

***Ecophobic Hamlet and ecophilic Ophelia.
On human relations with nature***

***Ekofobiczny Hamlet i ekofiliczna Ofelia.
O związkach człowieka z naturą***

Monika Sosnowska

UNIWERSYTET ŁÓDZKI

Keywords

William Shakespeare, Hamlet, ecocriticism, nature

Słowa kluczowe

William Szekspir, Hamlet, ekokrytyka, natura

Abstract

In this article I attempt to re-read different attitudes of two protagonists in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* from the perspective of ecocriticism, which main focus is to examine human relations with nature, in a broad sense of the term. I claim that Hamlet and Ophelia represent contrasting attitudes to nature, namely, Hamlet's utterances testify to his ecophobic attitude, while Ophelia's words – to her eco-friendly orientation. I will try to prove my thesis on the selected examples drawn from Shakespeare's drama.

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł stanowi próbę odczytania odmiennych postaw dwojga bohaterów Szekspirowskiego *Hamleta* z perspektywy ekokrytycznej, zasadzającej się na interpretacji związku człowieka z szeroko rozumianym światem przyrody. Twierdzę, że Hamlet i Ofelia reprezentują kontrastujące se sobą postawy w stosunku do natury, mianowicie wypowiedzi i zachowania Hamleta świadczą o jego ekofobicznym nastawieniu, zaś Ofelii – o jej przyjaznym podejściu do środowiska naturalnego. Na wybranych przykładach zaczerpniętych z dramatu Szekspira postaram się udowodnić postawioną w tytule artykułu tezę.

Ecophobic Hamlet and ecophiliac Ophelia. On human relations with nature

Reflecting upon a long-term and proliferating madness of humanity in its relation to nature, I came to a conclusion that inspired me to write this article. Similarly to the case of diagnosed insanity – a permanent disorder of the mind connected with disfunctional perception of reality and inability to know the difference between right and wrong – mad practices in which billions of people participate and perpetuate amounts to their misperception of the world of nature. To perceive it incorrectly means to see it as something separate from the world of humans, as something non-human, inferior and uncivilised, and thus in need of a better species to domesticate it (and consequently, exploit its inhabitants). A prevailing anthropocentric project, understood very broadly as regarding humans as the central element of the universe and interpreting reality exclusively in terms of human values and experiences, has been based on this misunderstanding. Generally, it has become a naturalized right of one species, namely *homo sapiens*, to treat natural environment, the Earth, and other species in terms of a world divorced from humanness, as if people did not come out of this world but come to this world from some other place.

Fundamental to my change in attitude towards nature was a reevaluation of values, almost in a Nietzschean critical gesture of moral status quo. If Nietzsche readily called: 'Christianity the one great curse, the one great intrinsic depravity' and he did not hesitate to state that: „I call it the one immortal blemish of mankind...’,¹ why I would dither over whether to call anthropocentrism 'the one great curse, the one great intrinsic depravity,' 'the one immortal blemish of mankind.' Undergoing revision of this centuries-long paradigm in humanities is connected with a posthumanist turn, having its roots in Foucauldian announcement of 'the end of man' and Derridean anti-Cartesian proclamation of 'the animal that therefore I am.' Careful study of their writings as well as pieces of literature ecologically engaged has been inspirational for scholars and researchers preoccupied with continuous abusive treatment of the Earth supported by the biblical urge: 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth'².

¹ F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/The Antichrist*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, London 1999, sec. 62, p. 199.

² *Genesis*, in: *The Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version, Nashville 1989, 1:28.

My personal interest in ecological issues was supported by paradigmatic shifts, which are advantageous for any critical analysis and rethinking human relation to nature. I found ecocriticism particularly useful and beneficial, both for an analyzing subject (scholar) and an analyzed cultural text, in this case – a literary text. The last premise behind writing an ecocritical essay lies in my weakness for Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and my urgent ecocritical call to explore ecological threads and motives in this drama.

