain particularities of the social constellation.

From the point of view of a comparative history of literature, character can be employed as a transversal category which permits the decentralization of a traditional analysis of aesthetic movements understood as a chain of events. Owing to her strong presence in the Western literary imaginary, Ophelia embodies a prime example. On the one hand the stylistic confrontation in the way she has been conceived by authors following Shakespeare reinforces even more Jorge Luis Borges's hypothesis in the story "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote": literary time flows in at least two directions, and Homer's *Odyssey* influenced James Joyce as much as his *Ulysses* has since influenced contemporary readings of the *Odyssey*. In this sense, one recognizes that approaches by schools such as poetic or pictorial symbolism do not necessarily correspond in their treatment of the character to that designed by Shakespeare. She/he who writes, reads twice, and she/he that reads more than once, also writes. Readers will superimpose the image of the other Ophelias imagined by literature, film, plastic arts, or music onto Shakespeare's Ophelia, although at present less so in music than in other forms of expression; the character is silent in the musical imaginary, from the *Ballad of the Death of Ophelia* (1848) by Hector Berlioz up to Ambroise Thomas's opera *Hamlet* (1868), which give her the soprano part — the whitest voice. And yet, it is in poetry where her character claims the most protagonism, especially from the beginning in the nineteenth century. Ophelia dons symbolism's white habits in the *Poésies* of Arthur Rimbaud and returns to her springtime meeting with Hamlet, whom he doesn't name. She is also mad, but her insanity has much of the poetic fury described by Plato. Rimbaud imagines the character at the heart of the infinite, which, in romantic poetics, is conceived as the motor of creation. From the third section of the poem an affective identification between the poet and Ophelia is produced. Reason drives Hamlet mad, holding him captive. Ophelia's madness, on the other hand, transcends all reason, all dividing lines between life and death, between nature and civilization. With Rimbaud, Ophelia is lulled by the trembling willows weeping upon her shoulders. The willows illuminate her robust forehead. The wind kisses her breasts and it is she who translates Nature's voice into a song.

When the expressionist George Heym converts Ophelia into the protagonist of his poem, he substitutes the *locus amoenus* for a "no-place" in keeping with the sign of an industrial time of blood, sweat, and machines. Ophelia is already without a soul and only her mind remains. The poem abandons the admired symbolist condition, which tended toward exclamation ("O pale Ophelia! Beautiful as snow!" as the adolescent Rimbaud would respectfully, and therefore with some distance, say of Ophelia) and enters into the realm of questioning everything because it knows nothing. And what it knows is, most likely, disliked by the reader. The poems approach the body more and more, almost becoming obscene. Scenes are described in close up, cadavers are dissected. Shakespeare's river gives way to Rimbaud's calm sea, practically a lagoon, and opens up into the dark foreboding ocean. Synesthesias fill the poem: "red midday sweat," "yellow winds," "blue eyelids." These figures are not ornaments, but, rather, ways to show that the world was broken, and that in order to represent it language must work like an index finger, pointing to the exterior of language, and not towards the moon. Language's exterior is the cruelty of this industrial society that is heard from the field where Ophelia (who now has no spirit, and is no longer a person, only flesh) was found by the poet. Heym describes the end of virginal nature, the end of an uninterrupted landscape by the exploitation of men by and for other men. And woman, or the cadaver of woman, is a zone of transit, a doorway between two worlds, that is also the pre-industrial and the urban present, given in the poem, as needed, with its most sinister soul and its least welcoming visage.

The productivity of Ophelia insofar as the central character of modern poetry along with her especially transitional character allows her to fashion poetics and develop them to such an extent that they open up other forms that question them. At the same time, as I underline the little attention that has been dedicated to the category of character in poetry, undoubtedly a result of the traditional understanding of poetry as a modality heavily affected by the expression of authorial subjectivity, and, correlatively, the radical difference between the terms "person" and "character" owing to the restrictive placement of the character in the realm of literary fiction, and in particular, narrative and theater. Many authors have questioned, from a poetic standpoint, the specific restrictive conceptions of poetry taking advantage once again of the ambivalent Ophelia. The Portuguese surrealist António

