

University of Iceland
School of Humanities
Department of English

Shakespeare's women as catalysts of action

An examination of six female characters who instigate action in
Shakespeare's plays

M.A. Essay

Mina Ribic

Kt. 230283 – 2659

Supervisor: Giti Chandra

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Abstract

William Shakespeare's plays are notoriously multi-dimensional, as are his characters. In this paper I argue one of the crucial topics related to his work that becomes more integral with the rise of each feminist wave: the role his female characters as catalysts. In comedies, the female heroines and their intentions tend to be straightforward, but in tragedies their influence is a delicate and subtle art form. To exemplify their roles as catalysts I turn to three pairs of characters from six different plays, analysing them through three separate lenses. Since there were not many options for women in the Elizabethan era, I chose the three primary archetypes: wife, mother, and villain. To analyse the role of wives, I look to Juliet from *Romeo and Juliet* and Katherina from *The Taming of the Shrew* and explore the way they subtly move the play along as catalysts. Meanwhile, to analyse the role of mothers I turn to Gertrude from *Hamlet* and Tamora from *Titus Andronicus*—two very different characters yet alike in that they catalyse action, spurring the characters around them into violent act. Finally, to analyse the role of villains, I examine the ways in which Lady Macbeth from *Macbeth* and Goneril from *King Lear* both incite the main male characters into action and stimulate their own masculine traits.

This thesis will seek to demonstrate through close reading of the text, and the examination of key scenes, to point out the exact moments when these women step into the role of a catalyst. Adaptations are particularly useful, as they amplify the catalytic effect. The central argument of this paper is that Shakespeare's female characters do not always have to be the protagonist to be essential to a play – they can be just as powerful as catalysts.

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Introduction

In this paper I explore the triggering power of Shakespeare's female characters and how they set the plays' plots into motion. Feminist readings of Shakespeare's plays abound, but here I focus exclusively on the role of female characters as catalysts and their absolute necessity for the plays' existence. At first glance, these female catalysts may appear to occupy relatively minor roles that do not have a significant impact on the course of the play. Only through in-depth analysis can these roles become plainly evident and rightly appreciated. Through six examples of such women, I build an argument of how Shakespeare has given these female catalysts the power not only to set the stage for the unravelling of the storyline, but also to initiate the action of the other characters (typically males) around them. These women's roles will be dissected and analysed in a demonstrative way, depicting evidence of how they came to acquire such power and their overall importance in the plays. An essential part of my argument is exemplified through various adaptations, considering that the visions of talented artists are also essential for the better comprehension of the role of a catalyst. The adaptations provide additional insight into how these characters can be interpreted differently from one generation to another, while making the role of the initiator clearer for the purpose of this thesis, either by downplaying or intensifying their actions. Shakespeare gave his fictional women power through different positions; this becomes particularly clear when two contrasting characters are compared. Thus, my analysis compares two contrasting characters in each of three different domains: catalysts through marriage, catalysts through motherhood and catalysts through villainy.

These three statuses were pretty much the only choices women had at the time, for if they were not wives or mothers, then they were considered villains. The first set of catalysts I will analyse are the two unlikely brides - Katherina from *The Taming of the Shrew* and Juliet from *Romeo and Juliet*, who exemplify what it means to catalyse the whole plot through their marriages. The second set will be the two queens - Gertrude from *Hamlet* and Tamora from *Titus Andronicus*. They are truly queens in their plays, not only by title but due to the agency Shakespeare gives them to set bloody events into motion –

which they undoubtedly do, through their sons. In their roles as mothers, though very different ones, they wield their power as catalysts and set into motion all the necessary components of a tragedy. The third set will explore the link between masculinity and villainy in the form of a woman, as demonstrated through two famous antagonists - Lady Macbeth from *Macbeth* and Goneril from *King Lear*. Lady Macbeth is usually considered the ultimate Shakespearian villain, but Lear's eldest daughter is not that far behind. By analysing these two I will demonstrate how they as villains manage to set the stage for future events leading to the well-known tragic endings. In all, this paper intends to prove that whether as wives, mothers or villains Shakespeare's female characters play what is arguably the most important role in the whole play – the role of the catalyst.

Genres and Themes

Before diving into in-depth analysis of the six characters and a close reading of each play, it is important to establish the foundation these characters were built on, i.e., the genre they belong to and the theme they encapsulate. Genre is a crucial issue when it comes to Shakespeare's heroines because usually through genre their fate is predetermined. Women in comedies tend to have a happily-ever-after ending with the man they love, while in tragedies they end up dead with the man they love. Equally so, themes are critically important because they depict the underlying meaning of each set of characters through marriage, motherhood, and villainy.