I suppose that Shakespeare's intention (which is impossible to discover) was not to focus on ecological matter. Moreover, ecocritical reading is not founded on authorial intentions, rather on examinations of relationships between natural environment and literature. Elizabethan playwrights did not explicitly examine green issues although an ecologically-oriented scholar may claim that Shakespeare's works are abundant in such stuff all living organisms are made on, to paraphrase a quotation from *The Tempest* ('We are such stuff / As dreams are made on,' 4.1.156-57)³. A case in point is Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The play is not ecologically engaged, neither in the sense of a piece of literature, for which nature is a main fixation, nor being such piece of writing as an ecological manifesto. This fact is not an obstacle to examine *Hamlet* with reference to two protagonists' attitudes towards nature and the world of non-human life. In my article I will focus on Hamlet and Ophelia, who establish different relationships with nature and therefore they represent two oppositional ecological attitudes. The point of departure is Hamlet's and Ophelia's language, and through digging into the linguistic dimension of the play it is possible to re-interpret their behaviour and (non)interaction with the natural world. To Hamlet, it becomes a threat and nuisance, the object of disgust connected with biological instincts and mindlessness. He seems to be sick at nature and can be labelled as an ecophobe. Contrary to Hamlet's negative and hostile usage of words to describe the mechanics of non-human reality and 'logics of the natural,' Ophelia – having ecophilic inclinations, finds relief in connection with nature. She seeks refuge outside overly human Elsinore, which becomes a real prison-space for her, as she dives into wilderness of forest and stream. Hamlet and Ophelia could have had an interesting conversation on nature and culture. To paraphrase the title of Sherry B. Ortner's article, '*Is Female to Male as Nature to Culture*,'⁴ I pose a corresponding question: 'Is Ophelia to Hamlet as Ecophilia to Ecophobia?'

That there is something 'unnatural' in the state of Denmark, one may find out about following dramatic narrative in the first act of *Hamlet*. Status quo

³ W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. F. Kermode, London 1975.

⁴ S. Ortner, *Is Female to Male as Nature to Culture*, in *Woman, Culture, and Society*, eds. M. Zimbalist Rosaldo and L. Lamphere, Stanford, 1974, pp. 67-87.

was violated, murder was committed at the Danish court and Claudius, a fratricide, suppressed the truth about his coming to the throne. Old Hamlet did not die in a natural way – which may be presumed when somebody is killed with malice – and therefore his return from the underworld is, on the one hand, a voice of the immemorial order that demands to find a murderer out, while on the other – it is an egoistic voice of an individual who orders both, to be revenged and his killer to be punished. The Ghost brings a memory of his own death and tells a relevant story to unmask the murderer. Peculiarly enough, although Old Hamlet was asleep when the crime was committed, he knows the details of the murder. And he had lost his life in his orchard while at rest. In his conversation with Hamlet, the Ghost for the first time mentions poison, ‘the leperous distilment (1.5.64),⁵ being poured into his ear and as a result of circulating in his blood system, producing symptoms similar to leprosy. Hamlet’s father dies in disgrace, without confession, troubled by a guilty conscience, eliminated by his brother who remarried his wife, succeeded to the throne, and made up a story about old King’s death.

Although the Ghost is not given many utterances in the play, the word ‘nature’ is used to excess, namely six times (for comparison, Hamlet mentions ‘nature’ seventeen times, while Laertes who has more than twice as many lines as the Ghost, uses it six times). As Jan H. Blits claims, old Hamlet’s understanding of nature encompasses: human life, virtues, and family affection⁶. Referring to the sins committed in his lifetime, the Ghost says ‘the foul crimes done in my days of nature’ (1.5.12). In his resentful description of fratricide, old Hamlet conjures up a memory of the murder, being called ‘unnatural’ twice (1.5.25, 1.5.28), while with reference to filial feelings, which he does not doubt, he uses an expression ‘if thou hast nature in thee’ (1.5.81), meaning natural feelings. Lamenting upon a posthumous betrayal by his wife, Gertrude, her affection and hasty remarriage to vicious Claudius, the Ghost depicts his brother’s lack of virtues as poorness in ‘natural gifts’ (1.5.51). According to Hamlet’s father to undo the unnatural deed is natural, therefore he demands a revenge and punishment of his brother-fratricide and incest, who – in his opinion – seduced Gertrude despite Claudius’ lack of virtues and real strength of character. Moreover, the Ghost treats inner working of human organism as a natural phenomenon as he talks about ‘The natural gates and alleys of the body’ (1.5.67).

