

076. “Native and indued Unto that element”: A material feminist approach to Ophelia’s death in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*¹

Gizem BARDAŞ²

Işıl ŞAHİN GÜLTER³

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to bring the material, specifically the materiality of the human body and the natural world, to the forefront within the context of material feminist theory and practices in William Shakespeare’s renowned play *Hamlet*. Drawing on material feminist literary criticism as the principle guiding paradigm, this paper explores the manner in which Ophelia’s entanglement with the material world in *Hamlet* offers fresh insights into the reconsideration of many dichotomous categorizations, including culture/nature, man/woman, and human/nonhuman. In this regard, this paper, which draws mainly upon material feminisms’ notions of “trans-corporeality,” “diffraction apparatus,” and “thing power,” considers the materiality of the bodies an active force. Thus, this paper provides a critical perspective on Shakespeare’s conventional representation of Ophelia’s death. By paying particular attention to Ophelia’s entanglement with the natural world in *Hamlet*, this paper indicates that the reconceptualization of Ophelia’s entanglement with water in her drowning scene within the context of material feminist theory can offer a sense of fluidity, mobility, and dynamism between dichotomous categorizations.

Keywords: Material feminisms, woman, nature, body, *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare

“Sularda yaşamak için yaratılmış gibi”: William Shakespeare’in *Hamlet* adlı oyununda Ophelia’nın ölümüne maddeci feminist bir yaklaşım

Öz

Bu makalenin amacı, William Shakespeare’in ünlü oyunu *Hamlet*’te, maddeyi, özellikle insan bedeninin ve doğanın maddeselliğini, maddeci feminist teori ve uygulamalar bağlamında ön plana çıkarmaktır. Kavramsal çerçevesine maddeci feminist teorinin rehberlik ettiği bu makale, Ophelia’nın *Hamlet*’teki maddesel dünyayla iç içe geçmesinin, kültür/doğa, erkek/kadın ve insan/insan olmayan dahil olmak üzere daha birçok ikilikçi sınıflandırmanın yeniden ele alınmasına ilişkin yeni anlayışlar sunmasını inceler. Bu bağlamda, maddeci feminizmin “bedenler arası geçişkenlik,” “kırınım aparatı,” ve “şeylerin kapasitesi” kavramlarına dayanan bu makale, bedenlerin maddeselliğini aktif bir güç olarak ele alır. Böylece, Shakespeare’in Ophelia’nın ölümüne ilişkin geleneksel temsiline eleştirel bir bakış açısı geliştirir. Bu makale, *Hamlet*’te Ophelia ve doğal dünyanın iç içe geçmesine odaklanarak,

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² Yüksek Lisans Öğrencisi, Firat Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü (Elazığ, Türkiye), gizembardas2333@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6195-4700 [Araştırma makalesi, Makale kayıt tarihi: 29.12.2022-kabul tarihi: 20.02.2023; DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.1252890]

³ Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Firat Üniversitesi, İnsani ve Sosyal Bilimler Fakültesi, Batı Dilleri ve Edebiyatları Bölümü (Elazığ, Türkiye), igulter@firat.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-2313-0997

Ophelia'nın boğulma sahnesinde suyla iç içe geçmesinin yeniden kavramsallaştırılmasının maddeci feminist teori bağlamında, ikilikçi sınıflandırmalar arasında akışkanlık, hareketlilik, ve dinamizm duygusu sunabileceğini öne sürer.

Anahtar kelimeler: Maddeci feminizm, kadın, doğa, beden, *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare.

