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**PORTRAYAL OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SHAKESPEARE'S HAMLET AND ITS  
FILM ADAPTATIONS**

**Bakalářská práce**

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Prohlašuji, že jsem závěrečnou práci vypracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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Vlastnoruční podpis

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# 1 Introduction

William Shakespeare is without a doubt the most famous playwright of all time. Therefore, naturally, there have been countless researches done concerning his style of writing, the symbolism in his works, his characters, the impact he had on literature in the following decades etc.

The aim of my thesis is to examine more closely the way William Shakespeare portrayed female characters, specifically in his most famous play *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. This thesis focuses on the female characters in *Hamlet* because it was and still is a very significant work of literature and with the development of women and gender studies there is a lot of new findings considering this topic. Explicitly, the aim is to analyse in depth the significance of female characters in *Hamlet* because they certainly play important roles in it and unfortunately are often overlooked and deemed as minor characters.

The first part of my thesis concentrates on the overall position of women in the Elizabethan era. It describes what life was like for ordinary women in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and what their position in society was. We also have to take into account the queen, Elizabeth I, who was Shakespeare's patron and played a very significant role in his life.

Then the general approach Shakespeare took when writing female characters in his plays is discussed. Some researchers believe that Shakespeare was quite progressive in this matter and that many of his female characters are rather independent and would be in today's terms considered feminist.

The next part provides a detailed description of the two female characters in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Gertrude and Ophelia. In my opinion, they are both incredibly interesting characters that are also very important for the whole story. Contrasting views considering these two characters are dealt with.

A part of this study is also the analysis of the film adaptations of *Hamlet*, the different approaches different actresses took when portraying Ophelia and Gertrude as well as the changes

the directors made when adapting these characters for the silver screen. Film continues to be one of the most prominent types of mass media and there were several film adaptations of Hamlet made in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century therefore it is important to provide a brief study of female characters in films in this thesis as well.

## **2 Position of women in the Elizabethan Era**

The aim of this chapter is to provide a brief look at the society of the Elizabethan era, with the emphasis on the position of women. The general living standard of ordinary women is discussed as well as their rights, or lack thereof. This chapter also deals with the importance of the marital status of women, their education and work. Elizabeth I is mentioned as well since she was the most influential woman of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The time during the reign of the queen Elizabeth I is often considered to be the golden age in the history of England but after studying the era in more detail it very soon becomes clear that not everything was so 'golden' after all. While the rich, who were in a very small minority, might have led quite nice and joyful lives, for ordinary people life was a constant battle. If life was difficult for ordinary men it was countless times more demanding for ordinary women (World History in Context).

Women in the 16<sup>th</sup> century were viewed as unpredictable, uncontrollable and generally inferior to men in almost all aspects. As Pragati Das (2012) suggests in that era it was said that "*women were to be seen, and not heard.*" In some instances though, not all men necessarily agreed with this ideology in their personal lives and did not treat their wives and daughters as someone who would be below them (Women in the Age of Shakespeare).

### **2.1 Living standard for women**

The standard for living was generally lower for women than for men, even if they belonged to a similar social class. Women were mostly just expected to be the wives, mothers, sisters and daughters. According to Theresa D. Kemp (2010) from fifty to seventy percent of all women lived in relative poverty and had just enough money to survive. However many of them lived in absolute poverty and had to rely on charity, begging or stealing in order to provide food and clothing for their families (Women in the Age of Shakespeare).



That being said, many foreigners coming to England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century commented on the fact that English women seemed to have much more freedom than those in other European countries. For example Thomas Platter, a visitor from Switzerland commented in 1599 that “*Now the women-folk of England, who have mostly blue-grey eyes and are fair and pretty, have far more liberty than in other lands, and know just how to make good use of it for they often stroll out or drive by coach in very gorgeous clothes, and the men must put up with such ways, and may not punish them for it [...] and there is a proverb about England, which runs: England is a paradise for women, a prison for servants and a hell for horses*” (The Time Travellers Guide to Elizabethan England).

## **2.2 Rights and Responsibilities**

Women’s rights were mostly nonexistent in the Elizabethan era. Women were partially allowed to do what they desired only as long as they were not married. Once they got married they essentially became the property of their husband. They could not make any decisions by themselves anymore and had to ask for their husband’s permission. A woman could not dispose of any of her property because all her belongings became those of her husband in marriage. She could not invite anyone into their home or even write her own will without the husband’s approval. However, a woman did not have a complete freedom even before marriage since unmarried girls were basically a property of their fathers (The Time Traveller’s Guide to Elizabethan England).

Women’s responsibilities were simple; to take care of the household and be there for their husband anytime he needed them. Wives of the lower and middle class men would go to the market, buy all the things necessary and be of assistance to their husband and his job. Actually, as Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford (in *Women in the Age of Shakespeare*, 2010) suggested, “*aristocratic and middling wives actually performed a significant proportion of the labour for which their husbands were paid.*” Women had very little to no free time for themselves. Wives of the upper class men had it a little bit easier since their servants could take on some of their responsibilities (The Status of Women in Shakespeare’s Time).

## 2.3 Marriage

Everyone was expected to get married in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, though only few people got married out of love; especially those belonging to the upper class had their marriage arranged for them for financial as well as social reasons. Divorce at that time was something unthinkable that only the richest were occasionally able to get (Daily Life in the Elizabethan Era).

Since women could not aspire to any kind of a professional career, the only amelioration available for them was marriage (The Status of Women in Shakespeare's Time). Even though women did not gain much from marriage in some cases they could still consider it an improvement. Since birth women were already a property of a man and that was of their father. The position of young girls in the household was fundamentally the same as the position of a servant. After marriage, however, as Ian Mortimer (2012) points out, *"[...] you [as a woman] may gain considerably, for you are able to take advantage of your husband's position in society, becoming his deputy. As a married woman you organise the household, govern the behaviour of the servants and children and place the orders for supplies."*

However, as Theresa D. Kemp (2010) adds, not always did marriage make life easier for women. As the 16<sup>th</sup> century laws allowed husbands to physically punish their wives and domestic violence was nothing out of the ordinary. In fact, it was not until twentieth century that this violence started to be acknowledged as an assault and against the law (Women in the Age of Shakespeare).

## 2.4 Education

Women in the age of Shakespeare received predominantly only basic education. In spite of the fact that under the renaissance learning new grammar schools were establish girls were not allowed into the majority of them. Young girls from the lower class were taught only a little bit of writing and reading skills; however some of them did not receive even this small amount of education. Subsequently these girls would begin training in knitting, spinning, housewifery etc (Women in the age of Shakespeare).

The situation was better for girls from the upper class since their families often hired professional tutors that would teach their daughters at home or alternatively these girls got sent into other wealthy household to be tutored there. These girls were taught languages and literature, as well as some social skills such as dancing and singing. Not even this type of education though, was meant to prepare young women for a higher education. Women were not permitted to attend university; in some of the prestigious ones such as Oxford or Cambridge they were not able to get the same degree as men up until the middle of the twentieth century (The Status of Women in Shakespeare's Time).