It should be noted that five of the six women analysed here are characters from tragedies, while only Katherina is found in a comedy and therefore stands out as a bridge between comedy and tragedy. Genre greatly affects the women's roles as catalysts. No matter how much they trigger other characters, even inconspicuously guide them in a certain direction, they all inevitably remain prisoners of their genres. Undoubtedly, most of Shakespeare's strong female characters tend to be heroines from comedies, who display nuances of various admirable characteristics such as beauty, wit, determination, and above all the ability to bring happiness to others around them by resolving all issues at hand. This was a role Shakespeare frequently gave to his leading ladies, especially since a strong

woman was his monarch at the time. An important factor at play here is that only in comedies could the strength and necessity of a woman with agency be displayed openly; in the cases of tragedies or other more serious dramas, Shakespeare gave women a more veiled power, as catalyst.

It is paramount to take into consideration the vast critical material orbiting the subject of Shakespeare's heroines in comedies and tragedies. Catherine Belsey, who in her essay "Gender in a Different Dispensation: The Case of Shakespeare" argues the important role gender has on the fate of a woman in the Bard's plays. The crossdressing of female characters allows women the liberation to act and let go of any psychological and physical restraints (Belsey 8). Taking into consideration heroines such as Viola from *Twelfth Night*, Rosalind from *As You Like It*, and Portia from *The Merchant of Venice*, it becomes clear that the agency these women have commands the plays and brings about a happy outcome. Their demanding and assertive nature, combined with an attitude of taking matters into their own hands, displays rather masculine traits, which would be considered unacceptable for women at the time, and yet Shakespeare found a way around this stigma. He allowed these characters to blur gender boundaries, take on the roles of protagonists, identify and solve problems while at the same time driving the plot forward only by shielding them under the cloak of manhood (Belsey 8). Each one of these characters at some stage disguises as a man in order to carry out all of the mentioned actions, and yet manages to retain femininity because of that very disguise. For these characters to reach utter happiness, which meant marriage at the time, and additionally to bring the play to a happy end, they had to go through three stages: find themselves in a most difficult situation where they have no control over their lives, go to a different land and take on a role of a man. Only through these three stages can these women become transgressive characters and ultimately metamorphosise into agents of action. As seen in the plays, Viola is shipwrecked, Rosalind banished, and Portia left to a twisted lottery game set by her deceased father. Hence, to resolve matters, Viola must be in Illyria as Cesario, Rosalind hidden in the Forest of Arden as Ganymede, and Portia must go to Venice as the lawyer Balthazar. Only then do they truly begin to drive the plot and guide other characters in the directions of their choosing. It is solely through their masculine disguise that they manage

to expel their sheer force as protagonists, and it is only in these disguises that they speak their most effective monologues. For heroines in tragedies this is not the case, as their power is constricted and concealed within the role of a catalyst.

Women in Shakespeare's comedies were viewed as protagonists and discussed by numerous scholars for their power of agency. Portia's assertion of power through her ring is depicted by Karen Newman in her paper "Portia's Ring: Unruly Women and Structures of Exchange in *The Merchant of Venice*", claiming Bassanio only wished to give the ring to her once she was disguised as a man and did not fear to take action, argue or be unruly (Newman 28). In short, without Portia the happy ending would not have taken place, her presence is paramount, as Henry David Gray argues (Gray 123). In order for a comedy to thrive it is crucial to have a heroine and amplify her importance, more than it would be in a tragedy (Gray 126). One of the main reasons for this is the union of marriage which was presumed at the time as the only acceptable happy ending (Gray 126). However, most critics of tragic heroines have a very different outlook when it comes to women's roles and observe them only as villains. Richard Levin in "Feminist Thematics and Shakespearean Tragedy", claims that the force driving the plot comes from the trouble caused by patriarchy that was taking over (Levin 127). The female characters do not have any agency in this case, as tragedies could only take place in a world that has no female influence and revolves around patriarchal values (Levin 128). Only the wicked women come to light as the good ones are overshadowed in tragedies, as we see in *King Lear* where the two older sisters acquire agency (Gray 127). They are never recognised for more than their wickedness. This is the same fate Lady Macbeth faces, as she is simply a tool in many critics' eyes which sparks violence in her husband, only to be discarded late on (Gray 127). There have been signs of virtue in heroines such as Goneril and Lady Macbeth, but since there are confined to their roles as villains, villains are all they remain (Gray 129).

Limited to exercise their power only through others, the five ladies of tragedies meet the same fate: death. Shakespeare seems to suggest that this is a price a woman must pay if she wants to wield power. Neither these female characters nor their husbands experience a

happy ending. In stark contrast to the couples in comedies, Juliet, Lady Macbeth and Goneril kill themselves, while Gertrude and Tamora are killed together with their sons. These women face dire, life-or-death circumstances yet are afforded only a limited access of agency—unlike their comedic counterparts. Shakespeare’s female catalysts can exert power only indirectly, by triggering other leading characters in the plot. They are never given the opportunity to resolve a problem; instead, they remain complicit in the problem until their untimely deaths, making them always subservient to the plot. Shakespeare establishes a tough surrounding for them where, unlike the heroines in comedies who display masculine traits such as determination and bravery, the women of tragedies are punished for exemplifying the same, as they strive to survive within a fixed system. Unlike the comedy heroines, “the women in the tragedies, even the strong and difficult ones, even those who appeal to the supernatural to be ‘unsexed’ (Macbeth, 1.5.40), remain resolutely confined to female dress”, which proves to be a great tool of success for the former group (Belsey 7). In their case, any transgression that takes place is punished eventually, which is why they never rush into action directly, but rather spin webs slowly, entangling others around them into action. However, while this makes it harder to spot exact moments when they execute power within the plays, it also makes their role of a catalyst even more intriguing and exuberant once this becomes obvious, as I will make clear through examples of some close readings of texts from the mentioned plays.