Introduction

Hamlet has been regarded as William Shakespeare's most renowned play in the Western canon. *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's masterpiece, probably written in the mid-seventeenth century, was influenced by *Amleth* (a revenge tragedy). *Hamlet* as a praiseworthy dramatic production has been the subject of academic research "full of digression and contradiction, amplification and ellipsis" (McAlindon, 1991, p. 102). The dramatic construction of *Hamlet* is mainly based on Prince Hamlet's revenge on his uncle Claudius, who killed his father, King Hamlet, and married his mother, Gertrude. However, Shakespeare's representation of women has been the main concern of this paper. Juliet Dusinberre's *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (1975) has been considered the first comprehensive critique of how women are portrayed in Shakespearean drama, inspiring a progressive increase in interest in academic critique of Shakespeare and feminism during the last several years. In 2016, *Shakespeare in Our Time: A Shakespeare Association of America Collection*, edited by Dympna Callaghan and Suzanne Gossett was released by Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death. The collection is introduced with a chapter, appropriately titled, "Why Feminism Still Matters," by former SAA President Phyllis Rackin. It is highly crucial because feminism is the first subject covered in a book that analyzes the present situation and potential future directions in critical Shakespearean studies.⁴ In this regard, drawing on material feminist literary criticism as the principle guiding paradigm and contributing to the previous Shakespearean scholarship, this paper will explore the manner in which Ophelia's death offers fresh insights into the reconsideration of many dichotomous categorizations, including culture/nature, man/woman, and human/nonhuman, through her entanglement with the natural world.

The evolution of material feminisms⁵ parallel developments in ecofeminism, reflecting the influence of particular discourses and debates circulating around the aforementioned dichotomous categorizations. By constructing a history of ecofeminist study that is pertinent to early modern studies as well as the interaction between the human and nonhuman natural realms, ecofeminist approaches to Shakespearean theatre expand on the work of early feminist academics. In this vein, this paper focuses on how Shakespeare might be understood as existing in a context where culture and nature, man and woman, and human and nonhuman exist in hierarchical dualist pairs, and it contends that a re-evaluation of material practice proves to be an especially helpful way to reconfigure these categorizations. It also shows how gender differences have an impact on materiality, which is not just defined in terms of distinctions between humans and other species. Ecofeminist theorists and researchers have a particular interest in analyzing the places where feminist and gender critique

⁴ See also Carol Chillington Rutter's *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (2001); Phyllis Rackin's *Shakespeare and Women* (2005); the second edition of *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare* (edited by Dympna Callaghan 2016); Valerie Traub's *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality and Race* (2016); Ania Loomba and Melissa Sánchez's *Rethinking Feminism in Early Modern Studies: Gender, Race and Sexuality* (2016); and Marianne Novy's *Shakespeare and Feminist Theory* (2017); and Rebecca Laroche and Jennifer Munroe's *Shakespeare and Ecofeminist Theory* (2017).

⁵ There are several titles for material feminisms, including "feminist materialism," "corporeal feminism," "feminist posthumanism," or "trans-corporeal feminisms" (Lemke, 2017, p. 86), since the field has been a highly active and complicated area of research. In this paper, material feminisms will be used to cover the theoretical and disciplinary spectrum.

combine with environmental criticism. Greta Gaard illustrates the main tenets of ecofeminism as follows:

Drawing on the insights of ecology, ecofeminism’s basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature. (1993, p. 1)

As Gaard has observed, the forms of oppression are all interrelated, but ecofeminism pays particular attention to the oppression of women and nature, as the domination of those entities is facilitated by an understanding of the other. The emphasis on the interconnected forms of oppression is what ecofeminism emphasizes, despite the fact that there are many different ways to analyze their connection. Renowned scientists and historians of science have handled this issue within ecofeminism by attempting to undermine the culture/nature dualism and its attendant implications for gendered power relations. In this vein, Carolyn Merchant’s *The Death of Nature* (1980) and Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1984) were both influential works. According to Merchant’s historical perspective, the perception of women and nature as passive objects of masculine reason shaped the scientific discourse from the seventeenth century onwards. More importantly, Merchant initiates the idea that nature should be regarded as a historical actor in the evolution of culture. In synch with Merchant, ecofeminist physicist and activist Vandana Shiva interrogates the extent to which the progressive notions of ‘development’ have been destructive to our interrelations with the nonhuman nature and transformed both women and nature “into passive objects, to be used and exploited for the uncontrolled and uncontrollable desires of alienated man” (Shiva, 2010, p. 6). In similar terms with Merchant and Shiva, Haraway’s concept of cyborg points out that the dichotomous categorizations of culture/nature, man/woman, and human/nonhuman need to be blurred by interrogating their mutual constructedness. Haraway’s cyborgs, “material-semiotic actors,” “trickster coyotes,” and “artifactual” natures “thoroughly breach” the borders between dichotomous categorizations (1991, p. 151). Thus, insisting on nature’s own agential capacity (Alaimo, 2000, p. 12) problematizes the essentialist woman-nature analogy.