It is understandable then, why it was so important for a woman to get married since there was no chance she could manage to live on her own and earn enough money. Women were not expected to pursue a career anyway but rather to take care of their husband, children and the household.

## **2.5 Women as writers**

Literature was one of the few areas which women could make a living in. The most common genre women participated in was translation since young girls from the upper class received an education in languages. One of those female translators was for example Anne Locke who left her husband and with her two children moved to Geneva where she translated the sermons of the French protestant Jean Calvin. Afterwards Lock also published the first English collection of sonnets. She was also one of the first women to write her own religious texts, even though religion was a field in which men typically prevailed (Women in the Age of Shakespeare).

Another prominent writer was Isabella Whitney. Isabella was actually an ordinary girl working as a servant who taught herself how to write. As Theresa D. Kemp (2010) suggests, she is believed to be the first ever English woman to write secular poetry.

Then, there was Mary Sidney, the sister of her more famous brother Philip Sidney. Mary was a translator as well as a playwright. Her closet drama *The Tragedy of Antonie* was immensely popular at her time. She is also known for editing her brother's famous work *Arcadia*.

Other genres of literature in which women participated were mostly texts concerning household information such as recipes for medicine or food. Women also frequently wrote books for their children, offering life advice and guidance. They often did so out of fear of dying during childbirth, which happened quite often, and not being able to raise their children (Women in the Age of Shakespeare).

## 2.6 The Queen

The queen, Elizabeth I was without a doubt the most important woman of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The start of her reign was definitely not easy since the common belief in that era was that women should not dominate over men and moreover the reign of the first female sovereign Queen Mary was not particularly successful. In the end though, respect towards the royal family subdued those negative feelings towards Elizabeth I as a ruler. At the end of her rule she was definitely one of the best loved (though as Ian Mortimer adds also one of the most feared) monarchs and her subjects considered her to be a very successful ruler (The Life of Elizabeth I).

Although the country had no doubt that the queen would sooner or later get married, she never did. Elizabeth realized that marriage would ultimately mean that she would lose her power. Additionally, marriage would mean that she would become a subordinate to her husband and that was something that Elizabeth could not cope with, given her intellect and pride. Elizabeth I said herself, that rather than acquiring a husband, she considered England and its people her priority. 'I am already bound unto a husband, which is the kingdom of England.' [...] 'Every one of you, and as many as are Englishmen, are children and kinsmen to me' (The Life of Elizabeth I).

Even though Elizabeth herself defied any prejudices her subjects had about a female ruler, she did not actively do much for the rights of ordinary women living in England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. According to Alison Weir (1999) she accepted the universal thinking that there were serious limits to women's choices.

Elizabeth I was a well educated monarch (she studied Latin, Greek, French, philosophy and astronomy amongst other things), some say she was among the most educated people of the 16<sup>th</sup>

century (Women in the Age of Shakespeare). As Henry Brown (2009) points out she was also a great admirer of drama; Elizabeth remarkably influenced the development of the English drama in general. It is no wonder then that she chose to become a patron to William Shakespeare.

## **Summary**

As is apparent from Chapter 2, life in the early modern era was very difficult for women, their education was poor, they were a man's property their whole lives, their rights were essentially nonexistent and there was no visible hope of any improvement in the near future. The most powerful person of that era was a woman; nonetheless even she did not have enough power (or will) to make the lives of ordinary women better. However it is important to remember that improving the lives of women was not a priority at that time and the majority of people did not even think that the position of women could be any different.

### 3 Shakespeare's Approach to Writing Female Characters

This chapter deals with the different types of female characters William Shakespeare created and what their roles are in his plays. The author often created female characters that fall into certain categories that appear in several of his plays. At the end of this chapter the influence of the Queen is also discussed.

There is a visible pattern when it comes to female characters in Shakespeare's plays; plenty of them challenge the long established gender roles and possess some degree of influence and power. They are also not afraid to use that power, sometimes even in uncommon and subversive ways. The male characters are definitely influenced by the female characters and their actions although they for the most part refuse to acknowledge their power and authority. According to Nicole Smith (2012) nowadays it is almost impossible to read Shakespeare's plays and not consider the fact that some of the female characters are one of the most complex characters Shakespeare ever created and that very often they are the main motivators of action in his plays (An Analysis of Shakespeare's Women).

Many authors believe that Shakespeare created exceptional heroines for his time. As Pragati Das (2012) argues Shakespeare's female characters are intelligent and independent and that Shakespeare is "*a champion of womankind and an innovator who departed sharply from flat, stereotyped characterizations of women common to his contemporaries and earlier dramatists.*" On the other hand Pragati Das adds that other researches claim these women have several negative qualities and that Shakespeare himself was not untouched by the misogynistic views that prevailed in his era (Shakespeare's Representation of Women in His Tragedies).

For example Henry Norman Hudson claims that Shakespeare "*could not have made his women equal to his men without unsexing and unsphering them; which he was just as far from doing as Nature is. The alleged inferiority, then, of his women simply means, I suppose, that they are women, as they ought to be, and not men, as he meant they should not be, and as we have cause to rejoice that they are not. He knew very well that in this matter equality and diversity are nowise incompatible, and that the sexes might therefore stand or sit on the same level without standing in the same shoes or sitting in the same seats.*" However it is important to keep in mind

that Hudson's book was originally published in 1872 and the views on gender equality must have been immensely different at that time compared to those we have in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **3.1 Types of female characters in Shakespeare's Plays**

When it comes to female characters in Shakespeare's plays most of the time the author created characters that all fall into 3 categories, based on their marital status. There are the maids (young girls that are yet to be married), wives (women that are already married) and widows (those that were already married). It is very rarely that female characters do not follow this pattern.

As Theresa D. Kemp observes, "*nearly all the major female characters are presented in terms of their connections to men.*" Nevertheless, most of the female characters in the plays leave quite a significant impression on the readers, despite the fact that often they are not given many lines. Furthermore there are scarcely any children in Shakespeare's plays and none of them are ever girls. The only young women to be found in the plays are those that are to be married.

According to Theresa D. Kemp (2010), there are two main reasons for these types of female characters being written by Shakespeare and their roles in the plays being mostly to support the main male characters. Firstly it is the fact that in the Elizabethan era only male actors performed on the stage. As Stephen Orgel (1996) says in the Renaissance era the presence of women on the stage was forbidden because it was believed to compromise their modesty. Interestingly enough according to Phyllis Rackin (2005) men playing women's roles on the 16<sup>th</sup> century stage were taken absolutely seriously and the absence of women was not perceived as a deficiency. Therefore it is possible that with that thought in mind Shakespeare chose to write fewer female characters in his plays. The second reason was that the audiences mostly wanted a story about the human experience from the point of view of a man rather than a woman, even though people of both sexes attended the plays. The reason for that perhaps could be the fact that the society in Elizabethan era still considered the male sex to be the central one (Women in the Age of Shakespeare).