Katherina is the only non-tragic character analysed in this paper, and yet Shakespeare creates a delicately knitted link between her and the others. She stands out from other comedic heroines because her life is deemed almost tragic when looked at closely. Until Katherina is married, she is disruptive to her family and society, since she does not fit in the typical mould of an Elizabethan woman. At the time “women who asserted their views too vigorously risked being perceived as ‘shrewish’”, hence the label Katherina is given (Greenblatt 11). Her physical appearance is never described as attractive as that of her fair sister Bianca, and her temperament is too aggressive which does not make her a good daughter, sister, or wife. In all she is “not the most charming woman in the world” (Pearson 232). Her outspoken nature and sharp tone, free will, and courage to take a stand for herself could all be tolerated if she had the opportunity to take the three previously

mentioned stages of other comedic heroines, but Katherina is never presented with the opportunity to disguise as a man. At the time women like Katherina,

came to be regarded as threats to public order, to be dealt with by the local authorities. The preferred method of correction included public humiliation – of the sort Katharina endures in *The Taming of the Shrew* – and such physical abuse as slapping, bridling with a bit or a muzzle, and half-drowning by means of a contraption called the ‘cucking stool’. (Greenblatt 11)

Katherina manages to be a catalyst and stays alive during the play by using Petruccio as her male disguise. While it may be different to what other heroines did in comedies, Katherina makes this strategy very effective, because she manages to gain everything she wants through her husband and establish herself as the agent of action who lives to see her happy ending. Petruccio understands her and gives her structure, and it is through this that she is contained in a frame of a socially acceptable woman while simultaneously maintaining the ability to be herself. Katherina succeeds in bridging the comedy and tragedy genres as she remains a catalyst and subtly triggers Petruccio, only to find freedom through him.

Just as Katherina is a bridge between the women in comedies and tragedies, so is an overarching theme of gender, which Richard Levin addresses in his article “Feminist Thematics and Shakespearean Tragedies”. While the three sets of characters each have their own separate theme, this general theme must be acknowledged since the topic of women is ever present in this paper. After all, the theme of gender remains decisive when it comes to genre and therefore links the two together. Levin states,

Since, according to these critics, Shakespeare is always grappling with the problem of gender, the comedies, which end in gender harmony, are often seen as his solution to the problem, the goal he is seeking, and therefore the tragedies come to represent a failure to solve this problem and achieve this goal. Moreover, the difference between the two genres is explained by the role of the woman in the thematic gender conflict; when they are able to cure or at least restrain the men’s masculinity, the result is a

comic resolution, and when the men will not let them do this, the result is tragedy, which makes it, again, a kind of failure. (Levin 133)

I personally do not agree with Levin that the thematic gender conflict does not separate tragedy from comedy, because inevitably the theme of gender always affects the outcome of the play, even though there are of course many other ideas involved in the process of creation. Certainly, the restriction of a woman's power over a man does not necessarily make a play a failure, but simply allows for a negative outcome because the theme of gender decides so. During the Elizabethan era, women could very well be the source of merry and joy to a community or a plot, but allowing them power to bring about tragedy and death was not common, since the weight of such an outcome was far greater than that of a happy ending. This brings me back to the argument about why Shakespeare positions his women as catalysts in most tragedies: so as not to bring too much attention to their disguised influence. Therefore, the theme of gender is present in each of the six plays discussed in this paper as an overarching theme.

The themes that are interwoven into the six plots are also closely linked to the three categories these characters occupy: Juliet and Katherina, catalysts through their marriage, have a shared theme of independence; Gertrude and Tamora, catalysts through motherhood, share the theme of revenge; and Lady Macbeth and Goneril, catalysts through their villainy, share the theme of demise by power. These women may differ in their approach, presence in the plot and ferociousness, but none of them lacks the power to trigger others into action. To initiate action whether directly like Lady Macbeth, one of Shakespeare's most complex and elaborate female characters, or accidentally like Gertrude, who has the least lines given to any of the author's leading women, is crucial not only to the plot itself, but to the formation of the theme. The themes linked to each set of characters will be explained further in the following chapters.

The rebel pair, Juliet and Katherina, both struggle to be heard by their families and society, which only becomes achievable once they enter into marriage and gain independence. For Juliet, the journey to freedom proves to be a tragic one. Even though her

independence is in death, she asserts herself as headstrong and determined, never yielding to her father or Paris. The first step to her independence is her suggestion to Romeo of marriage, seeing this as a window of opportunity to escape legitimately and be with the man she loves. But once she realises that after Tybalt's death this will not be enough, she goes to the friar and puts into effect her next escape. Nothing is off limits for this young tragic heroine when it comes to her independence, as she proves that even taking her own life is an option if it means she can control her own destiny. Meanwhile, Katherina also enters into a marriage and in so doing takes her first step towards freedom. While she rebels in the beginning, later she realises that through Petruccio she can have much more freedom when she is no longer deemed a shrew. As a married woman she learns how to be herself, while at the same time appearing acceptable to her society, and by doing so gains independence. Katherina's nature does not change, as underscored in the final act when she drags the two women, but she does guide her aggressiveness in a different direction.