In the twenty-first century, internationally recognized scholar of environmental humanities, Stacy Alaimo has challenged woman and nature analogy in her *Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminine Space* (2000). Alaimo points out that the analogy between women and nature may have helped to consider those entities as properties as well as spaces to be occupied and conquered. However, this analogy also provides women with outlets for reconceptualizing possible alternative pathways to power. It is possible to argue that under the influence of the linguistic turn in gender studies in the 1990s, ecofeminist literary criticism has been progressive in deconstructing this analogy rather than affirming it. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the material turn in feminism and gender studies provides an intuitive and encouraging path through which material feminisms have been included in literary studies. Moving away from the social constructivism of the linguistic turn, material feminisms emphasize the interconnectedness of bodies, physical realms, and even matter. Not surprisingly, material feminisms embrace recent theories such as posthumanism, as they consider nonhumans to play an active role in these material connections. Material feminisms allow for the reconfiguration of humans and nonhumans as things rather than distinct entities. This point encourages us to think of humans and nonhumans as permeable to each other rather than as separate. Intertwining with feminist approaches, material feminisms reinforce the process of dualist pairs’ coming together in *natureculture* (Haraway, 2003). By situating humans in a relational ontology of “(fractious) kinships” with nonhumans (Bennet, 2009, p. 112), the reconsideration of materiality will open new spaces. Bruno Latour refers to this as a

democratizing call for a gender-fluid "parliament" of things, which would consider binary pairs as co-actors in a spectrum of ontologically co-producing entities (1993, p. 3). In this regard, this paper employs material feminisms as a framework to reconfigure the relationships between dichotomous categorizations, including culture/nature, man/woman, and human/nonhuman, thus, aims to expose how those dichotomous categorizations are interconnected with the matrix of power structures in *Hamlet*. Rather than reiterating the essentialist connections between those dichotomous categorizations, this paper problematizes historical essentialism, focusing here on the materiality of human and nonhuman bodies, which are entangled with each other in *Hamlet*.

The material turn in material feminisms

The linguistic turn under the influence of postmodernism and poststructuralism in the 1990s has been recently criticized by material feminists. As Karen Barad articulates, "Language has been granted too much power. The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn lately every "thing" – even materiality – is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation" (2003, p. 801). The linguistic turn has been widely criticized by material feminists as being insufficient and privileging discourse over materiality. It is significant to note that one of the most important aspects of the material turn is its response to some extreme elements of postmodern and poststructuralist thought, which it considers to be "dematerializing" the world into linguistic and social creations. Aiming at new socio-ontological research to outline a solution, material feminists offer that our perception of the world is neither outside of language nor constructed by it. Material feminists borrow some concepts from science, including "disclosure"⁶ and "intra-action"⁷ and build on these terms to develop a material solution. It is possible to argue that material feminisms combine environmental politics with environmental science to create the praxis of material feminisms. Indeed, the veracity of scientific and environmental claims influences the course of material feminisms. Environmental politics necessitate a revitalized appreciation for science's capacity to provide critical information about nonhuman beings, ecosystems, and other natural processes. Additionally, contemplating that human corporeality and nonhuman natures are co-constitutive enables the transformation of environmentalism itself. Being aware of this interconnectedness, Susan Hekman argues that the external reality is produced through the agents' interactions. In Hekman's terms, "It is intra-action between knowledge and the world, not a one-way movement either from the world to our concepts (mirroring) or a projection from the discursive realm onto the world (construction)" (2010, p. 91). To paraphrase Hekman, the exterior world is not fixed; however, it exists as more than just a projection of the discursive world. The world is the result of multiple factors interacting, not just the discursive and material worlds. When the 'subject' is considered a mere product of discursive and material elements, it will be disclosed in different manners, through which an individual perceives his/her own subject position (2010, p. 107). In this perspective, disclosure enables us not to limit our ability to understand that neither of our lived experiences or realities is more real than the others. To say the same in slightly different terms, disclosure allows for the development of material-discursive conceptual frameworks to challenge oppressive institutions. Thus, material feminist frameworks

⁶ Susan Hekman borrows this term from science studies theorist Joseph Rouse.