Hamlet develops his own attitude to nature and natural environment, taking a lesson from his father. He had learnt from his father – dead or alive

⁵ W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. A. Thompson and N. Taylor, London 2007. All quotations are from this edition.

⁶ J. H. Blits, *Deadly Thought: Hamlet and the Human Soul*, Lanham & Oxford 2001, p. 102.

– both his human actions and posthumous speech must have been of some significance to Hamlet. What accrued from this knowledge was a capability of discerning natural (in harmony with laws of nature) from unnatural (against laws of nature). Curiously enough, both biological aspects of functioning of human organism, including its essential function – keeping the life force of our existence, and human relationships, especially parental and filial feelings, and traits attributed to human beings share the same terms, namely ‘nature’ and ‘natural.’ The murdered king considers the act of being killed by his own brother as ‘most foul, strange, and unnatural’ (1.5.28). *Ergo*, what seemed natural was a restoration of the order of things (that was violated and infringed laws of nature, i.e. ‘guaranty’ of natural demise) by Hamlet himself performing a revenge. Cultural command to avenge his father’s death has become naturalized in the name of the unnatural murder.

Among the Ghost’s utterances there are direct references to the world of nature, for example when he evokes the last moments of his lifetime spent in the royal orchard, where he used to unwind in the afternoons. Yet it is hard to find a bond between Hamlet’s father and natural environment, considering non-existence of a detailed, intimate, and personal description of, for example, the abovementioned orchard. Rather, in one of his subsequent utterances he displays his anthropocentric point of view of plants: ‘And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed / That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf’ (1.5.32–33). The plant indicated by the Ghost, not accidentally a ‘weed,’ appears to be an obtuse, morally indifferent, wild plant. Its lethargic and rampant overgrowing by the mythologic river in the kingdom of the dead is connected with the place where it grows, not with a natural state of the weed’s (over)activity. It is slightly numb, but it benefits from the place where it grows to pululate. The purport of this fragment is negative, even if only by the usage of the word ‘weed,’ a parasitic plant that does not give anything in return but obtains nourishment and overgrows by the river of forgetfulness. Perhaps such unfavourable or even contemptuous attitude to plants stems from the way the former king was eliminated. Indeed, Claudius makes use of a poisonous plant (‘juice of cursed hebona,’ 1.5.63). Vivian Thomas and Nicki Faircloth state that it is the only plant, which effects on human body are described by Shakespeare with painstaking precision on the example of Hamlet’s father being murdered by his brother by means of a vial of poison poured into his ear while the king slept⁷.

Hamlet seems to share the Ghost’s view on nature and its laws, which are *de facto* culturally sanctioned, agelong and universal order, called natural

⁷ V. Thomas and N. Faircloth, *Shakespeare’s Plants and Gardens: A Dictionary*, London 2014, p. 178.

order, yet, in fact, being a social and conceptual construct to the core. To Hamlet, reality has become an unweeded and uncontrolled garden of epidemic proportions, neglected by its gardener, a place in which 'things rank and gross in nature / Possess it merely' (1.2.137). In Hamlet's opinion, the dreadful state into which his family and the state got, was not natural. It was in need of an urgent repair, hoeing weeds, removing putrid matter, and cutting off excessively creeping flora.