The theme of revenge is most visible in Gertrude's and Tamora's stories. While this theme is most directly connected to Tamora, as she wants to avenge her murdered son, Gertrude indirectly provokes it in her son. This is a general theme in both plays, which is why they end so bloody, but the two Queens trigger action in people around them, thereby making revenge a tangible action and not just a desire. Gertrude unfortunately is never given a prominent speaking role in *Hamlet*, nor do we see inside her thoughts as she never delivers a monologue, but what can be derived is that her decision to marry Claudius is the start of his and Hamlet's downfall. Because of her lack of involvement, or concealed information she refrains from sharing with either of them hoping to bring peace, she unknowingly provokes further need for revenge—the ultimately vengeful act being her drinking from the poisonous cup and setting Hamlet into a murderous rage. Tamora's act of revenge is made clear as she accepts Saturninus' advances and swears to kill Titus. Just like Gertrude, she loses her husband and her sons to this revenge as she drags them into vengeful thoughts, sparking violence which ends up being the demise of them all.

Lady Macbeth and Goneril are two women who possess many typically-male characteristics such as ambition, shrewdness, pragmatism, aggression, strategic plotting, and vengeance, but most of all a thirst for power, which shapes a clear theme between them – demise by power. Both nourish the seed of ambition in their husbands and through them feel the power they desire to wield over others. The difference is that Lady Macbeth soon realises that her husband is able to go much further than she when it comes to destruction, while Goneril realises that hers cannot keep up. However, both of them, as women with masculine traits in Elizabethan plays, return to their core selves and realise that they are incapable of such horrific action, only to end up taking their own lives as a means of repentance towards the audience.

Later in this paper, I will examine and defend these themes with evidence not only from the text, but also through an additional indispensable tool: adaptation.

Adaptation

A relevant exploration of the six catalysts in this paper will be conducted through the art of adaptation, since adaptation is not only a compelling way of examining different sectors and angles to a character from different standpoints, but also the highest form of compliment. By this definition, Shakespeare is one of the most complimented authors of all time, considering the abundance of adaptations of his plays. Julie Sanders in her book *Adaptation and Appropriation* detail the importance of Shakespeare in connection to adaptation. I found her arguments to be most relevant when it comes to the female characters I focused on, as analysing them proved to be impossible without the aid of the adapted forms of the original plays. Their roles as catalysts were made clearer through certain adaptations, because whether they be “extensions, amplifications or alterations, (they) highlight often perplexing gaps, absences and silences within the original”, and so help the veiled catalytic role be recognised (Sanders 126). Shakespeare was unique among his contemporaries in that he gave his female characters meaningful roles in his plays; nonetheless, he tended to do so carefully and discreetly in some cases, such that readers must immerse themselves deeply in a text in order to discover the true role of the leading

lady. Though there were other writers who gave importance to female characters, none of Shakespeare's contemporaries reached his level of genius. When thinking of Ben Jonson, his play *The Silent Woman* comes to mind, with Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, with John Ford, *Tis' Pity She's a Whore*, with John Fletcher, *The Scornful Lady*, but when thinking of Shakespeare a whole array of female characters comes to mind. It is no wonder that Shakespeare's work tends to be more adapted than any of his contemporaries, especially as the feminist climate increasingly influences creative thought.

The six female characters I focus on are not visibly catalysts but can be interpreted as agents of critical actions in the plays. The crucial difference this paper strives to prove is that, even though it may not be apparent at first, their most important role is that of a catalyst who triggers the actions of other characters more so than their own. Setting others into motion is not a transparent job, but a necessary one if the play is to be successful. With ease one could overlook the triggering effect of Katherina and Juliet and view them as obedient wives who eventually followed in their husbands' footsteps, or Gertrude and Tamora as destructive queens full of lust not noticing the action they put into motion through their sons. Perhaps the easiest misinterpretation would be to that of Lady Macbeth and Goneril as simple villains with no justified cause, missing the significance of every initiation they displayed. Here lies the relevance of adaptation since many, "as a result have a deep political and literary investment in giving voice to characters or events which appear to have been oppressed or repressed in the original" (Sanders 126). Certain adaptations portray the catalytic effects of these women more clearly to the audience.