⁷ Theoretical physicist and feminist theorist Karen Barad's notion of "intra-action" refers to the ontological inseparability of culture and nature, "Intra-actions, according to Barad, cut together apart at the same time, which means that they are differenti-ated and entangled simultaneously. This way of seeing the world is different from Cartesian dualism – which dichotomizes or makes binaries – cutting into two, the absolute separation or pre-existing determinate boundary of subject/object, culture/nature, here/there, now/then. Intra-action troubles Cartesian dualism, making the shift to a non-dualistic view of the world" (Murriss and Bozalek, 2021, p. 71). Murriss, Karin and Vivienne Bozalek, "Intra-Action." In *A Glossary for Doing Postqualitative, New Materialist and Critical Posthumanist Research Across Disciplines*, edited by Karin Murriss, Routledge, 2021, p. 70-71.

acknowledge that different subject positions, which derive from material-discursive situatedness, can never be fixed and categorized. Affirming the position that language is not the primary means by which bodies are defined, and that there is a material reality that enables us to configure the real world and how subjectivities are expressed, the disclosures allow for broadening feminist approaches towards the social-ontological level. Thus, such a broadening perspective shifts the attention from language to material awareness. In Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman’s terms, “the material turn in feminist theory opens up many fundamental questions about ontology, epistemology, ethics, and politics, questions that are explored” (2008, p.7).

Being aware of the fact that matter primarily refers to nature and the body reveals Western ideology’s dualist categorizations, it is certain that one of the fundamental causes of women’s oppression is the woman’s assumed relation to nature. In Western ideology, nature is considered silent, passive, and subordinate to human subject; however, “‘new’ material feminisms displace the human as the principal ground for knowledge [...] and accepts that matter is alive” (Taylor and Ivinson, 2013, p. 666). Thus, a “priority [is] given to difference, entanglement, and undecidability” because this problematizes “the distance, separation, and categorical assurance that shores up the self-mastery of the oedipal (male) subject of humanism” (MacLure, 2015, p. 98). It is therefore no coincidence that material feminisms dismantle not only anthropocentrism but also androcentrism of Western ideology. If the idea that nature is a passive matter is challenged, then, multiple articulations will be created to transfer between various structures of domination. In other words, the reconceptualization of nature allows for multiple disclosures to create material-discursive frameworks that dismantle the systems of oppression. Once nature is considered an active matter, then the female body can also be reconsidered as “more than an inert, passive object on which ideology inscribes meaning, but rather it is an agential reality with its own causal role in making meaning” (Hames-Garcia, 2008, p. 327). Such a reconsideration allows for dismantling Western patriarchal ideology, which has been sustained by a variety of dichotomous categorizations, including culture/nature, man/woman, and human/nonhuman. Indeed, this approach underlines the co-existence of “human and nonhuman, material and discursive, and natural and cultural factors” (Barad, 2007, p. 26), opening multiple entry points for alternative social and ethical visions that will challenge all forms of oppression.

In synch with Hames-Garcia, Nancy Tuana insists that it is important to recognize the interconnectedness between nature and culture, abandoning all traces of ontological divides, which she refers to as “interactionism”. In Tuana’s terms, “the point is that material agency in its heterogeneous of forms, including irreducibly diverse forms of distinctively human agency, interact in complex ways. Agency in all these instances emerges out of such interaction; it is not antecedent to them” (2008, p. 196). Taking Tuana’s point into consideration, it is important to note that nature is not external or eternal, but instead, agential materiality of the world and ourselves. This kind of nature—one that is explicitly not a cultural projection—is emerging from the intersecting domains of material feminisms. In these domains, the increased emphasis on matter has stressed the need to recall the concreteness of existential fields, both in terms of the physical dimension and non-binary epistemological object-subject systems. Such a turn frees us from the confines of Cartesian and Enlightenment definitions and dismantles the Cartesian binary of mind and body to portray corporeality.

A material feminist approach to Ophelia’s death in *Hamlet*

The representations of submissive female characters and oppressive patriarchal structures that predominated early feminist critiques have recently been challenged and revised by material feminisms.