In Prince's imagination the garden stands for a metaphor for social order. Continuously expressing or even blazoning out his pejorative perspective on social reality, he sees it through the prism of dark, tameless nature, and menacing natural environment, which without human intervention expands monstrously and oppressively in size. Denmark has become miasmatic. Rotteness, decay, stink, pollution, excess, and fertility are negative states attributed to nature in its botanical cycle of life. They produce unpleasant bodily sensations, they can even be a threat to a human being, which generate fear and repulsion. It is not incidental that floral imagery with its central image of the garden spreads within the text, reverberating as a consequence of spinning a pregnant story by the Ghost. The story indicated that under old Hamlet's rule both, condition of the state (the well-ordered and tended to garden), and his personal sacred place of relaxation (the quiet castle orchard) were to attest to the ruling monarch's responsibility, care, management and protection against enemies. Paradoxically, the abovementioned garden is one of the safest places, but eventually becomes the crime scene. It was doubly paradoxical since it provides security for the murderer to perform his crime. It is noteworthy that instead of exploiting curative properties of plants, Claudius benefits from their toxic properties for his wicked plan whereby they were turned into murder weapon. Claudius becomes an expert in abusing the power of plants and simultaneously he becomes a specialist in toxicology as he knows of lethal, botanic doses. His employment of knowledge about poisonous plants, on the one hand, shows his detection of potentially devastating property in plants, which is more powerful than human immune system, while on the other, it also demonstrates Claudius' perverted attitude towards them, his disrespect for other organisms that by themselves would have not caused anybody's disease or death.

In a conversation with his mother, Hamlet warns her against eventual intimacy with Claudius, admonishing her: 'And do not spread the compost on the weeds / To make them ranker' (4.149-50). Gertrude's marriage to the murderer of Hamlet's father is part of rotteness and moral decay. According to Simon Estok, in *Hamlet* social disorder is linguistically captured by expres-

sions pertaining to natural environment⁸. In his opinion Hamlet above all sees corruption and excess, imagined by naturalistic metaphors.

Collateral to floral imagery, animalistic representations appear in *Hamlet*, which are largely based on an evocation of names and pictures of rodent-like animals. David Hillman notices that they jump into and out of the pages at tense moments such as killing of Polonius, the Ghost's return to the underworld, or staging 'The Mousetrap'⁹. For example, Polonius, who is lurking and eavesdropping on Hamlet behind the arras, is compared to a rat ('How now! A rat!,' 3.4.22), treated as a pest, and in consequence – destroyed once for all – eliminated (stabbed by Hamlet). Although Hamlet had harboured hope that the lurking 'rat' was Claudius, he seemed to excuse his murderous act by finding higher motives, namely extermination of parasitic, harmful creatures, running rampant through the Danish court. Karen Raber claims that Hamlet elects himself 'to the role of royal rat catcher'¹⁰ and he purposefully directs the play-within-the-play under the telling title 'The Mousetrap.' The Prince promises, metaphorically, to catch Claudius in a mousetrap as well as to 'catch the conscience of the king' (2.2.540).

Ecophobic attitude to rodents puts Hamlet in an antagonistic position, in constant readiness for action, in this case, for setting traps or personal confrontation to defeat the plague of pests at Elsinore. In *Hamlet* three father figures (the Ghost, Polonius, and Claudius) are compared to rodents, albeit rats hold the most negative connotations. Then Hamlet's father, also symbolically adopts the form of a rodent-like animal as in Hamlet's imagination he is represented as a mole. He arrives from another dimension, he orders to keep the oath of secrecy after disclosing the revelations about the past, he is the voice from under the ground, a place of human last repose. Hamlet addresses his father's ghost as 'old mole!,' which does not mean that it is an amicable, burrowing creature. Rather he becomes a contact between the world of the living and the dead, between the world of people and animals, between the kingdom of beings who live in proximity of decaying or dead matter, especially human remains, buried in the ground.

Metaphors and symbols of rodent-like animals, which leap from their burrows, holes and tunnels, squeak and eat away at Hamlet's imaginarium, neighbour with a slightly different kind of imagery. Disgusting worms are squirming and creeping in Hamlet's mind's eye. The Prince repeatedly mentions 'worms,' a popular name for various invertebrates or insects at different stages of their development when they differ greatly in appearance from

⁸ S. Estok, *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia*, New York 2011, p. 86.

⁹ D. Hillman, *Shakespeare's Entrails: Belief, Skepticism, and the Interior of the Body*, New York 2007, p. 107.