The other important reason to consider adapted forms of plays stems from the very importance of adaptation itself: the evolution of the original. As Sanders argues, "adaptation on the whole tended to operate within the parameters of the established canon, serving at times to reinforce that canon by ensuring a continued interest in the original or source text...at the same time insuring the revival or 'repair' of the same" (Sanders 124). Not only are the six catalysts depicted more clearly in adaptations, but their survival is also ensured through the generations, as is the survival of the plays. Considering that

Shakespeare himself was “an adapter, an appropriator of myth, fairy tale, folklore, the historical chronicles of Holinshed, and the prose fiction and poetry of his day”, it is only natural that his work would flow in time towards the inevitable sea of adaptation (Sanders 59). It must be mentioned, however, that Shakespeare is adapted so often not only because he is “outside the copyright law, making him both safe and cheap” to adapt, but also because his characters are so multi-layered, flexible, and universal, which is always tempting for artists to use like clay and mould into the message they wish to send to their respective audience (Sanders 60). Jean Marden states, “each new generation attempts to redefine Shakespeare’s genius in contemporary terms, projecting its desires and anxieties onto his work” (Sanders 60). The adaptations referenced in this paper are no exception. Some tend to stay as loyal to the original as the time limit will allow, and some give new dimensions to the catalysts, making them more relatable to their audience.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Baz Luhrmann’s modern 90’s, teenage and sassy Juliet from *Romeo+Juliet* (1996) and Gil Junger’s Katherina in *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999) show a different yet weaker side to these characters, compared to Franco Zeffirelli’s adaptations of the two. Julie Taymor’s dystopian mixture of modern military and ancient Roman setting sheds a very different light on Tamora in *Titus* (1999), emphasising her conniving political strategy and raw sexuality in far greater measure than the original play. Gertrude’s sexual tension with Hamlet is played upon differently in the three adaptations of *Hamlet* by Kenneth Branagh’s, Franco Zeffirelli’s and Laurence Olivier’s interpretations of her leaving the audience room to explore her power over her son and her possession of initiation even further. Additionally, Roman Polanski’s portrayal of Lady Macbeth allows the viewer a more transparent view of the triggering effect this fragile, fair wife has over her husband in *Macbeth* (1971), while Justin Kurzel provides the audience with the opposite approach, creating an archetypal portrayal of her character in *Macbeth* (2015). Finally, Edwin Sherin’s stage adaptation goes an additional mile with an all African American cast of *King Lear* (1974), but does not necessarily give the audience a deeper insight into Goneril’s catalytic role; however, Jocelyn Moorhouse in *A Thousand Acres* (1997) and Richard Eyre’s *King Lear* (2018) help viewers sympathise and methodically track the triggers Goneril pulled to set events into action.

I agree with Sanders' argument that,

the adaptation of Shakespeare inevitably makes him 'fit' for new cultural contexts and political ideologies...many theories which have had their intellectual foundation in recent decades such as feminism, postmodernism, structuralism, gay, lesbian and transgender theory, postcolonialism and now, increasingly, the new digital humanities, have all had a profound effect on the modes and methodologies of adapting Shakespeare. (Sanders 58)

Shakespeare's characters can be used to prove a point, even if at the time that certain theory was not yet conceived, just this paper will argue in terms of the "woman catalyst". As other sources proved to be essential in inspiring the Bard when creating his plays, so do the future adaptations of these help keep pumping fresh air into the 17th century plays' lungs, keeping them alive and thriving even in this present day. I felt film and theatre adaptations are the most popular media in this current time especially in light of the Covid-19 situation, forcing online experiences into our everyday lives. As theatres began to stream their plays online too, it certainly moves away from Shakespeare's initial idea of how his work should be presented, but none of these logistical changes manage to subvert his plays or lose their influence and meaning. As a matter of fact, adaptation provides its "own intertexts... so perhaps it will increasingly serve us better to think in terms of complex filtration, and in terms of networks, webs and signifying fields, rather than simplistic one-way lines of movement from source to adaptation" (Sanders 33). When it comes to films and stage, John Elis argued it best: "Adaptation into another medium becomes a means of prolonging the pleasure of the original presentation, and repeating the production of a memory" (Sanders 33).

However, adaptation also tends to be the best way to emphasise a certain point being made about a character's catalytic action. Adaptation enables us to comprehend how these characters function as catalysts, and in many cases clearly exemplify the power they hold over the development of action in the plot. In many cases their role is the underbelly of the story, but once it is exposed, as it is most certainly in the adaptations used in this paper, it

helps shed any doubt that the female characters in question are the catalysts of the plots in question. In sum, adaptations are a vital aspect of this paper not only because they help to affirm the arguments, but also because Shakespeare remains such a big and widely known source of adaptation. That imminent link between adaptation and Shakespeare is best stated by Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier when noting, “as long as there have been plays by Shakespeare, there have been adaptation of those plays” (Sanders 58).