Lee Jamieson as well claims there are certain types of female characters that appear in several of Shakespeare's plays. Rather than on their marital status though, these types are based on the personality traits of the characters. There is for example the 'bawdy woman' who is defined by her sexuality. These women usually belong to the lower class and speak in prose. Then there is the 'tragic innocent woman'. A typical representative of this group would be Hamlet's Ophelia or Juliet of Romeo and Juliet. An unfortunate destiny awaits these characters as their loss of innocence is ultimately punished by death. Another type is the 'scheming femme fatale' whose main purpose is to manipulate the male characters and once again their wicked ways usually end in their death. A perfect representative of this category is Lady Macbeth whose manipulation caused both hers and her husband's death (Types of Female Characters in Shakespeare).

### **3.2 Relationships between Characters**

One of the common sources of tension in Shakespeare's plays is the tension between daughters and their fathers. The absence of their fathers plays an important role as well, since it gives the young heroines more freedom. That of course holds true only if the girls come from a wealthy family, otherwise the absence of a father creates more complications for young girls rather than advantages (Women in the Age of Shakespeare).

What is interesting to point out is the fact that the majority of Shakespeare's heroines are motherless. One of those characters without a mother is also Ophelia in Hamlet. Shakespeare perhaps did this to place his female characters at a disadvantage that would later on make us sympathize with these characters more (Shakespeare's Pathos), and as Phyllis Rackin (2005) adds when mothers do appear in Shakespeare's plays they are hardly ever satisfactory.

Additionally female characters in Shakespeare's plays are almost never siblings to other girls, with a few exceptions they are presented as sisters to their brothers, Ophelia being an example again (Women in the Age of Shakespeare).



### **3.3 Influence of Elizabeth I**

Since William Shakespeare lived at the same time as Elizabeth I and his company even performed for the Queen many historians believe that these two surely must have influenced each other. As Jane Dall (2000) says Shakespeare definitely created powerful female characters, however he never talked about women royalty in his plays. Many English people in the 16<sup>th</sup> century were afraid that a woman could not lead a country on her own and these concerns about the stability of the nation are reflected in the themes of some of Shakespeare's plays. Particularly in his plays Hamlet and Macbeth it is the actions and political involvement of female characters Gertrude and Lady Macbeth that ultimately lead to political instability and disruption. Although Jane Dall (2000) admits that "*neither play is a direct commentary on Elizabeth, each drama reflects social anxieties from decades of female monarchical rule.*"

#### **Summary**

William Shakespeare definitely created intriguing and exceptional female characters for his time nevertheless they were still heavily influenced by the patriarchal society of the early modern era since they were very often defined by their marital status or their husbands/fathers rather than by their own personalities or actions.

## 4 Portrayal of Women in Shakespeare's Hamlet

This chapter provides an analysis of the two female characters in William Shakespeare's Hamlet. The first part deals with the analysis of Gertrude, Hamlet's mother and the Queen of Denmark. The second part focuses on Ophelia, Hamlet's lover. The contrasting views concerning these two characters are presented and examined along with extracts from the play to support each view and opinion.

### 4.1 Gertrude

#### 4.1.1 Gertrude's portrayal

Even though Gertrude does not have many lines in the play, she is talked about quite often and is definitely one of the most important characters. Gertrude is one of the most privileged of Shakespeare's women given the fact that she comes from a royal family. She is often described as a shallow queen that cares only about her own pleasures, someone that needs to be constantly taken care of and cherished. On the other hand according to Richard Corum (1998) she is also the most unjustly treated character in Hamlet. She is falsely accused of many vices, the most serious of them being the accusation of adultery. King Hamlet's ghost says about Gertrude:

“Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,  
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts -  
O wicked wit and gifts that have the power  
So to seduce! - won to his shameful lust  
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.” (1.5.42-45)

However there is no evidence throughout the whole play that would prove this accusation, that Gertrude had a sexual relationship with Claudius even before the King Hamlet's death, to be true.

Later on in the play Hamlet also blames his mother for taking part in the murder of his father:

“A bloody deed – almost as bad good mother,  
As kill a king and marry his brother.” (3.4.28-29)

This comment by Hamlet can be easily dismissed again since there is no definite proof in the play that would confirm his alleged accusation, moreover neither Hamlet’s father when he was still alive nor his ghost had ever said anything that would support Hamlet’s doubts. Moreover if Gertrude truly was involved in the murder of King Hamlet, Claudius would surely confide in her which he does not throughout the whole play (Shakespeare’s Representation of Women in His Tragedies).

Another thing Gertrude is accused of is the fact that she is not mourning (which at that time included wearing only black clothes and keeping a modest behaviour) her husband’s death enough, at least not enough in Hamlet’s eyes:

“O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason  
Would have mourned longer – married with my uncle, “(1.2.150-151)

However, given the evidence in the text that Gertrude mourned the death of her husband for about a month, she behaved as any other woman in the Elizabethan era would have. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century it was completely normal for a woman to mourn only for this amount of time and no more mourning would have been expected from her (Understanding Hamlet).

One could wonder then, why it is that prince Hamlet found his mother’s mourning so terribly short-lived. Perhaps one of those reasons as Richard Corum (1998) claims could have been the fact that Hamlet himself was not mourning enough and reacting properly to his father’s death resulting in the fact that the prince decided to project his own guilt onto his mother to make himself feel better. Or, alternatively, prince Hamlet might be angry with his mother because she was able to move on with her life and have a happy relationship with someone else. Hamlet could be jealous of that since he cannot say that about himself (see also chapter 5.1.2.1).

After the consideration of all the accusations against Gertrude there is only one left that can actually be proven to be true and it is the very first one that Hamlet makes in the play. Hamlet accuses his mother of incest. However the first one to bring up the topic of incest was King Hamlet's ghost:

“Let not the royal bed of Denmark be  
A couch for luxury and damned incest.” (1.5.82-83)

Later in 1.2. Hamlet says about his mother:

“With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!” (1.2.157)

As Richard Corum (1998) explains, Gertrude broke the Tudor ecclesiastical law and she also violated the bible's prohibition. However it was very rarely in the early modern era that this type of incest was brought before the court and the majority of Elizabethan people would not consider a marriage between a brother and a sister-in-law a crime. F. G. Emmison (in *Understanding Hamlet*, 1998) actually says that *“incestuous marriages met with little disapproval”*. So it is very likely that the people watching the play in the theatre would not have shared the same disgust with Gertrude as Hamlet did but rather react to the situation as every other character in the play did; consider it only as an insignificant violation of an outdated law.

Even though Gertrude is frequently painted as quite a negative character, the reader never gets that impression from Gertrude's own words or actions. It is always the men around her, the ghost or prince Hamlet, that talk about her in negative terms and are accusing her of being guilty of all those evil acts. Richard Levin (in *Gertrude's Role in Hamlet*, 2013) adds that Hamlet's and the ghost's speeches should not be as easily believed by the readers since they are both considered to be unreliable characters. *“[Neither] of [the accounts of Hamlet and the Ghost] can be considered objective, since they come from her son and her late husband, both of whom believe that they have been wronged by her, and each account is generated by and serves a specific agenda that is directly related to that wrong”* Richard Levin (in *Gertrude's Role in Hamlet*, 2013) concludes.