In this vein, *Hamlet* creates a dramatic space in which Ophelia and the nonhuman nature perform interconnectedness, filling out the history that belong to those entities. Ophelia's effort to transcend the limits of discursive realms especially during her drowning scene brings a fresh insight into the idea that "Ophelia has been an insignificant minor character in the play, touching in her weakness and madness but chiefly interesting, of course, in what she tells us about *Hamlet*" (Showalter, 1994, p. 77). That is, "[Ophelia's] tragedy is subordinated in the play," (Showalter, 1994, p. 78) associating her madness solely with her relation to the male characters; her lover Hamlet, her father Polonius, and her brother Laertes. Thus, the material feminist reconsideration of Ophelia's agential capacity defers "matter from its long history of attachment to automatism or mechanism" (Bennett, 2010, p. 3), drawing attention to the human entanglement with the material world. As Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino point out, Ophelia's agential capacity during her drowning scene reinforces the requirement to retrieve the body from its discursive dimensions with a focus on the body's entanglement with the material world (2011, p. 76). Such a lens provides both Ophelia and the material world with the opportunity to assert agency by recognizing their material presence on the stage, decentering the play from its male subject of humanism, and deconstructing the "normative sense of the human and its beliefs about human agency" (Coole and Frost, 2010, p. 4). More importantly, it is in the interest of these new material insights to reinforce the material reality of nonhuman nature with which Ophelia engages an offstage process. In this sense, the entanglement between Ophelia and water in her drowning scene offers two different perspectives on the play: a setting, which is not contaminated by human activity and Ophelia's performativity that is not predetermined by the male protagonist.

Ophelia's death marks a significant change in the course of the action, and its unusual revelation demonstrates her ongoing significance to the dramatic construction. Ophelia's death is brought by a natural force, water, with the stream drawing her back to itself in a "muddy death," as Gertrude's remarkable elegy for Ophelia demonstrates:

There is a willow grows askant the brook
That shows his hoary leaves in the glassy stream.
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
Of crowsfeet, nettles, daisies and long purples,
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.
There on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds
Clamb'ring to hang, an envious sliver broke,
When down the weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. (*Hamlet* IV, vii: 164-173)

The willow is itself an emblem described by Thomas Fuller in his *The History of the Worthies of England*: "A sad Tree, whereof such who have lost their love make their mourning garlands" (as cited in Ronk, 2015, p. 26). The discursive connotations of the flowers have been previously analyzed. Harold Jenkins establishes a close relationship between the meaning of the flowers, including agony, poison, or treachery, respectively, and the plants on the stage (1982, p. 544-546) and "the flowers are transformed to trophies" (Ronk, 2015, p. 26). These relations have contributed to the conventional interpretations of Ophelia's tragedy in Shakespearean studies so far. However, the reconsideration of the agency of the flowers and Ophelia and their entanglements offers (Kordecki, 2018, p. 16) something beyond these conventional readings. As the above quotation indicates, the scene exposes the transference of attributes

between the materials and the characters, both of whom are considered capable of agency. The branch on which Ophelia climbs is “envious,” upon Ophelia’s entrance the “brook” into which she falls is weeping while the “willow” is assumed to have “hoary leaves,” recalling Polonius’s aged skull. As Val Plumwood suggests that deconstructing the binaries involves “affirming and reconceptualizing the underside, nature” and “re-inscribing nature with the intentional and mind like qualities” that Descartes removed (1993, p. 5). By depicting “nature as an actor” we can “radically challenge the idea that nature is passive matter, there for cultural consumption” (Alaimo, 2000, p. 12). Giving plants a memorable role in *Hamlet* modifies the interaction with the written words and the living things on stage (Laroche, 2011, p. 221). In a broader sense, this reconsideration allows for humans relating themselves to the rest of the living and the agentic world (Ağın, 2015, p. 40). Such a depiction, bridging the gap between dichotomous categorizations, can allow for imagining nature as somehow linguistically capable of communication with humans, erasing the unique otherness of nature. Gertrude’s elegy for Ophelia follows as:

Her cloths spread wide,
And mermaid-like a while they bore her up;
Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death. (*Hamlet* IV, vii: 174-179)