CHAPTER I

While *The Taming of the Shrew* is a comedy and *Romeo and Juliet* a tragedy, both center on the same broad event – marriage. In this chapter, I will explore the characters of the two women, their family backgrounds, and how their marriages affect the plays as they assert their dominance. On the one hand, Katherina and Juliet are very different, but on the other, it is marriage that links these two characters, and it is this very link that sets the play into motion. Katherina is older than Juliet and even though she does come from an affluent family, she does not have both parents like Juliet. Her father is much more lenient than Juliet's and she has a sister, Bianca, who is a foil to Katherina – a foil Katherina secretly longs to be. Katherina does not show love or infatuation towards Petruccio at first, like Juliet does for Romeo. Her and Petruccio's merging seems to be purely for practical reasons – his to gain money and hers to gain the status of a married women. By contrast, Juliet and Romeo's love is innocent and pure, and also childish, which is expected since they are teenagers. Comparing Juliet's reaction when she heeds her nurse to inquire about Romeo, saying, "If he be married,/ My grave is like to be my wedding-bed" (Rom.1.4.245), to Katherina's comment, "...Let him that moved you hither, / Remove you hence. I knew you at the first/ You were a movable" (Shr.2.1.195-6), implying he is a piece of movable furniture to her and going on to insult him furthermore while he infuriates her with sexualized innuendos, demonstrates how differently these women felt about their men. The innocent infatuation Juliet has with Romeo and the feisty love-hate relationship Katherina has with Petruccio are worlds apart, but Shakespeare relies on these different women to similarly ignite the fire in their respective plot. Juliet unleashes her father's fury and the hate between the families leads to Tybalt and Mercutio's death, while Katherina unleashes hers and Petruccio's fury leading to taming of Kate and a "Kated" Petruccio (Shr.3.2.238).

Introduction to characters

At first glance, not much connects the characters of Juliet from *Romeo and Juliet* (1968) and Katherina from *The Taming of the Shrew* (1967) besides the fact that Franco Zeffirelli

took on the challenge of turning both plays into movies, with them leaving a lasting impression on the world's audience and forever iconising these two women. Zeffirelli cast Elizabeth Taylor as Katherina and Olivia Hussey as Juliet, as both of these actresses were dark-haired, beautiful, feisty women who perfectly exemplified the nature of Shakespeare's original characters. Katherina and Juliet possess initiative and trigger the actions of their husbands and with that the sequence of events in both plays. It is not unusual to find powerful female characters in Shakespeare's plays, who have the ability to influence their society. Irene G. Dash argues in her book *Wooing, Wedding, and Power: Women in Shakespeare's Plays*,

that Shakespeare created a wide range of female characters and that he was fully aware of the problems women face in patriarchal societies like his own, Dash argues that Shakespeare offers us a number of female characters who are remarkable in their resilient and "realistic" (p. 1) responses to life. Again and again, she maintains, characters like Kate... prove themselves capable of achieving power-if not over society at large, then over themselves. (Hageman 127)

Juliet and Katherina are a perfect example, as will be elaborated further in this chapter, of characters who create this power and have the last say in their plays - Katherina by finding liberation through Petruccio, and Juliet by not yielding to her parents' wishes, but finding an eternity with Romeo in death.

The strength of Katherina, later known as Kate, is clear from the very start, for it is she who sets the play into motion by her verbal and sometimes physical battle with Petruccio. Petruccio's proposal to Kate is most unusual, aggressive and downright vulgar as he wittily retorts to her comments of how he will pluck out her sting, where Shakespeare plays with words shifting the argument to a sexual context having Petruccio say, "What, with my tongue in your tail?" (Shr.2.1.216). Kate nevertheless does enter into the marriage, proving that it is not solely her father's wish, but that she has a say in the decision of her fate and therefore the rest of the storyline. This is something Zeffirelli emphasised a lot in his adaptation, where he shows Kate peeping through a window, secretly smiling, implying that she is not only intrigued by Petruccio, but that she likes him (*The Taming of the*

Shrew). Scholars have debated whether or not Kate is truly tamed, and how willingly she enters into the marriage. Even though she does speak badly of Petruccio, calling him a “half-lunatic, a madcap ruffian and a swearing Jack”, she never directly says that she does not want to marry him, nor asks her father to not give her away (Shr.2.1.285-86). Let us not forget that it is Kate after all who initiates the topic of marriage when arguing with her father in the beginning of the play, saying, “...she must have a husband,/ I must dance barefoot on her wedding day/ And, for your love to her, lead apes in hell” (Shr.2.1.32-34). In this comment we can see clearly that Kate longs to be married, especially before her sister, and uses an expression “lead apes in hell” to indicate that she does not want to meet the proverbial destiny for unmarried women. In all, when examined from this point of view it is evident that because of Kate’s wish to marry, Petruccio enters the play and the plot begins to culminate. If Kate had not protested to “lead apes in hell”, there would have been no marriage, Bianca would not be able to marry either and there would be no story. Kate’s fiery nature and temperamental ways energise the story at first, only to have her calm as the plot progresses, consequently mellowing the tumultuous storyline. While she might be interpreted as tamed, it is actually Kate that tames everyone else, because when she surrenders to love and takes on a peaceful presence, nearly everyone around her mellows out as well, including her husband. The ones that do not, like Bianca and the widow who begin to rebel at the end of the play, Kate tends to them by taking matters into her own hands and forcing harmony upon them. Undoubtedly Kate was written by Shakespeare to be a catalyst for all the shifts in mood present in the play, as she moves the other characters around her aggressively at first but more mildly later on.