Richard Corum (1998) also believes that even though Gertrude is not perfect she definitely is not the villain of the story and that she is sometimes perceived as such because it was always women

who were blamed for the patriarchy's own problems. Since the time of Eve, who was blamed for the man's first disobedience, the limitations of patriarchal culture were very frequently projected onto women.

#### **4.1.2 Gertrude's relationships with other characters**

##### **4.1.2.1 Gertrude and Hamlet**

Gertrude has undoubtedly the most complicated relationship in the play with her son Hamlet. Hamlet feels a lot of anger towards his mother which was manifested in all those accusations he made against her which were discussed above.

One of the main issues Hamlet has with his mother is his disgust regarding Gertrude sexuality. Just before Hamlet kills Polonius he says to his mother:

“Nay, but to live  
In the rank sweat of an enseamed<sup>1</sup> bed,  
Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love” (3.4.81-83)

Gertrude pleads him to stop saying:

“O, speak to me no more  
These words like daggers enter in my ears  
No more, sweet Hamlet.” (3.4.85-87)

But apart from that Gertrude does not try to defend herself against Hamlet's attacks. Although she does not admit that she would commit any crime either, Gwen Kelbly (2012) suggests that Gertrude does admit that her actions left a mark on her soul. Besides that it is up to the readers to decide how they feel about Gertrude's character. As Nicole Smith (2012) points out many of them share Hamlet's harsh condemnation of Gertrude's actions.

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<sup>1</sup> Soaked with grease (The Oxford Shakespeare)

Hamlet started to obsess over his mother's sexuality ever since his father's ghost told him about his mother's and Claudius's relationship and the alleged incestuous nature of it. The ghost's speech had a huge impact on prince Hamlet. As Gwen Kelbly (2012) points out, while the ghost is mostly just angry with his brother, claiming that Claudius seduced Gertrude, Hamlet seems to be much more fixated on blaming his mother and shaming her for her sexual life.

Hamlet seems to be so focused on his mother's actions that he actually forgets about his revenge on Claudius. As an example Emily Graf (2013) presents a scene in the third act when Claudius is praying and Hamlet has the perfect opportunity to kill him and revenge his father. However Hamlet decides to go visit his mother and criticise her for her behaviour instead. In the next scene Hamlet talks about another aspect of his mother's sexuality that he despises; the fact that he finds his mother to be too old to feel lust.

“If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,  
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax  
And melt in her own fire. Proclaim no shame  
When the compulsive ardour gives the charge,  
Since frost itself as actively doth burn,  
And reason panders will.” (3.4.74-79)

David Bevington (2009) argues that Hamlet considers his mother to be too old to feel such things and that by doing them she is actually shaming herself. In addition, it also seems that in that scene Hamlet starts to focus on Gertrude and her errors rather than on Claudius, the murderer of his father (Gertrude's Role in Hamlet).

Theresa D. Kemp (2010) concludes that it seems that Hamlet is generally incapable to comprehend female sexuality as he seems to be overwhelmed by Gertrude's as well as Ophelia's sexuality.

It is also important to mention that one of the reasons why Hamlet is so angry with his mother could be the fact that she ruined his chances of becoming the king of Denmark. Since Hamlet was waiting for over thirty years to become a king it is understandable that he would feel disappointed when his mother took that chance away from him by marrying Claudius

(Gertrude's Transformations: Against Patriarchal Authority). In addition, as Emily Graf (2013) points out, if Gertrude and Claudius were to have a child the inheritance of the throne would pass onto him or her. That leads us back to why Hamlet might be so obsessed with his mother's sexual life.

#### 4.1.2.2 Gertrude and Claudius

One of the most interesting questions about the play is why exactly did Gertrude marry Claudius. Theresa D. Kemp (2010) suggests that Gertrude remarried because she was seeking male protection, which at that time was essential for almost every woman. However, that is not something that prince Hamlet understands as he sees his mother's new marriage only as a means for her to satisfy her 'appetite', which is quite a misogynistic way of interpreting the situation. Although Hamlet is convinced that Claudius is lesser compared to his father, there is not a single evidence in the play that would support the notion that he treats Gertrude poorly (Plays of Shakespeare: A Thematic Guide).

On the other hand Richard Corum (1998) believes that Gertrude married Claudius because she desired a "*greater degree of power, equality, reciprocity, attention, intimacy, passion*". He also believes that Gertrude's relationship with the deceased King Hamlet could not have been as idyllic as prince Hamlet remembers it to be. Moreover according to Emily Graf (2013) the deceased king's ghost tried to make himself look as good as possible and Gertrude and Claudius as bad as possible to further help his agenda. Richard Corum (1998) on the other hand suggests that Gertrude only seemed to be ideal wife because she simply had no other way to behave in the patriarchal society of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, when her husband died she took her chance to get what she wanted, perhaps for the first time in her life, even if it meant disappointing her son. Nicole Smith (2012) actually argues that because Gertrude actively chose to marry Claudius made her a "*bold and brave woman who was strong enough to challenge social norms by rejecting them altogether.*"

Emily Graf (2013) presents one more reason why would Gertrude marry Claudius and that is because she wished to protect her son Hamlet from the murderer of his father. However that would mean that Gertrude knew all along that King Hamlet was murdered by his own brother,

for which though there is no clear evidence in the play. The ghost only accuses Gertrude of adultery but never makes any comments about Gertrude being involved in the murder or knowing who committed it.

Despite all the negative feelings Hamlet feels towards his mother, Gertrude still cares deeply about him. She worries about him and is concerned about his (in her eyes) excessive grief over his father's death (Women in the Age of Shakespeare). Gertrude tells Hamlet in 1.2:

“Good Hamlet, cast thy nightly colour<sup>2</sup> off,  
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.” (1.2.68-69)

#### **4.1.2.3 Gertrude and Ophelia**

Gertrude does not share many scenes with the only other female character of the play. The only genuine conversation between them can be found in 3.1 when Gertrude tells Ophelia:

“And for your part Ophelia, I do wish  
That your good beauties be the happy cause  
Of Hamlet's wildness; so shall I hope your virtues  
Will bring him to his wonted way again,  
To both your honours.” (3.1.39-43)

As G.R. Hibbard (1987) explains, in this scene Gertrude tells Ophelia that she is not against her relationship with Hamlet and simultaneously offers her a reason to participate in the scheme of finding out whether Hamlet's love for her is the reason of his madness.

However one of the most important of Gertrude's scenes is the one in which she announces Ophelia's death to her brother Laertes. Even though the common belief is that Ophelia

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<sup>2</sup> Night-like mourning garments and gloomy behaviour, the Queen combines two meanings in one (The Oxford Shakespeare)



committed suicide by drowning, Gertrude describes it only as an accident, perhaps to calm Laertes so he would not feel any more anger (Gertrude's Role in Hamlet).

“There is a willow grows aslant a brook,  
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;  
There with fantastic garlands did she come  
Of crow-flowers, 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 coronet weeds  
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke;  
When down her weedy trophies and herself  
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide;  
And, mermaid-like, awhile 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 endued  
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.” (4.7.141-158)

Gertrude's description of Ophelia's death is very poetic and moving. However many critics are concerned with the fact that the Queen knows what happened in such detail and suggest that she might have been involved in Ophelia's decease. The matter of Ophelia's death is in more detail dealt with in Subchapter 4.2.4.