As the quotation indicates, Ophelia’s body becomes nature itself and nature fuses into the human, transposing the human and nonhuman borders. In Ronk’s terms: “Ophelia is in harmony with nature (endued unto that element) and the sounds draw all the items of the scene, both human and inhuman, closer together so that weeping becomes a generalized event with many participants” (2015, p. 26). Ophelia is swallowed by the water. It is possible to argue that Ophelia, who isn’t merely linked with plants, turns into a creature of the water as a signification of human/nonhuman symbiosis. Thus, her death signifies the fusion of the human world into the nonhuman nature. Ophelia’s drowning scene offers layers of complex interconnections that speak to the issues surrounding the woman/nature analogy on a number of theoretical levels. A material feminist point of view carefully reevaluates if the conventional negative association of women with nature may really give opportunities for debating the issue of origins once nature is no longer assumed to be the domain of prescriptive, unchangeable, and retrogressive facts. In other words, Ophelia’s association with nature while she is alive has been the space of male discontent for the neglected nature. However, Ophelia’s death and her entanglement with water in her drowning scene transcend the dichotomous categorizations. It is therefore no coincidence that Ophelia’s desire for nature, specifically water, is evocative in the context of material feminist reading and facilitates a transposition of theoretical frameworks from the man/woman binary to a human/nonhuman one.

Extending Ophelia’s paradigm to culture/nature relationships offers multitudes of possibilities for reconceptualizing the culture/nature dichotomy and altering our perceptions and attitudes toward the natural world and its nonhuman species. First, the conception of nature as an actor or agential power shifts epistemological approaches away from the traditional scientific models of domination, discovery, and control (Warren, 2000, p. 35). Secondly, Ophelia’s death renders the embodiments of countless

intra-acting agencies; through her entanglement with the water in her drowning scene. Ophelia absorbs her own unfinished or incomplete subjectivity through her creative capacities. Thirdly, the water element offers associations that correspond to a revisioning of the epistemic relationship where we need "a diffraction apparatus," which can be employed to read concepts and bodies "through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge" (Barad, 2007, p. 30). To paraphrase Barad, "a diffraction apparatus" is necessary to presume the natural and the cultural simultaneously without "holding either nature or culture as the fixed reference for understanding the other" (2007, p. 30). Ophelia's entanglement with water, in this sense, provides us with new interpretations. Our interpretation will be our participation in the world's "differential becoming," which has the potential for creating further realities (Iovino, 2018, p. 114).

The description of Ophelia's drowning adds a deeper meaning to her previously submissive representations, "replacing her earlier frenzied madness with another sort: still, calm, deliberate" (Ronk, 2015, p. 33). More importantly, Ophelia, becomes a part of the material world, removed from the corrupted patriarchal space. With her death, she belongs to natural world like the mermaid, half-women and half-fish, featuring her in the material world. Here, Alaimo's notion of "trans-corporeality" provides a guiding framework to reconfigure Ophelia's death. Trans-corporeality emphasizes the idea of trans, as movement between or across bodies until categorizes of distinction, are so completely dismantled that we are forced to acknowledge the truth that our own nature and identities rely on multiplicity. Trans-corporeality indicates "a mobile space that acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions of human bodies, nonhuman creatures, ecological systems, chemical agents, and other actors" (Alaimo, 2010, p. 2-3). Recognizing trans-corporeality "makes it difficult to pose nature as mere background" to human culture and challenges us to engage with the very materiality of the self and the nonhuman world, which may lead to 'unraveling of the human'" (Alaimo, 2000, p. 3). While this has been going on, the physical natural world in *Hamlet*-water-crosses the body's permeable borders to reach corporeal interiors. This tangible, external world rearranges what is within, and highly visceral types of materials are capable of traveling from the inside to the outside. In synch with Alaimo, Barad writes, "matter is not simply [...] the surface effect of human bodies, or the end product of linguistic or discursive acts" and "all bodies not merely "human" bodies, come to matter through the world's iterative intra-activity-its performativity" (2008, p. 140-141). Thus, Ophelia's representation as a mermaid, half-woman and half-fish, can be regarded as material feminist disclosure, which enables Ophelia to challenge oppressive patriarchal institutions. Drawing attention from Prince Hamlet-based tragedy to her entanglement with nonhuman nature, Ophelia's iconic entanglement with water challenges previous representations that deny her subjectivity and agentic capacity.