Juliet acts as a catalyst as well: even though Romeo approaches her first at the Capulet feast, it is Juliet who encourages his advances that same night, after they become aware of each other’s identities, by asking him to marry her (Rom.2.1.186). Furthermore, Juliet takes the initiative to visit Friar Laurence, risking not only her reputation, but also banishment from her family by taking the sleeping potion. She shows a more mature and determined side by convincing Friar Laurence to either help her or let her take her own life. This is remarkable considering the gravity of her decision and how firmly she stands her ground, not wavering at the tender age of thirteen. Unlike Romeo, who goes into exile

after killing Tybalt, Juliet remains to deal with the situation on her own and therefore takes on all the risks. Keeping in mind that Romeo is a man from a respected family, we can assume that he would have had a better chances at the time to build a life away from Verona, even perhaps to get back into the good graces of Prince Escalus and eventually his own parents. By contrast, Juliet, as stated by her father, would not be welcome, and would be unlikely to survive as a woman without the support of a father or a husband (Rom.3.5.193-95). In addition to risking her life by taking the poison, Juliet makes the risky decision to run away with Romeo—a young man who has no money to his name who has been banished from Verona, making him an unstable and unsuitable husband and provider for Juliet. His banishment is just one in a long line of impulsive reactions that slowly brings the two lovers to their inevitable doom. By casting Romeo as an unstable, immature character, Shakespeare shifts the burden of problem-solving onto the character of Juliet, making her the rational one. Through the relationships with their families, husbands and themselves we see how Shakespeare brings two unlikely heroines to life, presenting them as victims of society at first only to later have us see the power of initiation and decisiveness they eventually execute.

Character background

In order to understand the mind-set of these two women and how they came about to such radical decisions and transformations, we must examine their families and intrafamilial relationships. The decision to marry Petruccio and remain married to him marks a transformation for Kate – not an inner one as most around her assume, but an outer layer, an aggressive coat that she has shed realising that she could have a husband and still be the strong-minded woman she always was. This outward transformation will be analysed further in this chapter, but first we need to break down her family dynamic. The two important female figures that mould Kate into a “shrew” are her mother and sister. The absence of the former takes a toll on a daughter, especially the older one since more is usually expected of her. A same-sex parent role model typically not only guides their child into the socially acceptable norms expected of them, but also sets an example so that girls

do not stray too far with their wishes and expectations. This was a fundamental lesson for young women back in the 16th century, and Kate missed out on it.

However, there is an even more challenging element of not having a mother and that is having a younger sister who exemplifies all the attributes required of a gentle maiden. Indeed, Kate's sister Bianca, whose name suggests brightness, is the foil to Kate's darkness. The layers of Shakespeare's characters continue to deepen as we become introduced to Bianca's true dismissive, vain nature later on in the play, once she is settled with a husband. In Zeffirelli's version of *The Taming of the Shrew* (1967) the audience gets a glimpse of Bianca's true character from time to time as she overdramatises Kate's attacks in front of her father to gain sympathy. Yet how quickly she recovers from them is even more unusual, especially in the company of her suitors, never missing the chance to give them a coquettish smile when an opportunity arises. Her character is depicted as very manipulative, while the shrew Kate exemplifies honesty.

Like Kate, Juliet also has two significant female characters that affect her transformation from girl to woman. Her mother, Lady Capulet, is a mere shadow of her husband. She was married off to him at a young age, as he says to Paris "And too soon married are those so early made" (Rom.1.2.13), expressing that he wishes a better life for his daughter and more time to enjoy her childhood. This explains why Lady Capulet is perhaps resentful of her daughter since she herself was never at liberty to choose when to be married or when to bear children. Zeffirelli strongly emphasises these turbulent emotions in Lady Capulet: as her husband looks at her through his window after arguing to Paris that Juliet should not be married off just yet, we see a furious Lady Capulet slam her window shut in rage as she glares at vengefully at her husband (*Romeo and Juliet* 1968). Ironically, it is Lady Capulet who, that very day, presents the idea of marriage to her daughter, only to point out that: "I was your mother much upon these years/ That you are now a maid. Thus, then, in brief:/ The valiant Paris seeks you for his love" (Rom.1.3.73-76).

The affection Juliet receives comes from her Nurse, who unlike Lady Capulet is always jolly and expresses what is exactly on her mind. However, the Nurse is just that – a nurse – and therefore inferior to Juliet’s parents and even to Juliet herself. So here we have a young girl just entering puberty with a mother who partially resents her and a Nurse who has no power over any circumstances. Interestingly, Lady Capulet likes having the Nurse around, which shows just how uncomfortable she is speaking with her daughter and the distance between them that needs to be mediated by the Nurse (Rom.1.3.8-11). Still, once a decision is made that Juliet must marry Paris, her mother makes no attempt to comfort her daughter or protect her from her father’s threats; she simply says, “Talk not to me, for I’ll not speak a word./ Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee” (Rom.3.5.203-4).