¹⁰ K. Raber, *Animal Bodies, Renaissance Culture*, Pennsylvania 2013, p. 119.

their adult stages. A case in point is Hamlet's reference to maggots, which in fact are necrophages/carrion-eating animals or insects, for example a number species of beetles and flies.

In his coarse comment after Polonius' death, Hamlet says to Claudius that he is at supper where he is not eating, but is himself being eaten by worms (4.3.17-19). Hamlet circulates around the topic of death and decaying body, reminding Claudius of food chain, in which some organisms pass away to be food for others, *inter alia*, worms, and then those that ate corpses are subsequently consumed by other species. In Hamlet's repulsive remarks to his uncle there is a hidden abomination, caused by visions of being consumed posthumously, of being part of that process. Voracious maggots come alive with every commentary by Hamlet, showing great appetite of nature, devoid of morality and sensitivity, gutsy nature devouring everybody, even the king. In this cycle, a human being serves just as one link, therefore Hamlet strips Claudius of illusions that man is the supreme being in the hierarchy of all beings. Martin Randall states that: 'worms reduce social hierarchies to biological routines of feeding, digestion, and excretion'¹¹. Although Hamlet perceives them as important agents in the whole regeneration cycle, his observations do not come from his proecological attitude, but from his eagerness to undermine Claudius' authority and to torment him with a perspective of being food for such revolting creatures as necrophages. Worms that may enter human body, especially a dead body, stir anxiety over final desintegration and dissolution of human identity.

Instead, the desintegration of Elsinore was also not prevented by old Hamlet, who capitulated to Claudius-the serpent. In the Ghost's story he is presented as a reptile with a sting that bit the sleeping monarch: 'The serpent that did sting thy father's life / Now wears his crown (1.5.38-39). Old King's Eden was no obstacle for a trecherous, crawling creature with which Claudius is figuratively associated. He also wears a metaphorical guise of a cunning and crafty fox ('Bring me to him. Hide fox, and all after!,' 4.3.27), an image borrowed from a lexicon of animals, which symbolically represent immoral behaviour. Interestingly enough, animals are endowed with human characteristics, only to be later ascribed to people.

In one of the scenes, Hamlet enthusiastically tests Polonius, having a game of animalistic associations. Having started their conversation, Hamlet focuses on a discussion of clouds and he toys with Polonius by looking at the clouds and comparing their shapes to animals: a camel, a weasel, and a whale. Each time Polonius agrees with Hamlet, confirming his conviction that Hamlet has gone mad. The Prince's associations develop into a triad,

¹¹ M. Randall, *Shakespeare and Ecology*, Oxford 2015, p.142.

beginning with a camel – an animal adapted to live in a very dry climate, through a reference to a weasel that is an excellent swimmer, ending by making a reference to a mammal which cannot survive on land, namely a whale. Unfortunately Polonius does not share his thoughts with Hamlet.

Hamlet's pejorative and negative judgment of his social surrounding and his distrustful attitude towards natural environment influences the way he perceives his mother. He sees Gertrude as a pasturing sheep or cow, which leaves fecund land to batten on a moor ('Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed, And batten on this moor?'; 3.4.64–65). In his conversation with Gertrude, Hamlet does not hide his fantasies. In one of these, Gertrude is called 'a mouse' and reduced to a sexual object that waits in a bedroom for Claudius-the rat, being his award and trophy.

An important connection between body and earth appears in *Hamlet*. It becomes evident in Hamlet's view of man – 'quintessence of dust' (2.2.274). This vanitative reflection is a denouement of the lot of humanity. A bit earlier, when Hamlet talks about human abilities and superiority, which man maintains over all the other inhabitants of the earth, it is shown as 'a sterile promontory' (2.2.265), 'a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours' (2.2.268–69). Finally, Hamlet questions human righteousness and decency, as well as incredibility and magnificence of the earth.

