

Reimagining Ophelia: A Multimedia Project

By Regan Borucke

Introduction:

For my last year as a Miller Arts Scholar, I wanted to create a piece of work that brought several of my artistic passions into one multi-media project; Acting, SFX makeup, filmmaking, projection design, and of course, Shakespeare. Back in the Spring of 2022, I shared in my proposal that I was not quite sure exactly what my end result would be, but I wanted to explore the language and expression of Shakespeare's text in an experimental and unconventional way. This project evolved and changed as the year went by, but I believe that the film I created achieved my original goal. Although it is hard to categorize, I would describe it as a "music video" of sorts if you were to swap a song for a monologue from Hamlet. I chose to explore Gertrude's monologue from Act 4 Scene 7 because I had just finished a paper about the floriography of Ophelia's famous bouquet and I was interested in the recurring natural language surrounding her character, especially in the monologue describing her death. The imagery, editing, makeup, costuming, and performance are all meant to express the ideas present in the specific text as well as the themes of the play as a whole. Throughout this process, I gained a lot of hard skills and gained a much deeper understanding of this particular character. In the future, I would love to make another piece exploring another famous monologue and character from William Shakespeare's canon in a similar off-kilter fashion. My faculty advisor for this project was Mona Kasra. She was my advisor because she reached out to me and gave me the idea to do an experimental multi-media project. [You can watch the final project here!](#)

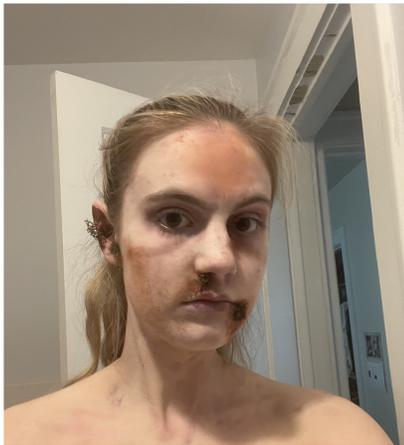
Research and Design:

My first step was to consider what themes I wanted to explore with this monologue and use that as inspiration for my performance and design. There is a lot of rich complexity in this monologue, so I decided to focus on a few ideas; surveillance, nature, and decay. In the early days of pre-production, I did a lot of reading about Ophelia from academics, writers, and other artists. Two of the most famous Ophelia-inspired works (outside of theatrical production or film) are [John Everett Millias'](#) painting and the poem by [Arthur Rimbauld](#). Both of these depict and describe her death, and after enough reading, drafting, and thinking about this character I became horrified at how these works made her death beautiful and romantically tragic. In Millias' painting, Ophelia's dead body looks luminous and gorgeous, making her a figure to be desired even in her death. This disgust I felt pushed me to go in the completely opposite direction and intentionally made my dead Ophelia as horrific and un-sexy as possible, and made some very gross projections to match.

Much of the design of the projections, the makeup, and the performance comes straight from the text of the monologue itself. For some it was more literal, Ophelia looks down at her muddy feet for “so fast they follow”, the camera falls back into water on “fell into the weeping brook” etc. But, some of the shots come from less obvious *Hamlet* is a play about surveillance. This monologue, in particular, is an eyewitness account of someone watching Ophelia drown. Throughout the play, all of the characters' actions, including Ophelia's are constantly watched and surveyed. I wanted to introduce the idea of surveillance in the mise en scene as an antagonist force that visually looks similar to modern security cameras.

The makeup itself was an extensive process. For the alive Ophelia, it was essentially just the makeup I do whenever I perform onstage in a show but a bit toned down. The drowned Ophelia was not quite so simple. In recent years and over the pandemic, my SFX makeup was focused more on avant-garde fantastical looks and when I began this process I had not done horror makeup outside of simple Halloween stuff in a while, so there was a lot of trial and error and makeup testing before the final look. People who have drowned have a very specific coloring and it was difficult to get that right without the makeup looking too white and clownish. I did not want to use any fake blood or false injury and instead purchased fake dirt powder that creates mud when combined with water. (The shots in the bathtub were meant to look like mud and dirty water, but my friend watching me edit pointed out how much it looked like blood. I'm choosing to consider that a happy accident because it still looks cool.) This product was incredibly messy and it took me a few tries to learn how to use it. Also, I liked the idea of Ophelia starting to become one with the pond around her, so I had moss grow out of her ears, nose, and mouth and entangled various fake mosses and plants into my hair.