### **4.1.3 Gertrude's death**

In the final scene Gertrude dies along with her son Hamlet, Claudius and Laertes. Gertrude drinks from a poisoned cup that Claudius intended Hamlet to drink. Emily Graf (2013) considers

this scene to be the last act of Gertrude's independence since she drinks from the cup even though Claudius told her not to. Gertrude replies to him saying:

“I will, my lord, I pray you pardon me.” (5.2.44)

It is not clear whether or not Gertrude knew that the cup was poisoned. Perhaps it was her way of keeping her son safe for the last time; since it seems that in this scene she is on Hamlet's side rather than Claudius's.

Some critics (such as David Laverenz, author of *The Women in Hamlet*) believe that patriarchy is the reason for the disastrous endings and consequently the deaths of the main characters of Shakespeare's tragedies. Moreover David Laverenz and other critics believe that the tragedy occurs as a consequence of the male characters not listening to their female counterparts. However Richard Levin (1988) argues that the catastrophic endings of Shakespeare's tragedies cannot be blamed on the patriarchy because if it truly were its fault, then the patriarchy must have been responsible for the happy endings in the romances and comedies as well.

### **Summary on Gertrude**

It seems that in the past Gertrude's character has been analysed only through her relationship with the biased male characters of Hamlet and her perception created solely from what prince Hamlet and King Hamlet's ghost had to say about her. However, if we judge Gertrude based on her own words and actions we come to the conclusion that she is rather an independent, strong, intelligent and well developed character.

## **4.2 Ophelia**

### **4.2.1 Ophelia's portrayal**

According to Martha C. Ronk (1994) Ophelia is often portrayed as a “*dutiful daughter, beloved beauty, mad woman, drowned innocent.*” In the beginning of the play she is a lively and happy girl however as the play progresses she becomes more and more melancholic and mad until she most likely kills herself (Understanding Hamlet). While for centuries Ophelia has been mainly perceived only as Hamlet's love interest with the development of feminist studies her character has been given a lot more importance.

As R. S. White (2000) suggests there are a few characters in Hamlet who did not cause their own death but Ophelia is the only true victim of the play since she, unlike the others, did not take part in the machinery of the rotten state of Denmark. Liz Lewis (2001) agrees with this statement adding that Ophelia is her whole life at mercy of the male characters of the play.

### **4.2.2 Ophelia's relationships with other characters**

#### **4.2.2.1 Ophelia and Hamlet**

Ophelia is a young and immature girl, being presumably only fourteen or fifteen years old which makes Hamlet (who is around thirty years old) twice her age. As Pragati Das (2012) observes Hamlet's feelings toward Ophelia vary throughout the play; from an undying love to needless cruelty.

Without a doubt, Hamlet once definitely loved Ophelia. At her funeral he says:

“I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers  
Could not, with all their quantity of love,  
Make up my sum-” (5.1.259-261)

At that time Hamlet had no reason to lie, since Ophelia was already dead.

However, after Ophelia rejects Hamlet he becomes rather cruel towards her and later in the nunnery scene made Ophelia believe that he does not love her anymore:

“I did love you once.” (3.1.115)

As many critics (e.g. Gabrielle Dane) have suggested, Hamlet’s later cruel treatment of Ophelia most probably comes from his unresolved issues with his mother, Gertrude. Lisa Corbett (2009) explains that Hamlet considers all women to be untrustworthy based on his mother’s premature remarriage and lack of mourning. He believes his mother’s behaviour to be an example of all women (Innocent Victims: Poetic Injustice in Shakespearean Tragedy). As he says in 1.2.:

“Frailty, thy name is woman-” (1.2.146)

*“Hamlet’s generalization about the frailty of women is more likely to be regarded as ‘mad’ as he takes out his revenge against the gender upon the innocent Ophelia”* says Alan Urquhart (1996).

In the famous nunnery scene Hamlet treats Ophelia with stupendous heartlessness when he tells her:

“Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a  
breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest, but yet  
I could accuse me of such things that it were better my  
mother had not borne me.” (3.1.122-125)

There are several different analyses of the nunnery scene. Perhaps Hamlet actually tried to save Ophelia; his cruel treatment was meant to force Ophelia to leave Elsinore and free herself from the influence of Hamlet and men in general. Hamlet warns Ophelia of men in 3.1. saying:

“We are arrant knaves,  
all; believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery.” (3.1.128-129)

Hamlet is completely unaware of the pain he causes Ophelia in this scene and does not acknowledge the suffering she is going through caused by the death of her father which is

especially astounding since he is so engrossed in his own father's death (Hamlet and Revenge Tragedy: A Reappraisal).

However, as J. Dover Wilson (1960) claims, Hamlet knew that he was being listened to by Claudius and Polonius and everything he says at this point is intended for their ears since he knows they are behind the curtains. When Ophelia agreed to take part in Polonius's plan she condemned herself in Hamlet's eyes thus the cruel treatment of her. Lisa Corbett (2009) presents a slightly different reading of the nunnery scene, claiming that Hamlet deliberately chose to drive Ophelia mad because she participated in the scheme against him.

Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia remains quite the same in the next scene they share together. Hamlet makes lewd propositions which Ophelia promptly declines.

HAMLET "Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

OPHELIA No, my lord.

HAMLET I mean, my head upon your lap.

OPHELIA Ay, my lord.

HAMLET Do you think I meant country matters<sup>3</sup>?

OPHELIA I think nothing my lord." (3.2.104-109)

Their conversation leaves Ophelia disturbed and the next time she appears in the play we learn about her madness (On Ophelia's Madness).

A. C. Bradley (1905) presents another plausible explanation for Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia saying that Hamlet never stopped loving Ophelia and everything he did and said was only to make Claudius believe that he truly was mad.

#### **4.2.2.2 Ophelia and Polonius**

Since Ophelia is a motherless character the most influence on her has her father, Polonius. According to Heather Brown (2004) Ophelia suffers from the lack of a reliable female figure that her mother would traditionally represent.

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<sup>3</sup> Sexual intercourse (The Oxford Shakespeare)

In the beginning of the play Polonius tries to warn Ophelia about Hamlet and his intentions. As Victor L. Cahn (2000) explains “*Polonius tries to exert paternal authority over Ophelia, stifling her sexual desires and warning her, with characteristic circumlocution, of the danger the Prince poses.*”

“Do not believe his vows, for they are brokers<sup>4</sup>,  
Not of the dye which their investments show,  
But mere implorators of unholy suits,  
Breathing like sanctified and pious bawds  
The better to beguile. This is for all-  
I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth,  
Have you so slander any moment leisure  
As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.” (1.3.126-134)

Ophelia obeys his requests and rejects Hamlet. Later on when Ophelia tells Polonius about Hamlet’s odd behaviour he asks her if she had said something hurtful to Hamlet lately to which she replies:

“No, my good lord, but as you did command  
I did repel his letters, and denied  
His access to me.” (2.1.109-111)

Polonius, who originally thought that Hamlet was acting strange because of something Ophelia said, suddenly starts to blame Hamlet’s behaviour on Ophelia’s neglect of him. Ophelia finds herself trapped between the man she loves and her father who does not allow her to repair her relationship with Hamlet (Plays of Shakespeare: A Thematic Guide). When Polonius is killed by Hamlet Ophelia’s guilt intensifies since now she believes herself to be the cause of Hamlet’s madness as well as her father’s death.