Maria Lisboa, for example, begins with such processes as quotation and translation as motors for the following text:

"The Love of Arthur Rimbaud to the Master of Silence"

In the mountain where the stars die  
forests that existed one thousand years ago with  
black hair like the moon and the afternoon breeze  
when the softness enters like flower petals  
that stand over the sleeping dead  
and repeat mysteriously:  
"On the calm black water where the stars are sleeping  
White Ophelia floats like a great lily"  
half-out of the earth like an infinitely opened eye  
dead a year ago since the moon was born  
dead a day ago since the rose was born  
dead a dream ago, dead a gesture ago  
against the blowing of the night trees  
it touched the infant breast of the spring  
and mysteriously repeated  
"O pale Ophelia! beautiful as snow!  
Heaven ! Love ! Freedom ! What a dream, oh poor crazed Girl!"  
transparent on the bland earth of star lava  
on hair identical to the the desolate dead  
dead one thousand years ago repeats:  
"White Ophelia floats like a great lily"  
the dead mysteriously says:  
"There is a watch that makes no sound."

"O de Arthur Rimbaud o Mestre do Silêncio"

Na montanha onde moram as estrelas  
bosques que existem há mil anos  
de cabelos negros como o luar e a brisa da tarde  
quando entra branda entre as pétalas das flores  
que se inclinam sobre o morte que dorme  
e misteriosamente repete:  
"Sur l'onde calme et noire où dorment les étoiles  
Un chant mystérieux tombe des astres d'or"  
semi-saído da terra com um olho infinito aberto  
morto há um ano ao nascer da lua  
morto há um dia ao nascer da rosa  
morto há um sonho, morto há um gesto  
frente ao sopro das árvores da noite  
tocou o seio infante numa primavera  
e misteriosamente repete:  
"O pâle Ophélie! belle comme la neige!  
Ciel! Amour! Liberté! Quel rêve, ô pauvre Folle!"  
transparente sobre a terra mole de lava de estrela  
sobre cabelos idênticos aos dos mortos desolados  
morto há mil anos repete:  
"La blanche Ophélie flotte comme un grand lys"  
o morto misteriosamente diz:  
"Il y a un horloge qui ne sonne pas." (1541)

Many of the motives for the description of the character of Ophelia, understood as an intertextual continuum, once again find their point of connection here: youth, spring, love, death, infinity. The poem does not seek to be an affirmative song, but rather the negative of the preceding poem, in the way that, from Keats, we imagine language to be the negative of life.

In the case of António Maria Lisboa it is interesting to ponder the implications of the use of linguistic alternance, of polyphony, and of collage from the point of view of an enunciative understanding of poetry as a textual genre affected by the possibility of encasing voices, characters, and subjects. Lisboa takes the identification of the poet with Rimbaud's dead woman to the extreme by converting the same poet into a cadaver and placing those words he dedicated to Ophelia on the river water as an epitaph. The relation between enunciation and character is, simultaneously, one of themes of the following passages of *m-Talá*, which, as is often the case with the poetry of Chus Pato,



carries out an active dialogue with the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, and in which, not accidentally, the processes towards renovating poetry interacts with its use in markedly different settings, often bordering on the theatrical:

"On the Lyrical Subject of Poetic Enunciation"

not already 'identified' like one or any of the subjects of verbalization, but rather a limit of language, empty — in any case unrepresentative or figurative and out of which unfolds a truth process within the language, of fictionality, of an opening towards the sensible. To deny this constructive capacity is to deny the language the truth process that unlocks words. It is because of this limiting quality that lyricism can adopt all formulas and not just that of rhetoric but also of other literary genres. In particular, the poem absorbs the world within itself — we announce nothing new. Thus, its fictionality, its trip towards, for example, the country of the oracles without ever being oracular, nor prophetic (in today's world oracles are impossible); towards the Epeopee country without a happy return to native soil; towards the country of concepts without any temptation occurring to them. Horror of horrors! of a system; towards the country of the narratives without naturally being able to tell any stories, scientific discourses or not; towards the drama and autonomy of different voices that compose it, and of course, towards the country of mass culture, which means of the literary subgenres We assert that his subject is a type of eighth passenger of language foreigner to all forms of country, but never outside the politically "human" Thus the need for the title of this dissertation "Ophelia, alien: traveller of the stars," certain as I am about the rest that the similarity of this a-significant has not escaped any of my listeners with certain conceptual aspects of the "feminine" in our current civilization and literary system.