To find counterbalance to Hamlet's terminologic and symbolic abuse I turn to Ophelia and her ecophilic attitude. Contrary to Ophelia, Hamlet seems not to have a real connection with natural environment. If what triumphs in Hamlet's speeches is wayward, but also putrescent flora, parasitic and yet bacchanalian fauna, then Ophelia's words give an impression of her confidence in forces of nature, constantly challenged by her father, brother and Hamlet. No sooner than in the madness scene, Ophelia's language becomes abundant in symbolic references to botanic world, although it is not free from sexual allusions. According to Lisa Hopkins, Hamlet's 'contempt towards the earth is suggestively counterpointed by the Polonius family's sustained use of garden and floral metaphors. This is most famously instanced during Ophelia's madness, but in fact it is a well developed pattern long before that,'¹² namely in the first scene pending the dialogue between Laertes and Ophelia. Simultaneously, it is the first scene in which Ophelia appears as a younger sister, who commonsensically tries to aptly answer her brother, who is preaching on moral issues. His concern is preserving chastity, which with reference to women determined not only whether they retained dig-

¹² L. Hopkins, *Shakespeare On The Edge: Border-crossing in the Tragedies and the Henriad*, Hampshire 2005, p. 56.

nity, but also reputation of their relatives. Then, Laertes directs the dialogue to biological and ecological areas.

In his book Vernon Guy Dockson claims that:

Ophelia is first introduced to us through Laertes's language of flowers and nature, specifically in terms of Hamlet's questioned amorous advances and the briefness of love – like a flower – as it turns out these images also relate to the shortness of Ophelia's life, the flowers (real or imagined), and the garland of her death¹³.

It seems that Laertes intentionally uses both, allusions to nature and botanic terms, as if he talked with live images that best spoke to Ophelia, sensitive to floral imagery. Laertes warns Ophelia against Hamlet's fleeting feelings towards her and he compares them to a swiftly blossoming flower that withers with the same speed: 'A violet in the youth of primy nature, / Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting, / The perfume and suppliance of a minute, / No more' (1.3.7-10).

A violet becomes Ophelia's flower of fate. It is later alluded to by Ophelia herself in the mad scene and once more by Laertes over his sister's grave. Laertes laments over Ophelia's demise and he harbours hope that her chaste body will purportedly give birth to violets ('And from her fair and unpolluted flesh / May violets spring', 5.1.228-29), flowers growing over Ophelia's bed of eternal rest. As Jan H. Blits claims, Laertes's former exploitation of the metaphor of violets, accentuating impermanence of Hamlet's love for Ophelia, turns its metaphorical sense into a literal meaning; it becomes an offspring, originating from Ophelia's corpse. Thus, 'Flowers are her flesh's only progeny'¹⁴.

Laertes gives Ophelia another warning when he vividly paints a picture of pests devouring young floral buttons before they turn into flowers: 'The canker galls the infants of the spring, / Too oft before their buttons be disclosed' (1.3.38-39). He also mentions an infestation of insects ('contagious blastments', 1.3.41) that is pestilent to plants if it plagues them at their nascent stage of development. In Hopkins' opinion it prefigures an early death of the sibling¹⁵. Yet Ophelia does not lose her pep and eventually shrewdness speaks through her. She advises her brother not to conduct himself in the manner characteristic of some pastors who show 'the steep and thorny way to heaven' to believers (1.3.47), whilst they themselves behave immorally as

¹³ V. G. Dockson, *Emulation on the Shakespearean Stage*, Farnham & Burlington 2013, p. 95.

¹⁴ J. H. Blits, op. cit., p. 345.

¹⁵ L. Hopkins, op. cit., p. 56.

they tread 'the primrose path of dalliance' (1.4.49) and pay no attention to their own teachings. The primrose road of pleasures is contrasted with the thorny path of sinfulness and repentance, the path of prickly bush, perhaps rosebush. This juxtaposition demonstrates double moral standards applied to men. It is worth adding that in Latin *prima rosa* means first rose of spring. It is possible that Ophelia implicitly alluded to blithe and rakish way of life of some young men, ravenous for virgins to be sexually abused and abandoned like withered, first flowers of spring. Given the meaning of this conversation between siblings, videlicet to admonish Ophelia on a disreputable defloration for an unmarried woman, the floral motives along with the description of biological life cycle (e.g. blossoming, withering), and potential threats (infestation) acquire metaphorical significance.

