

- 29 Weissman MM, Bland RC, Canino GJ, Faravelli C, Greenwald S, Hwu HG, et al. Cross-national epidemiology of major depression and bipolar disorder. *JAMA* 1996; **276**: 293–9.
- 30 Forsell Y. The pathway to meeting need for mental health services in Sweden. *Psychiatr Serv* 2006; **57**: 114–9.
- 31 Plomin R, DeFries JC, McClearn GE, McGuffin P. *Behavioral Genetics (4th edn)*. Worth Publishers, 2001.
- 32 Sadock BJ, Sadock VA. Mood disorders. In *Kaplan and Sadock's Synopsis of Psychiatry: Behavioral Sciences/Clinical Psychiatry (9th edn)* (eds BJ Sadock, VA Sadock): 534–90. Lippincott Williams and Wilkins, 2003.
- 33 Kraemer HC. Epidemiological methods: about time. *Int J Environ Res Public Health* 2010; **7**: 29–45.
- 34 Kendler KS, Gardner CO, Prescott CA. Toward a comprehensive developmental model for major depression in men. *Am J Psychiatry* 2006; **163**: 115–24.
- 35 Shanahan L, Copeland WE, Costello EJ, Angold A. Child-, adolescent- and young adult-onset depressions: differential risk factors in development? *Psychol Med* 2011; **6**: 1–10.
- 36 Carbone JR, Gorman JM, Goodman J, Willems MB. Mood disorders and the heart. In *Medical and Psychiatric Comorbidity Over the Course of Life* (ed WW Eaton): 97–127. American Psychiatric Publishing, 2006.
- 37 Bus BA, Marijnissen RM, Holeywijn S, Franke B, Purandare N, de Graaf J, et al. Depressive symptom clusters are differentially associated with atherosclerotic disease. *Psychol Med* 2011; **41**: 1419–28.
- 38 Dalby RB, Chakravarty MM, Ahdidan J, Sorensen L, Frandsen J, Jonsdottir KY, et al. Localization of white-matter lesions and effect of vascular risk factors in late-onset major depression. *Psychol Med* 2010; **40**: 1389–99.
- 39 Greenstein AS, Paranthaman R, Burns A, Jackson A, Malik RA, Baldwin RC, et al. Cerebrovascular damage in late-life depression is associated with structural and functional abnormalities of subcutaneous small arteries. *Hypertension* 2010; **56**: 734–40.
- 40 Kendler KS, Gardner CO, Fiske A, Gatz M. Major depression and coronary artery disease in the Swedish twin registry: phenotypic, genetic, and environmental sources of comorbidity. *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 2009; **66**: 857–63.
- 41 Bondy B. Common genetic factors for depression and cardiovascular disease. *Dialogues Clin Neurosci* 2007; **9**: 19–28.
- 42 Baghai TC, Varallo-Bedarida G, Born C, Hafner S, Schule C, Eser D, et al. Major depressive disorder is associated with cardiovascular risk factors and low Omega-3 index. *J Clin Psychiatry* 2011; **72**: 1242–7.
- 43 Sheline YI, Pieper CF, Barch DM, Welsh-Bohmer K, McKinstry RC, MacFall JR, et al. Support for the vascular depression hypothesis in late-life depression: results of a 2-site, prospective, antidepressant treatment trial. *Arch Gen Psychiatry* 2010; **67**: 277–85.



## psychiatry in literature

### Ophelia in *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare

Jo Richards

*Hamlet* continues to fascinate contemporary actors and audiences. The dramatic possibilities which arise from the main character deciding to 'put an antic disposition on', i.e. pretend to be mad, provides an intriguing study for psychiatrists.

The play begins with Hamlet meeting his deceased father's ghost. The ghost reveals how he was murdered by his own brother, who has now married his widow, Hamlet's mother. Following the ghost's visitation Hamlet's emotional and behavioural turmoil escalates. He rejects fair Ophelia and accidentally kills her father Polonius. Audiences understand how Hamlet wrestles with continuing suicidal and homicidal urges as the plot progresses. Hamlet's soliloquies during Act III and IV reveal the turbulent emotional and intellectual inner world of a desperate man. We understand Hamlet's destructive urges, 'Now could I drink hot blood'. We hear and see his most private discussions with himself about whether revenge is justified. By Act V we know that Hamlet is himself prepared for death, 'The readiness is all'.

Following Hamlet's famous misogynistic attack on Ophelia in Act III, 'Get thee to a nunnery . . .', Shakespeare gives the latter a single soliloquy. She eloquently comments on Hamlet's seeming mental breakdown, 'O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown' and her own sadness, 'And I, of ladies most deject and wretched/That sucked the honey of his music vows'. However, as Ophelia's grief increases following her father's death, so does her passivity. This contrasts with Hamlet's active attempts to resolve his internal and real life crises. Audiences see Ophelia unravelling mentally through the eyes of the other characters during Act IV such as Claudius, ' . . . poor Ophelia/Divided from herself and her fair judgement'. We and they attempt to decipher the meaning behind her speech and behaviour while she ceases to engage directly with us. Instead she speaks disjointedly and sings, seeming to allude to death, 'They bore him barefaced on the brier/Hey non nony . . .'. Later, Gertrude describes how Ophelia subsequently drowns while picking wildflowers. Gertrude's account of Ophelia falling in the water portrays the latter as helpless and disconnected from real danger. 'Her clothes spread wide . . . they bore her up . . . she chanted snatches of old tunes/As one incapable of her own distress . . . Till that her garments, heavy with their drink/Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay/To muddy death'. Ophelia's death can be interpreted as suicide. There is uncertainty about this in the play, recognisable as equivalent to a present day coroner's open verdict.

Considering Hamlet and Ophelia together, we observe different responses to loss and abandonment. It is Shakespeare's skill in creating the characters which binds us into this old tragedy still. He does this through their clever use of language, their relationships with other characters in the play and interaction with audiences. We love to listen to the momentous soliloquies of the Prince of Denmark, alone on the stage with us but each time seeking variation, a new interpretation. But the vulnerable Ophelia has also become iconic. Ophelia's transformation from an eloquent to an elusive and disengaged character charts her particular dispossession.

The quotations are from the 1996 Penguin Books edition (ed. T. J. B. Spence).

The British Journal of Psychiatry (2012)  
201, 359. doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.112.120501