"sobre o suxeito lírico da enunciación poética"

non xa identificado como unha ou calquera das persoas da verbalización senón un límite da linguaxe, baleiro, en todo caso arrerepresentativo ou afigurativo e que desde aquí desprega un proceso de verdade na lingua, de ficcionalidade, de abertura cara ao sentible. Negarlle esta capacidade de construción é negarlle á lingua o proceso de verdade que desblinda as palabras. É por esta calidade de límite polo que este Eu do lirismo pode adoptar todas as fórmulas non só da Retórica senón tamén de todos os demais xéneros literarios. En definitiva, o Poema subsume dentro de si o mundo — nada novo enunciámos — De aí a súa ficcionalidade, a súa viaxe seguida cara, por exemplo, ao país dos oráculos sen chegar a ser oracular, nin profético (hoxe en día son imposibles os oráculos); cara ao país da Epeopea sen retorno feliz cara a ningún solo natal; cara ao país dos conceptos sen que se lle ocorra a tentación Horror dos horrores! dun sistema; cara ao país das narrativas sen naturalmente chegar a relatar ningunha historia, dos discursos científicos ou non; cara ao drama e a autonomía das diferentes voces que o compoñen, e como non, cara ao país da cultura de masas, é dicir dos subxéneros literarios Subscribimos que este suxeito é unha especie de oitavo pasaxeiro da lingua estranxeiro a toda clase de patrias, pero nunca alleo ao politicamente "humano" De aí a necesidade do título desta disertación "Ofelia, alien: viaxeira das estrelas" segura como estou polo demais de que a ningún dos meus oíntes se lle escapou a semellanza deste a-significativo da lingua con certos aspectos da conceptualización do "feminino" na nosa civilización actual e sistema literario. (66)

The character of Ophelia, which will be central throughout the entire book, appears here subjected to a productive *míse-en-abyme*. As the text above allows one to see, Ophelia is simultaneously protagonist, title, and theme. This deals with the theory of enunciation, and of which only a fragment reaches us in cursive. It is important to note that the discourse is presented to herself as oral for which the poem, or at least this part of the poem, is presented to be a transcription of a previous intervention. In this way Pato plays at breaking the pact normally ascribed to poetry, as it is seen as a space of immediateness and enunciative presences. In the same way as in *As amantes de Hamlet*,

although from different presuppositions, Ophelia also represents a collective identity, the historical feminine subject. There is a strict relation between character and person, a problematic relationship to which language (poetics, in this case, but not only poetics) has contributed. Once again, it is surprising that, often, the theoretical discourse on character does not match the level of its artistic demand. While a structural study of character attempts to reduce the complexity of the subjective fictional plot to a limited series of functions and inputs, a pragmatic focus underlines the eminently linguistic function of character, and tends to categorically differentiate the notions of person and character, an operation verifiable both in theater studies and studies in narratology. It is necessary to point out that this striving for abstraction is not concluded without plot tensions, up until the point that, in order to sustain it, many "intermediate" categories are often needed between the notions of character and person (see Martínez Bonati).

Studies of pragmatic orientation are more useful the less they oblige one to a restrictive comprehension of a character's active dimension determined by categories such as a "person who speaks" or "person who reasons in speech" (see García Barrientos). It might be helpful to consider, for example, the importance that silence as dramatic effect has in twentieth-century theater. Furthermore, the intertwining multiplicity between the categories of subject, voice, person, and character are worth considering. And it is important to consider that voice is not an exclusively linguistic category, at least according to the structuralist tradition, which tended to focus on language as a macro sign susceptible to decomposition and to internal analysis. The theater of Samuel Beckett, often cited by theoreticians concerned with the crisis of the character category in contemporary stage practice, makes very productive use of the voice as an almost spectral representation, of the person (see Fuchs). In modern literature, characters are often spectral, a condition which is sharpened by the representational consciousness that the receptor assigns them and which often thematizes by the authors as the self-consciousness of the character that attempts to escape, without success, from his/her fictive condition. In other cases, literature demonstrates the effects of the infinite chain of the signifier on subjective representation. In the following poem by Leopoldo María Panero nothing is what it appears, thereby signifying nothing, and the poem refuses to name its object, Marilyn Monroe:

Blond hair in which nothing is extended  
live only in the caves  
(pride therefore dies, in the caves  
the monster stirs in the emptiness  
"What is, therefore, the cause of your sadness  
The blacks in the viscous darkness, death by water.  
On the road everyone finds nobody"  
On the road everyone finds nobody  
the king hidden by flesh  
shadow in which light is not seen  
Marilyn (blue water) this poem  
does not name you.

Cabellera rubia que en la nada se extiende  
viva tan sólo en las cavernas  
(el orgullo así muere, en las cavernas)  
agitábase el monstruo en el vacío  
"Cuál es pues, la causa de su tristeza  
Los negros en la oscuridad viscosa, la muerte por agua.  
"Todos por el camino encuentran a nadie"  
Todos por el camino encuentran a nadie  
El rey oculto por la carne  
sombra que en la luz no se ve  
Marilyn (agua azul) este poema  
no te nombra. (96-97)

The referent of the text is one of the colored photograms from the Andy Warhol series based on a photographic negative of Monroe. Death by water, which points to Phlebas the Phoenician from Eliot's *The Waste Land* and the king move the poem towards fertility rituals, which in this case are frustrated. The figure of a modern Aphrodite, embodying the attributes of a celestial and earthly goddess, Monroe is in certain ways linked to the ambivalence of Ophelia. To both construct and take apart his own text,



Panero probably begins with scenes from the film *Something's Got to Give*, filmed just before Monroe's death where she swims naked in a pool that, for her, acts as a river.

By virtue of this *ékphrase*, constructed simultaneously over a fixed image and over various images in movement, Panero manages to disrupt the same dynamic of the representative process. The object of the poem is not a character; rather, it a representation of a person whose participation in the industrial cinematic star system converted her, already in life, into character. An exclusively linguistic understanding of the character impedes a vision, for example, of up to what point Monroe functions in the imaginary, in more than one sense, as a modern Ophelia, affected by the duality between candor and sensuality, always on the fringes of reason, tempted by the ghost of suicide, by the turgid river of death. It is nevertheless curious that Monroe herself felt profoundly attracted by the character of Ophelia and that she would have the chance to explore it with the goal of representing it on stage.

Truman Capote makes reference to a conversation with Constance Collier, an actor of English origins specializing in Shakespearian theater and professor of dramatic art in New York. Collier becomes mentor to Monroe, calling her fondly (according to Capote, who introduced them), "my special problem." Capote reproduces the words of Collier, who, after assigning her the epithet "beautiful child" emphasizes the inherently cinematographic quality of the actress. In evocative expression, Capote, speaking as Monroe's mentor, attributes her delicateness to that of a hummingbird, impossible to be captured by anything other than a camera. From Shakespeare's Ophelia to Capote's Monroe, the category of character can open multiple pathways. To speak of the feminine character demands focusing attention, therefore, in the way in which the heterocentric direction of Western thought (and Western thought on literature and of literature itself as cultural praxis) has conditioned the formation of feminine characters in literary works and, more decisively, the imaginary (self)-perception of women in society.

Structuralism made characters into units of a system accentuating their dependency with respect to narrative functions. The return of the character to the spectrum of theoretical literary priorities, starting in the 1990s, supposed, in many cases, its being understood as "effects" (see Jouvé) or "products" of the fictional traumas identified in narratology. Ophelia, on the other hand, always resisted being narrated. She found a better fit in theater or poetry perhaps for the tendency of these genres — at least in her modern manifestations — of questioning speaker and a tendency toward divided subjectivity. Characters are not only words and when they attempt to be only this they sicken, like Hamlet. The madness of Ophelia, on the other hand, is productive. Ophelia is embodied in distinct aesthetics from symbolism to expressionism, passing through surrealism. A schizo-criticism of the character, along the lines of Deleuze and Guattari, allows one to transcend the elitist rigidity of the cult/popular difference and explain her flexible ambiguity, capable of inhabiting more than two genres and of contributing to all the arts.