Ophelia is deeply saddened by the thought that her rejection is the cause of Hamlet’s madness since she believed Hamlet’s feelings towards her to be genuine (Shakespeare’s Women). As Liz

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<sup>4</sup> Originally a middleman, a broker soon became synonymous, in some contexts, with a go-between, and thus a bawd or pander (The Oxford Shakespeare)

Lewis (2001) suggests, when Polonius insists on his belief that Hamlet madness comes from neglected love, it is rather because of the fact that he wishes to marry his daughter to the prince of Denmark than that he truly believes that Ophelia is the cause of Hamlet's madness.

After all, throughout the whole play Polonius's main interest was always to make himself look good, especially in the eyes of the royals. As Harold C. Goddard (1955) points out "*Polonius is above nothing indirect, sly, or crafty; he is above nothing that will flatter his own ego by proving his own wisdom.*" In it no surprise then, that he would use his own daughter to please the King and Queen.

As Lois Potter (2012) notes Shakespeare's previous heroines were quite disobedient to their fathers. As a response to the objections that his heroines are far too disobedient he might have created Ophelia, who is the exact opposite. She is too obedient and her submissiveness is in the end the cause of her demise.

#### 4.2.2.3 Ophelia and Laertes

Laertes reacts to Ophelia's relationship similarly as their father did; he warns her that Hamlet can never give her what she wants and marry her since he must marry someone who will benefit the state of Denmark.

"He may not, as valued persons do,  
Carve for himself, for on his choice depends  
The sanity and health of the whole state;" (1.3.19-21)

As Theresa D. Kemp (2010) says Ophelia would not "*provide Denmark with potentially necessary political alliances with other nations.*"

While to Polonius Ophelia is mostly a property from which he can profit, as Gabrielle Dane (1998) suggests, to Laertes she is an angel who he must protect from other men. However despite Laertes's lectures to Ophelia, in the end he (as well as Hamlet and Polonius) only slows down her mental growth to satisfy his own needs (Reading Ophelia's Madness). Heather Brown

(2004) actually claims that Ophelia is so dependent on the male characters of the play that she does not in fact have her own identity; she cannot act or think for herself.

### 4.2.3 Ophelia's madness

As Lois Potter (2012) says, while Hamlet's madness is "*witty, outrageous, and mostly feigned*" Ophelia's madness can be described as more lyrical. As Martin Hilský (2010) suggests, Ophelia's madness has distinctive female attributes. Her madness is physical and stems from her emotionality and sexuality. Ophelia's madness is definitely more intense than Hamlet's and there is no doubt that it is real (Shakespeare a jeviště svět).

Ophelia becomes mad as she cannot decide whether she should be loyal to her father or to Hamlet. Hamlet is incapable of acknowledging the suffering Ophelia goes through when she tries to please both of them (Male Dominance and Female Exploitation). Moreover, she was never allowed to properly express herself and act on her feelings. She became mad because no one ever listened to her or cared about her feelings (Pregnant with Madness - Ophelia's Struggle and Madness in Hamlet).

However, many critics (e.g. Richard Corum) believe that Ophelia became mad because it was the only way in which she could properly express herself and distance herself from the rigid patriarchal society of the early modern era. "*Being oppressed and rejected by the patriarchal authority, Ophelia's sanity finally collapses and she steps into the realm of madness,*" comments Y. C. Chen.

Ophelia's madness manifests itself in her songs and ballads in which she sings about her sorrows and unexpressed emotions. Prominent theme in her songs is the death and burial of her father.

“And will he not come again?

And will he not come again?

No, no, he is dead,

Go to thy death-bed.

He never will come again.



His beard as white as snow,  
All flaxen was his poll.  
He is gone, he is gone,  
And we cast away moan,  
God ha' mercy on his soul.” (4.5.190-199)

It seems that Ophelia might be re-enacting a funeral (since Polonius did not receive a proper one) given also the fact that she is giving the onlookers flowers as well. The flowers have a significant symbolic value as Gabrielle Dane (1998) explains “... *for Laertes, rosemary and pansies signifying remembrance and thoughts; for Gertrude, fennel and columbines representing marital infidelity; for Claudius, rue and a daisy denoting repentance and love doomed to be unhappy.*”

Ophelia also sings about her disappointment with love and Hamlet’s unfair treatment of her.

“Young men will do’t<sup>5</sup> if they come to’t,  
By Cock, they are to blame.” (4.5.59-60)

Ophelia accuses men of sexually abusing women; she is no longer the young naive girl that believed in true love. According to Amanda Mabillard (2000) Ophelia starts to sing these unchaste songs because she finally succumbs to the corrupt world.

Interestingly enough Ophelia’s real madness is only a very minor part of the play whereas Hamlet’s insanity is the main issue even though it is not at all authentic. That is of course because of their gender differences and the male experience always being dominant in the patriarchal society (Pregnant with Madness).

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<sup>5</sup> Engage in sexual intercourse (The Oxford Shakespeare)

#### 4.2.4 Ophelia's death

One of the most intriguing aspects of Ophelia's character that critics have been analyzing is definitely the matter of her death. Was it an accidental death or a suicide? If it was the latter what prompted Ophelia to kill herself?

Harmonie Loberg (2004) provides one of the most noteworthy explanations for Ophelia's death. The author suggests that Ophelia's death was neither an accident nor a suicide but that it was actually caused by the other female character of the play, Gertrude. As evidence Loberg presents the fact that the Queen knows what happened to Ophelia in such detail (when she informs Laertes that Ophelia drowned in 4.7.) and the way in which Gertrude herself died; killed by poison as all the other male murderers around her did, could suggest that she received the same punishment as them since she was a murderer as well. Harmonie Loberg (2004) argues that readers as well as critics do not acknowledge Gertrude's involvement in Ophelia's death because violence and aggression are and always have been connected to the male gender and that gender stereotypes generally did not allow critics to accurately analyse Gertrude's character.

The majority of critics believe that Ophelia committed suicide. As Lisa Corbett (2009) states, Ophelia could not stand Hamlet's terrible treatment as well as his madness and suffered because of the death of her father. The thought that she lost Hamlet's love because she was obedient to her father caused her to commit suicide.

Gabrielle Dane (1998) suggests that suicide was Ophelia's first autonomous choice and that "*Ophelia decides that in order authentically 'to be' she must choose 'not to be'.*" Dane concludes that Ophelia's death can be seen as the only rational one in Shakespeare's Hamlet.