Recently, in her article "Storied Seas and Living Metaphors in the Blue Humanities" (2019), distinguished ecocritic Serpil Oppermann has interrogated the sea's meaning, which always remains between the discursive and the real. According to Oppermann, new materialist theories have reconciled those two positions, in which reality and imagination blend, and she writes, "This is the sea's twofold condition: a physical geographical site and a vast domain of imagination that can never be conclusively charted" (2019, p. 446). The sea has never been regarded "as a static entity whose nature could be durably mapped, known, and projected into the future" (Lehman, 2016, p. 115) by the oceanographers, although the sea has been metaphorically used either futuristic hope or fatalistic thinking. Oppermann draws attention to the figurative representations of the sea from the time of Homer, reinforcing "the sea's fluidity, mobility, dynamism, and life-affirming qualities" (2019, p. 450) quoting from oceanographers as follows:

“a mobile space whose very essence is constituted by its fluidity,” “a dynamic world of relational becoming,” “life-creating and biosphere-sustaining body of saltwater” and “transformative force,” an “amorphous sea” marked by “unboundedness, drift, and solvency.” (2019, p. 450)

If Oppermann’s point of view is taken into consideration, it is obvious that “liquid pathways of connectedness conjoin creative acts of all kinds” (Past, 2016, p. 370). Oppermann’s reconfiguration of the sea from a material ecocritical point of view certainly enhances this paper’s reconsideration of the relationship between water and Ophelia. Affirming this position, the material feminist approach to water in *Hamlet* suggests an alternative to the rational scientific interpretations. This approach attempts to re-envision the polarized terms culture/nature, man/woman, and human/nonhuman. It also exposes ruptures in the boundaries operating in certain binary structures. Moreover, it allows for imagining the possibility of alternative conceptual frameworks that might include a shifting process of flow back and forth, a tension held in balance between subject and object, between separation and connectedness, between dependence and autonomy within the primary categories. More importantly, here the emphasis is on “thing power,” recalling Jane Bennett’s reference to “nonhuman powers,” to account for the ability of inanimate things to produce effects by operating in conjunction with other material bodies (Bennett, 2010, p. ix). Thus, Bennett challenges the notion that matter is inert or passive matter, and instead views it as a resource or the foundation for human or pure human activity. Thus, Ophelia’s entanglement with the water is as important as its materiality, and even though this creates a problematic tension in the discourse about the sea/water and women, these qualities are interrelated, prompting an investigation into how material meanings are created in a tangible sense between dichotomous categorizations. What interests this paper at this point is the material reconfiguration of Ophelia, who retains agency due to the certain material details of this particular scene, which is alluring to interpret as a form of *fluidity*. Thus, Ophelia appears more subversive and potent, challenging her previous emblematic configurations in the play. When Gertrude informs Laertes that Ophelia has drowned, he reacts as follows:

Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears. (weeps) But yet
It is our trick; nature her custom holds,
Let shame say what it will. When these are gone,
The woman will be out. Adieu, my lord.
I have a speech o’ fire, that fain would blaze,
But that this folly douts it. (*Hamlet* IV, vii: 184-189)

Laertes’s depiction of Ophelia’s death and his special references to the association between women and nature attract attention. Rather than bringing out a conventional reading of the woman/nature bond, material feminist approach may revise the myth of nature as a female’s habit. This reading frees nature from the confines of Cartesian and Enlightenment definitions, and challenges the Cartesian binary of culture and nature or man and woman to portray corporeality. Therefore, material feminisms favor a return to materiality, known as the material turn, as it comes with many significant theoretical benefits and promising outcomes. The material entanglement emerges as a manner in which the binary systems that cause alienation, desperation, and fragmentation can be dismantled. Ophelia seems to feel the oppression and limitations of class and gender most deeply, moves to another dimension through her agential capacity that provides her with the power to subvert patriarchal discourses. Moreover, the material entanglement demonstrates the “vitality of matter” (Bennett, 2010, p. vii), which means “the