Just like other deaths announced by post-structuralism, the "death of the character" (Fuchs) is nothing more than theoretical reflection of a more ample crisis which not so much demands overlooking the category of character, but, rather, a precise considering of which conditions determine its conversion into object; its posterior weakening and its rehabilitation are an analytical tool in terms of a comparative universal transversal literature. The proclaimed "death of the character" should not be taken, therefore, as a sign of the real disappearance of an object, but, rather, as a symptom that an artwork's personal structure can still generate new forms of subjectivity, surging as a specific response to the crisis of subjectivity which has affected life and culture since the last century.

Note: The above article is a revised and translated version of María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar, "O personaxe como categoría transversal do comparatismo. De Ofelia a Marilyn Monroe," *Boletín Galego de Literatura* 33 (2006): 135-57. Copyright release to the author.

## Works Cited

- Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Trade, 1999.  
Capote, Truman. "A Beautiful Child." *A Capote Reader*. By Truman Capote. New York: Penguin, 2002. 578-89.  
Castarède, Marie-France. *La Voix et ses sortilèges*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1987.  
Cunqueiro, Álvaro. *Don Hamlet e tres pezas máis*. Vigo: Galaxia, 1974.  
Dacosta, Marta. *As amantes de Hamlet*. A Coruña: Espiral Maior, 2003.  
Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie*. Paris: Minuit, 1980.

- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Rhizome*. Paris: Minuit, 1976.
- Fuchs, Elinor. *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996.
- García Barrientos, José Luis. *Cómo se comenta una obra de teatro. Ensayo de método*. Madrid: Síntesis, 1992.
- Guattari, Félix. *Psycanalyse et transversalité*. Paris: Maspéro, 1972.
- Heym, Georg. *Dichtungen und Schriften*. Ed. Karl Ludwig Schneider. Hamburg: Heinrich Ellermann, 1964.
- Jouvé, Vincent. *L'Effet-personage dans le roman*. Paris: PU de France, 1992.
- Lisboa, António Maria. "O amor de Arthur Rimbaud o mestre do silêncio." *Poemas portugueses. Antologia de poesia do Século XIII ao Século XXI*. Ed. Jorge Rei-Sá and Rui Lage. Porto: Porto, 2009. 1541.
- Martínez Bonati, Félix. "Representación y ficción." *La ficción narrativa (su lógica y ontología)*. Murcia: U of Murcia, 1992. 91-112.
- Panero, Leopoldo María. "Alba (te fuiste, dejándome sin mí)." *Poesía 1970-1985*. By Leopoldo María Panro. Madrid: Visor, 1986. 142-45.
- Pato, Chus. *m-Talá*. Vigo: Xerais, 2000.
- Rimbaud, Arthur. *Arthur Rimbaud: Collected Poems*. Trans. Martin Sorrel. Ed. Antoine Adam. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001.
- Torres, Xohana. "Ofelia." *Poesía reunida (1957-2001)*. By Xohana Torres. Ed. Luciano Rodríguez Gómez. Santiago de Compostela: Pen Clube de Galicia, 2004. 315-16.

Author's profile: María do Cebreiro Rábade Villar teaches comparative literature at the University of Santiago de Compostela. Her interests in research include gender studies, poetry, and the comparative study of literatures of the Iberian Peninsula with focus on aspects of national identity. In addition to numerous articles, her book publications include *As antoloxías de poesía en Galicia e Cataluña. Representación poética e ficción lóxica* (2004) and *As terceiras mulleres* (2005). Rábade Villar is also a renown poet (in her publications she uses her first name "María do Cebreiro"). E-mail: <[m.rabade@usc.es](mailto:m.rabade@usc.es)>

Translator's profile: Manus O'Dwyer is working towards his doctorate in comparative literature at the University of Santiago de Compostela. His dissertation is about animality in the work of post-war Spanish poet José Ángel Valente. His interests in research include Spanish twentieth-century poetry, romantic literary theory, and contemporary critical and post-humanist theory. Email: <[manus.oduibhir@usc.es](mailto:manus.oduibhir@usc.es)>