As Harmonie Loberg (2004) suggests, the assumption that Ophelia committed suicide rather than that somebody else caused her death is far more popular because it is more comfortable for people to accept self-destructive tendencies in women as opposite to aggressive ones. Patricia Pearson (in *Queen Gertrude: Monarch, Mother, Murderer*; 2004) adds that it is also very common to believe that when a heroine turns against herself it is an honourable and admirable last act of defiance. In conclusion Patricia Pearson warns that "*in romanticizing Ophelia and her*

*death apart from all of Hamlet's murdered victims, we segregate her—we maintain her inequality.”*

Both of the female characters of Hamlet actually died of the same cause; torn between the men in their lives. Gertrude could not choose a side between her husband and her son and Ophelia could not be loyal to her father, brother and Hamlet at the same time.

### **Summary on Ophelia**

Ophelia can be easily regarded as the most likeable (and tragic) character of the play. She essentially represents the only goodness in the rotten state of Denmark. She's young and naive and unfortunately too loyal and obedient which eventually destroys her. Ophelia can no longer be read only as Hamlet's lover since her role in the play is far more significant.

## **5 Portrayal of Female Characters in Film Adaptations of Hamlet**

In the last part of the thesis the main focus is on Ophelia's and Gertrude's representation in film adaptations of William Shakespeare's Hamlet. There have been many adaptations in the last hundred years, in this thesis four of them are discussed; 1948 adaptation directed by Laurence Olivier, Franco Zeffirelli's adaptation from 1990, Branagh's version from 1996 and Almereyda's modern take on Hamlet from 2000.

### **5.1 Olivier's adaptation of Hamlet**

The black and white adaptation of Hamlet from 1948 directed by Laurence Olivier who simultaneously plays the main protagonist is now of course quite dated but it is still one of the most known and important film adaptations of Hamlet. The film won an Academy Award for Best Picture and Jean Simmons for Best Actress in a Supporting Role (Humanities Insights).

#### **5.1.1 Olivier's Gertrude**

In the 1948 film Gertrude's character (portrayed by Eileen Herlie) is heavily influenced by Olivier's oedipal reading of the play. The scenes between Hamlet and Gertrude can be often perceived as erotic since Gertrude touches Hamlet frequently and even kisses him on the mouth (Olivier, Hamlet, and Freud). According to Phillip Weller (1997) during the closet scene Olivier abandons Shakespeare's text altogether when Gertrude and Hamlet stare into each other's eyes and subsequently embrace and share a passionate kiss. Interestingly enough Herlie is thirteen years younger than Olivier, which makes their mother-son relationship even stranger.

### **5.1.2 Olivier's Ophelia**

Olivier's film presents perhaps the most traditional depiction of Ophelia (in this film portrayed by Jean Simmons). Olivier's portrayal of Ophelia oscillates from young sweet girl to an almost lascivious woman. Ophelia is a blonde in this film (whereas Gertrude's hair is dark) since she is supposed to represent the 'good girl' and perhaps even a not very bright one (Enter the Body). As H. R. Coursen (2010) points out Ophelia is in this film strongly connected with nature; she lives in a bright chamber filled with flowers whereas everyone else lives in the cold and dark castle. Olivier adds two scenes with Ophelia into the film; the first one being a flashback of Hamlet visiting Ophelia in the closet scene and then Ophelia's actual death. Ophelia's drowning resembles the famous painting by Millais in which Ophelia is peacefully floating in a river surrounded by nature (Studies in Shakespeare, Volume 20).

## **5.2 Zeffirelli's adaptation of Hamlet**

Franco Zeffirelli's Hamlet, released in 1990, is one of the shortest adaptations lasting only few minutes over two hours. The main protagonist is portrayed by American actor Mel Gibson. This time the story is set in the middle ages and is fairly dark and brutal (From Ethereal Confrontation to Child Abuse to Womanly Conflict).

### **5.2.1 Zeffirelli's Gertrude**

According to Samuel Cowl (in Hamlet and Hollywood, 2002), the opening scene "*establishes Zeffirelli's decision to focus on Hamlet as a family romance, to place Gertrude firmly at its center, to compete extravagantly with Olivier's oedipal version of the play*". Sarah Hatchuel (2004) agrees that the initial funeral scene in the film introduces the oedipal interpretation, positioning Gertrude as a prize between Hamlet and Claudius. For example in the closet scene Gertrude tries to calm the violent Hamlet down by kissing him passionately on the mouth. Kristen S. Kurzawski (2002) suggests that Gertrude is the main female protagonist in the film. The cliché concerning the hair of the female characters that Olivier introduced in his film is reversed here; Gertrude (played by Glenn Close) is portrayed as the one with fair hair and

Ophelia is dark haired (Enter the Body). Glenn Close portrays Gertrude as quite sexual and passionate.

### **5.2.2 Zeffirelli's Ophelia**

H. R. Coursen (2010) considers Helena Bonham Carter's Ophelia to be very intelligent; someone who is intellectually able to keep up with Hamlet. However Zeffirelli's Ophelia is also very child-like and innocent. Zeffirelli portrays Ophelia as a contrast to Gertrude; while Gertrude is much more affectionate towards Hamlet than Ophelia who mostly just looks at the ground. Gertrude is also wearing decorated gowns while Ophelia is only seen in simple white or brown dresses; Ophelia is generally overshadowed by Gertrude in scenes they share together (Hamlet and Hollywood). However Helena Bonham Carter gives a really powerful performance despite Zeffirelli's intentions to make her only a distraction for Hamlet. Carter herself said in an interview that she was afraid that Zeffirelli intended to make Ophelia only an accessory to Hamlet, *"but, in fact, he sort of allowed me to make her a strong character. She can be quite wimpy and passive. There is no space these days to play Ophelia too passive or too obedient or too vapid. She has to have spirit and character,"* Carter says. Zeffirelli chose to add the scene where Hamlet visits Ophelia in her chamber (instead of Ophelia just announcing what happened to Polonius) and her drowning, just like Olivier did (Empowered by Madness).

### **5.3 Branagh's adaptation of Hamlet**

Kenneth Branagh's four hour long Hamlet is a bold attempt at a full text film adaptation of Shakespeare's play. While the film has been praised by the critics for its beautiful costumes, architecture and generally its visual aspects; it was a box-office failure. Branagh also seems unsure whether he wants to make a film or an investigation of the play (Humanities Insights).

### 5.3.1 Branagh's Gertrude

Unlike the two films previously discussed, Branagh steers clear from the oedipal version of the play and there are no hints in the film suggesting an incestuous relationship between Gertrude and her son. That is especially prominent in the closet scene, which in other films sometimes resembles a sexual intercourse, but in Branagh's film Hamlet and Gertrude are more business-like towards each other (Making Mother Matter). According to Dianne M. Hunter (2008) Julie Christie's Gertrude is stern and solemn. Branagh chose to add a flashback scene in which the viewers can see Gertrude's adultery when King Hamlet was still alive; something that is not ever explicitly stated in the play (From Ethereal Confrontation to Child Abuse to Womanly Conflict).