Then came the contacts. I have 20/20 vision and no reputable store will sell you colored contacts without a prescription so I had to make an appointment with an optometrist. Because I chose ones that would dull my whole pupil and iris, I had to learn how to do a part of the makeup with my vision obscured and while I was working I would often take out one eye and close the other in order to see what I was doing.



One of many makeup tests:
This was my first time attempting to use SFX dirt! If you look at my forehead, there is a massive smudge of dirt because I accidentally blended the powder out with a brush. This substance was very difficult to use but when done correctly it had a great effect!



Final makeup test with the colored contacts!

For the lighting, I already had one LED strip and I purchased one RBG 10W sunrise lamp. I wanted to be able to create natural and unnatural-looking lighting, which was possible with the sunrise lamp. However, I often found that the projections were enough to serve as both projections and lighting, and they cast really interesting shadows on my face. Most often I used the lighting to add a color wash over the projections.

Production:

I filmed all of my footage last summer while in Syracuse, New York. I had a remote job working for a publishing company and I also played Helena in Syracuse Shakespeare in the Parks' production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. While in Syracuse I was subletting a room in a very old, beautiful, and slightly creepy house. I decided that it would be the perfect place for me to film, also because it had an empty bedroom with no furniture and large blank walls I could cast projections onto. Because it was Summer in upstate New York, the sun would not set until 10:00pm. I would typically work until 3 or 4 in the morning, and sleep in until it was time for me to do some remote work and go to rehearsal.

The performance involved a lot of experimentation. I thought a lot about shapes and movement to highlight and enhance the imagery projected behind and on top of me. I normally shot takes that were anywhere from three to nine minutes long and would play the projections on a loop, cycling through them 5-10 times each take. My favorite images I created are ones like the screenshots below, where I am laying backward over several stairs.



Originally, I planned to shoot partially on Filmic Pro, an app via the app store that lets you shoot high-quality video, and partially on a black magic camera I would purchase with some of the grant money. Unfortunately, during my first week working on this project, my headlamp slipped off of my head and shattered the liquid crystal display and part of the keyboard on my laptop. I decided to use the camera money to buy a second computer because the Apple store would not be able to fix my laptop for four weeks. Not having a laptop for that period would mean having to completely stop filming in that location, which I did not want to do because then I would not be able to film in the same location, rendering the footage I had already shot useless. Even if I were to purchase a camera, I would not be able to generate projection imagery without a laptop. I also would have been unable to do my job at the publishing company. So, I bought the cheapest MacBook I could and continued. Even though it would have been great to use a camera, I think the filmic pro quality is still very high and I think the tradeoff of having the location I wanted was worth sacrificing the higher camera quality.

I did try to employ some simple camera techniques even though I was using an iPhone. For the footage on the stairs, I tried several different times to get a slight Dutch angle to accentuate the slant of the stairs and give the shot an unsettling feel. Because I was doing everything by myself, I had to come up with very odd ways to keep continuity and I often had to test record to make sure I was in the correct place in the frame. This project taught me a lot about quick and independent problem-solving. Because I was doing everything myself, I had to learn how to manage lighting, projections, and a camera all at once.

The part of the process where I think I learned the most and had the most growth was post-production. At the beginning of this process, my video editing skills were decent but modest, and now I can certainly put premiere pro on my resume with the utmost confidence. One massive challenge for me was the overall sound of the film. If I choose to continue editing this

later, I will certainly try to learn more about audio capture and editing. I captured the monologue on the audio equipment in Clemmons library and no matter how hard I tried I could not get the quality to be loud enough without sounding awful and fuzzy. After a couple of sessions in the booth, I had to settle with what I captured, but I think the background soundscape I created is pretty good considering my relatively limited experience.

In the future, if I can, I would love to make another video like this with another Shakespeare character. Originally, I wanted to make two, Ophelia and Juliet, but that became impossible due to time and budget constraints. I think if I were to make some that are less graphic, they could possibly be used as an educational tool to show to theater students in some capacity.

Overall, I feel like I have grown and learned a lot from this project, and I am very proud of the final product!

Item	Cost	Notes
Makeup	\$122.73	
Colored contacts	\$49.29	
Costuming/props	\$157.97	Includes two identical dresses, fake flowers and foliage
Tripod	\$17.27	One week into shooting I knocked it over and broke off the top.
Replacement laptop	\$1,130.64	
Repair for broken laptop	\$677.00	
Hard drive	\$91.75	1TB of storage
Projector	\$69.99	
iStock Subscription	\$349.00	The only subscription that lets you get videos is the most annual one.
Adobe subscription	\$250	Premiere pro, After Effects
Other tech	\$54.02	Adaptors and lights
Total	\$2969.66	