Whilst in a conversation between Ophelia and her father, Polonius's admonishments and warnings against Hamlet become a form of sexual education of a 'green girl' (1.3.100), unexperienced and uninformed daughter. Only this time Polonius unfolds a perspective of defloration not by means of explicit floral imagining, but by exploitation of animal imagery. He avails himself of a persuasive example of birds that were thought to be easy to catch: 'Ay, springes to catch woodcocks' (1.3.14). Ophelia is compared to a reckless woodcock that like this bird becomes entrapped after having been lured by a hunter. Ophelia-the easy meat had to be taken in by melodious and well-composed vows of a skilful Hamlet-the poacher. Curiously enough, it is Polonius who uses his daughter as a bait (in the nunnery scene). He emphasizes it by assuring Gertrude and Claudius that he will loose his daughter to Hamlet. Polonius treats his daughter like a female animal, either a cow or a mare, which are usually kept away from a male.

Polonius's imagination is reigned by animal associations connected with Ophelia, whereas Laertes employs botanic expressions and metaphors. It is clearly demonstrated by his comparison of Ophelia to 'rose of May' (4.5.156) when Laertes helplessly observes his sister, who had lost her senses after Polonius's death and her rejection by Hamlet. Laertes becomes one of witnesses to a touching scene of madness, in which the young woman distributes real or imaginary flowers. Opheliac collection of herbs and flowers include: rosemary, pansies, fennel, columbines, rue, daisy, and violets. Ophelia brings a waft of nature to ecophobic Elsinore, a shelter providing a hidden place for pejorative images translated to a view of natural environment and its inhabitants. Ophelia removes a malicious spell casted on nature, if only for a moment.

In *Hamlet* there are no stage directions that would determine the recipient of a certain flower from Ophelia. Grounded in traditional symbolism it is acknowledged that rue, a symbol of repentance and forgiveness, is given to

the Queen or Claudius, rosemary for remembrance and pansies for thought are distributed to Laertes, fennel as a symbol of flattery is suitable for the King, violets associated with fidelity and columbine with infidelity could be handed out to Gertrude, while Ophelia probably keeps a daisy for herself as a sign of unrequited love. Only one species returns in the description of Ophelia's drowning, namely daisies.

In the scene of Ophelia's funeral, lamenting Laertes mentions that Ophelia's body is put in the ground: 'Lay her i'th' earth' (5.1.227). It means that she will merge with the chthonic element as her body becomes part of it. Anticipated transformation of Ophelia into violets is also Laertes's wish. It is significant since it reflects a natural course of events – inevitability of decay and constant transmutation of matter, of one thing into another. When it comes to Ophelia, her change is nonaccidental – she is to turn into violets, which is what her brother wishes for.

In that way Ophelia would become a new ingredient of nature, with which she has an intuitive bond and subconscious conviction that just like other people, she is integral part of it. Perhaps it explains why Ophelia was the bravest person in contacts with nature. Although it is hard to say whether it was caused by losing the senses or her conscious choice. Before Ophelia brings flowers to Elsinore, she picks them in a literal sense, while she metaphorically deflowers the earth, she interferes in its virginal state. Ophelia, however, does not have bad intentions towards nature and her behaviour should be rather treated as an introduction to a forthcoming ritual of integration with nature. It is a portent for her divorcing from civilisation, from the ecophobic world of Elsinore, where nature awes and sickens.

After the loss of her father, Ophelia does not plan any revenge, no rebellion against the laws of nature arises in her mind. Despite being grief-stricken, there is not any hatred of hostility, both towards human beings and other beings. In the mad scene she is able to convey her grief by means of fragments of folk songs and stories, and eventually to accept her orphan destiny. As it turns out she will be adopted by forces more powerful than social forces, namely by nature. It will be the home for ecophilic Ophelia.