### 5.3.2 Branagh's Ophelia

Ophelia's character was given several new scenes in Branagh's adaptation. The boldest additions were flashbacks to a lovemaking scene between her and Hamlet; again something that is not in the original play. In Branagh's adaptation it is the failure of Hamlet and Ophelia's relationship (as well as the fact that her former lover kills her father) that causes Ophelia's madness (Making Mother Matter). In the film Ophelia also reads the love letter that Hamlet sent to her herself rather than Polonius reading it. Ophelia's mad scenes were also extended. Kate Winslet's Ophelia is much more mature and strong (than e.g. Carter's Ophelia). As G. S. Teker (2006) suggests "... *Branagh's mad Ophelia, in Kate Winslet's performance, takes on a feminist slant; her acting style is divorced from lyricism and to-be-lookedatness*". Branagh, unlike Olivier or Zeffirelli, does not include the drowning of Ophelia in his film but only has Gertrude report it. In this way he tries to distance himself from reading Ophelia's death as her giving in to the patriarchal society and her ultimate defeat (Empowered by Madness). H. R. Coursen (2010) also adds that Branagh suggests that Ophelia poses a threat to the state, and that is why she receives those cold water treatments in this adaptation.

## **5.4 Almereyda's adaptation of Hamlet**

Michael Almereyda's modern adaptation takes place in contemporary New York with all its technology and media. Hamlet is a film student and Claudius is the head of Denmark Corporation. Although the film received mostly positive reviews many argue that the story just does not work in a modern setting when the language from Elizabethan era remains (Shakespeare in the Media).

### **5.4.1 Almereyda's Gertrude**

The adaptation from 2000 contains many changes to the original play but perhaps the most significant change that Almereyda made to Gertrude's character (portrayed by Diane Venora, who also played Ophelia in an earlier adaptation as well as Hamlet on stage) was the fact that she committed suicide. In Shakespeare's play it is never explicitly said that Gertrude knew that the cup was poisoned. Almereyda's Gertrude is a professional and modern woman that, as Samuel Crowl (in *Hamlet and Hollywood* 2002) says "*positively glows in Claudius's company*". In Almereyda's film Gertrude desperately tries to keep her image of a perfect woman however that image starts to slowly fall apart (*Hamlet and Hollywood*).

### **5.4.2 Almereyda's Ophelia**

According to H.R. Coursen (2010) Julia Stiles' Ophelia is rebellious and assertive and the actress portrays her madness powerfully. In this adaptation Ophelia's mad scenes take place in the Guggenheim museum and Ophelia drowns in a fountain. As Amanda Kane Rooks (2014) suggests Almereyda's Ophelia differs significantly from the romantic Ophelias in previous adaptations. In this film the focus is not on Ophelia's beauty or her madness as it often is in other film adaptations of Hamlet but rather on her defiance against alienation and hypocrisy of society. In Almereyda's film Ophelia's madness is not portrayed as sexual or as Ophelia exposing her weaknesses but rather her fighting back; Ophelia demands attention (The 'New' Ophelia in Michael Almereyda's Hamlet). On the other hand while Theresa D. Kemp (2010) agrees that Julia Stiles gives a decent performance she also points out that her Ophelia is a weak and childlike character.



## **Summary**

Each director of each film adaptation of Hamlet portrayed the female characters of the play differently. In the films discussed there are the typical romantic Ophelias as well as more feminist and strong ones; there are very sexual Gertrudes as well as intelligent and independent ones. In the film adaptations the roles of Gertrude and Ophelia are definitely given more importance since they are frequently given additional scenes. However they still cannot break free and in the end succumb to the patriarchal society.

## 6 Conclusion

The first part of this bachelor thesis dealt with the overall position of ordinary women in the early modern era. The life of ordinary women was not an easy one; women did not have basically any rights and their whole lives were the property of the men in their lives. It was extremely difficult for women to get a decent education or have any kind of career.

The second chapter covered the female characters created by William Shakespeare in his plays. Shakespeare created some very independent and strong women in his works however not even the great playwright could escape the patriarchal society of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The majority of the women in his play fall into stereotypical categories and are defined by their sexuality or marital status.

The next part provided an analysis of the two female characters in William Shakespeare's most famous play Hamlet. Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, is usually perceived as an adulteress and a woman that is strongly defined by her sexuality. She does not have many lines in the play therefore readers often base their feelings towards her only on what is said about her by Hamlet and the ghost, both of whom are greatly biased. Gertrude is actually one of those independent female characters that Shakespeare created and should be treated as an intelligent individual rather than just a sinner or a whore, which is very common.

Ophelia is also mostly treated as Hamlet's accessory or a distraction. However her role in Hamlet is more significant than that. Her madness is undoubtedly authentic and shows that sometimes becoming mad was the only way a women could express what she really feels in a strongly patriarchal society that did not care or listen. Ophelia's suicide was her last stand against oppression.

In the last part the portrayal of Ophelia and Gertrude in four film adaptations was discussed. Each director changed the story of these characters slightly, sometimes for the worse; nevertheless in all of these adaptations the female character gained more importance. Even though the directors were influenced by the feminist criticism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their female characters are still very much under the control of the patriarchal society.

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## **Résumé**

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá zobrazením ženských postav v Shakespearově hře Hamlet. V první části je shrnuto celkové postavení žen v alžbětinské době; jaké bylo jejich vzdělání, práce, co pro ženu znamenalo manželství a v krátkosti jsou zmíněny spisovatelky 16. století. Dále jsou rozebrány různé typy ženských postav, které se objevují v hrách Williama Shakespeara a zda měla na spisovatele vliv Alžběta I. Dále se tato práce zabývá zobrazením dvou postav ze Shakespearovy hry Hamlet, Gertrudou a Ofélií. Obě tyto postavy jsou často vnímány jako nepodstatné i když ve hře hrají důležitou roli. Nakonec jsou rozebrány postavy Gertrudy a Ofélie ve čtyřech filmových zpracováních Hamleta.



## Anotace

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<b>Název práce</b>	Zobrazení ženských postav v Shakespearově Hamletovi a jeho filmových zpracováních
<b>Název v angličtině</b>	Portrayal of Female Characters in Shakespeare's Hamlet and Its Film Adaptations
<b>Anotace práce</b>	První část této bakalářské práce se zabývá pozicí žen v alžbětinské době; jejich postavením ve společnosti a jejich právy. Další část se zaměřuje na ženské postavy v Shakespearových hrách. Hlavní částí této práce je analýza Gertrudy a Ofélie ze Shakespearovy hry Hamlet. Rozebráno je i zobrazení těchto postav ve čtyřech filmových adaptacích.
<b>Klíčová slova</b>	Ženské postavy, alžbětinská doba, William Shakespeare, Ofélie, Gertruda, literatura, film
<b>Anotace v angličtině</b>	The first part of this bachelor thesis deals with the position of women in the Elizabethan Era; their social status and their rights. The next part focuses on the female characters in the plays created by William Shakespeare. The main focus of this thesis is on the analysis of Gertrude and Ophelia in Shakespeare's play Hamlet. Portrayal of these two characters in four film adaptations is also discussed.
<b>Klíčová slova v angličtině</b>	Female characters, Elizabethan Era, William Shakespeare, Gertrude, Ophelia, literature, film
<b>Rozsah práce</b>	37
<b>Jazyk</b>	Angličtina