

Artist	Millais
Title	Ophelia
Date	1851
Medium	Oil on canvas
Scale	
Scope	Literary subjects in Painting
Style	Pre-Raphaelite



Subject: Taken from a scene in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Driven mad by the death of her father at the hands of her lover Hamlet, Ophelia wanders the countryside picking flowers but falls into a river. Grief-stricken at the loss of her father and rejected by Hamlet, she drowns rather than save herself. Millais and the Pre-Raphaelites were deeply influenced by Shakespeare, medieval subjects, literature, Britain's historical past. Millais spent time finding a location which matched exactly the description given in *Hamlet* of Ophelia's death.

Influence from cultural/social factors: 1. Created at a time when the art critic John Ruskin encouraged artists to 'go to nature in all singleness, rejecting nothing, selecting nothing'. Millais and the Pre-Raphaelites depicted nature as realistically as possible.
 2. Millais formed the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood alongside Holman Hunt and Rossetti. Their aim was to break with the conventional teaching at the Royal Academy and instead create more honest paintings by looking at art from before the time of Raphael (early 1500s) for inspiration.

Formal features	
Composition	Ophelia placed centrally in a landscape setting. She and the nature surrounding her all captured accurately.
Colour or texture	Colour is used to draw the eye around the canvas and help with the narrative. Ophelia is pale against the dark brown river. Red poppies symbolism death, white daisies indicate innocence, the landscape is a rich green, showing Millais's attention to nature.
Light and tone	The whole scene is brightly lit, allowing us to see all the detail and the narrative
Space & depth or relief	All forms and objects are depicted in minute detail, this makes the whole scene in focus and emphasises the reality Millais is attempting in his technique.
Line/brushwork	Clear forms with clear outlines, showing the influence of Van Eyck (an artist from before the era of Raphael....Pre-Raphaelite).

Use or development of materials, techniques & processes: Painted plein air to record nature as accurately as possible. Tubes of oil paint - recent development- allowed artists to paint outdoors. Pre-Raphaelites applied paint to a wet white ground this made the colour more intense **SO THAT SYMBOLIC DETAILS COULD BE SEEN BY THE VIEWER AND HELP TELL THE NARRATIVE**

Stylistic comment and artistic influence: Millais was a founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. This group of painters focused on scenes from history, literature or with a medieval theme. They looked to art from before the time of Raphael, such as Northern Renaissance artists like Van Eyck. They depicted scenes as realistically as possible without idealising the figures depicted. Focus on nature, symbolic detail to help with the narrative of a scene. Bright intense colour used to draw the eye to details within the narrative.

Critical text quotes:

John Ruskin: *'Go to nature in all singleness of heart, rejecting nothing, selecting nothing'*.

Shakespeare: Queen Gertrude in *Hamlet* describing Ophelia's death: *'There is a willow grows aslant a brook.....there with fantastic garlands did she come of cornflowers, nettles, daisies'*.

Victorian critic: *'I see only that face of poor drowning Ophelia... I am fain to turn from the face of the mad girl to the natural loveliness that makes her dying beautiful'*.