One may find out about Ophelia's departure to another world from a poetic account given by Gertrude, addressed to Laertes and Claudius. In her eighteen-line-long ekphrasis (4.7.164-81), the name Ophelia is not mentioned even once, instead Ophelia is represented by the personal pronoun „she” as well as referred to by the possessive pronoun „her” to indicate her weeds, her trophies, her garments. It seems that the most important thing is not the person, but where and how, in other words, the place and circumstances of the tragic event, of Ophelia's drowning. As it turns out, she is pulled by a certain willow that grows by the stream. The tree becomes anthropomor-

phized inasmuch as it appeared to be a human figure looking at herself in the water mirror as if she was staring at the reflection including grey hair (in fact – the leaves of the willow). Accompanied by the tree, Ophelia weaves garlands of crowsfeet, nettles, aises, and long purples. The Queen picturesquely paints an image of nature, the central part of which is not Ophelia. In the foreground Gertrude places trees, water, and flowers – garlands, crownnet weeds, and weedy trophies.

Philip Armstrong states that in *Hamlet* not only human beings are agents in operation¹⁶. Other biological organisms also become actively engaged in ‘social bussiness,’ which results in transferring agency from human to natural elements. It is visible especially in Gertrude’s description of a cracking branch under Ophelia. Here the branch becomes the subject in the main clause: ‘There, on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds / Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke, / When down her weedy trophies and herself / Fell in the weeping brook.’ (4.7.170-73). While in the dependent clause, it is her ‘weedy trophies’ that is presented as a living, causative element of nature. Ophelia begins her clambering to hang her coronet of wild flowers on an overhanging limb of the tree. Interestingly enough, what falls into the stream first, is her ‘weedy trophies’ instead of the background herione, Ophelia, referred to by the object pronoun ‘herself’¹⁷. Subsequently, Ophelia is pulled into/ by the water, succumbs to the operation of the stream, another active part of nature. Additionally, things become meaningful in Gertrude’s description as Ophelia’s garments absorb water, or rather drink it: ‘But long it could not be / Till that her garments, heavy with their drink’ (4.7.178-79) pull her to ‘muddy death’ (4.7.181). Ophelia is portrayed as a mermaid, a creature associated with aquatic element, half-woman, half-fish. In Armstrong’s opinion: ‘the drowning results from the cooperation of agencies closely interrelated by shared qualities and propensities: weeping willow, flowerty wreaths, pendant boughs, hanging weeds, broken branch, fallen weeds, weeping brook, waterlogged garments, clinging mud. Ophelia is utterly immersed in this network of natural agents’¹⁸.

Perhaps Ophelia forefeeling her own death, which simultaneously is to be her rebirth, yields to it without a struggle, listening to a voice calling her from behind the Elisinore’s castle. She dies placidly, without convulsions, welded with nature, since it summons Ophelia and takes her away. After the purifying outburst of madness, Ophelia is ready to leave and seems to be reconciled with her destiny. Ophelia abandons herself to nature; she dies in cold water

¹⁶ P. Armstrong, *Preposterous Nature in Shakespeare’s Tragedies*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. M. Neill and D. Schalkwyk, Oxford 2016, p. 117.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ Ibidem, pp. 117-118.

chanting fragments of folk songs. Her ecophilic attitude is demonstrated by her language and behaviour, and finally it brings her relief and an opportunity to escape from, paradoxically, the dehumanized world of people.

Death also calls for Hamlet, although it makes human beings its indirect agents and poison becomes the direct one. Hamlet perishes in the duel, wounded by a poisoned sword. His demise is painful and agonizing. Stabbed by Laertes, first he is not aware of the lethal weapon. Albeit the poison attacks his organism with speed, it triumphs as his body convulses. Hamlet falls to the cold castle floor, dying. Instead of flowers, soldiers pay their last respects to Hamlet. A militaristic funeral is planned for him, as befits an ecophil. Ophelia's funeral corresponds with her ecophilic attitude. Answering my initial question: is Ophelia to Hamlet as ecophilia to ecophobia, from the ecocritical perspective, I would say – yes.