capacity of things" (2010, p. viii). This perspective allows for conceptualizing nature and women as having the ability to act, as this paper analyzes in *Hamlet*.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated how material feminisms, when incorporated into literary criticism, provide a fruitful framework for analyzing, critiquing, and explaining literary works. Paying particular attention to Ophelia's entanglement with the natural world in *Hamlet*, this paper argues that Shakespeare's representation of Ophelia in the play clearly illustrates the deeply problematic and harmful effects of dualisms on relationships, culture to nature, man to woman, human to nonhuman. This paper offers a material feminist point of view on *Hamlet*, recognizing that patriarchal institutions and discourses are destructive to women and nature. As discussed above, the linguistic turn offers a crucial vehicle to deal with the dualisms, which are essential to any discussion in relation to the metaphors in a dramatic structure, with an acceptance of the discursive practices' influence on re-inscribing or maintaining rigid opposition and hierarchy. However, the material turn focuses on how bodies even physical environments, and even matter itself are interconnected. In this context, Ophelia's entanglement with water offers an alternative vision to her disappearance from the play. That is, Ophelia is swallowed by the water. It is possible to argue that Ophelia turns into a creature of the water as a signification of human/nonhuman symbiosis. Thus, her death signifies the fusion of the human into nonhuman nature, or the integration of the nonhuman into the human realm. The material feminist point of view carefully reevaluates if the conventional negative association of woman with nature may really give opportunities for debating the issue of origins once nature is no longer assumed to be the domain of essentialism. To say the same in slightly different terms, Ophelia's association with nature while she is alive has been the space of male discontent for the neglected nature. However, Ophelia's death and her entanglement with water in her drowning scene transcend the dichotomous categorizations. Where matter is associated with the female body, women are limited in material terms by their bodies. However, contemplating the co-institutive materiality of human corporeality and nonhuman materials will enable the transformation of feminist issues. Ophelia's representation as a mermaid, half-woman and half-fish, can be regarded as material feminist disclosure, which enables Ophelia to challenge oppressive patriarchal institutions. drawing attention from *Hamlet*-based tragedy to her entanglement with nonhuman nature.

Ophelia's death offers the embodiment of countless intra-acting agencies; through her entanglement with the water in her drowning scene, Ophelia absorbs her own unfinished or incomplete subjectivity and her creative capacities. As Oppermann has also theorized, the water's "fluidity, mobility, dynamism, and life-affirming qualities" (2019, p. 450), the water functions in harmony with Ophelia in the drowning scene. The material feminist approach to the water in *Hamlet* suggests an alternative to the rational scientific interpretations. This approach attempts to reimagine the polarized terms culture/nature, man/woman, and human/nonhuman; while it exposes ruptures in the boundaries operating in certain binary structures. The drowning scene has demonstrated that intra-action is crucial to the theory of inter-subjectivity, and this quality is also reflected in the metaphor of the water, illustrating the notion of two subjects mediating their own and each other's subjectivity. Rather than a terrain of polarized dualist pairs, this particular scene evokes fluctuating boundaries, transition, dynamism, fluidity, and convergence. The freedom that Ophelia recovers in this liminal space not only allows her to become the agent of her own desire and not simply an object but also enables her to exercise the "vitality of matter" (Bennett, 2010, p. vii). It is therefore significant to note that material feminisms generate alternative ways of conceptualizing the various categories and relationships. Thus, center and margin are replaced

by a continuum that does not erase the opposing elements or reverse values, but attempts to fill in the space between. To sum up, this paper indicates that *Hamlet* suggests an alternative vision, exposing some of the faulty frameworks and erroneous assumptions of the anthropocentric and androcentric discourses that continue to govern Western ontological and epistemological beliefs, and, in doing so, a material feminist reading of Ophelia’s death offers up multiple entry points from which to open new spaces. Moreover, it allows for imagining the possibility of alternative conceptual frameworks that might include a shifting process of flow back and forth, a tension held in balance between subject and object, between separation and connectedness, between dependence and autonomy within the primary categories. In this regard, Ophelia appears more subversive and potent, challenging her previous emblematic configurations in the play.

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