The final and most pivotal role is played by Kate’s and Juliet’s respective fathers, because after all, women did not have much say in their future or marriages at the time of Shakespeare’s plays, which is why in these complex father-daughter relationships can help to explain why Kate and Juliet dove so quickly into marriage. The fact that the women that both met their husbands only once before getting married seems to indicate that they wanted to escape their families and current lives abruptly. On the one hand, Shakespeare gives us Capulet, a wealthy, influential man who sees his only daughter as “the hopeful lady of my earth”, displaying loving and protective feelings for her (Rom.1.2.15). Both her tender age and his genuine love of his daughter’s presence makes him want to postpone her wedding to Paris. Yet, this tenderness suddenly changes as soon as Juliet shows signs of disobedience. Quickly his love is forgotten and in the heat of the moment he is ready to drag her to her wedding on a “hurdle” used to draw traitors through the streets to their execution (Rom.3.5.155). Once Juliet is told by her father that the price for her disobedience is to, “...hang, beg, starve, die in the streets –/ For, by my soul, I’ll ne’er acknowledge thee,/ Nor what is mine shall never do thee good” (Rom.3.5.193-95), she becomes the catalyst in the plot of her own life, taking matters into her own hands. By threatening Friar Laurence to come up with a solution to her problem lest she take her own life, Juliet takes dramatic yet clever action to set the rest of the plot into motion. Unlike the immature Romeo who comes to Friar Laurence weeping and immediately wishes to give up and kill himself, Juliet is a much stronger character who searches for solutions first.

While Friar Laurence reprimands Romeo, he takes Juliet more seriously and presents his plan to her. Again, taking initiative, Juliet who is just a teenager makes a bold decision to drink the potion and abandon her family. It is not only her love for Romeo that brings about her transformation from a naïve girl to a determined wife, but also her wish to escape a domineering father, resentful, meek mother, and inferior Nurse. The advice to marry Paris and bury Romeo is the turning point where Juliet takes complete control, not only of her future, but of Romeo's as well. Inevitably her choices affect the lives of both the Capulets and Montagues (Rom.3.5.222-26).

In the case of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Kate's father Baptista appears to be a different man altogether from Capulet, but he is nonetheless also the main reason Kate secretly wishes to leave the family home. Kate deals not only with the loss of her mother but also with her father's obvious favouring of her younger sister Bianca. Kate confronts her father openly about this favouritism: "She is your treasure" (Shr.2.1.32). Kate's father is the straw that breaks the camel's back when it comes to Kate. His constant desire to marry her off and his shameless embrace of Bianca is enough to make Kate's life in her family home feel unbearable.

Marriage

Marriage sets the stage for Kate and Juliet to take their wishes from thought to action, and with that set into motion the turbulent unravelling of the two plays. Juliet and Kate are different characters – Juliet is a thirteen-year-old girl while Kate is a young woman – and yet still they both find their footing once they become married and with that take on the role of the plays' catalysts. On the one hand, Juliet's father urges Paris to, "Let two more summers wither in their pride/ Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride" (Rom.1.2.10-11). He insists that Juliet must be older in order to marry, showing that even at the time when girls were married off quite young, as her mother so encouragingly states using herself as an example, Capulet is more concerned about his daughter's well-being. Kate on the other hand has obviously over-stayed her welcome in her father's house, since Baptista seems to

resort to desperate measures - including not allowing his younger daughter Bianca to entertain any suitors - in order to marry her off. He states clearly,

Gentlemen, importune me no farther,

For how I firmly am resolved you know:

That is, not to bestow my youngest daughter

Before I have a husband for the elder. (Shr.1.1.48-51)

However, this is the first hint we get from Shakespeare that these two women will not obey any rules and that the story will take a course only they see fit. Juliet's tender age does not stop her from engaging in sexual intercourse with Romeo once they speedily wed, contrary to what her father wished for her. Meanwhile, Kate goes to bed with Petruccio once the play is over, which was quite unusual at the time. With all his bullying and boasting, Petruccio still does not have the upper hand to bed Kate; rather, it is she who willingly leaves with him at the end of the play.

As the two women move the plays along, they surpass their husbands. From day one, they choose the course their respective relationships will take. This feminist approach shows that Shakespeare possessed a "diversity of the mind of a sixteenth-century man whose understanding of the human condition extended beyond his own sex and beyond his own time" (Dash in Hageman 127). I will go on to further elaborate how through their marriages, these characters dominate their play's plot and act as catalysts.

KATE

When Kate finally meets her equal, she begins to emerge from her usual state of anger and frustration. The thought of marrying Petruccio brings something new into her life, an idea that her life could change for the better—or at the very least change. Her surprising disappointment with his delayed arrival to their wedding proves that Kate was willing to take that first step into something different that consequently creates the rest of the play. It would not be farfetched to argue that she might have easily made a debacle at the wedding

just in order to stop it from taking place, since this is a woman who is no stranger to violence or drama. Just as she grabs her sister and the widow, dragging them to their husbands for her final speech at the end of the play, she would have had the power to make a similar spectacle to stop the wedding. Her clear disappointment once married does not sway her willingness to stay with Petruccio despite her patience, appetite and sleep being put to the test, proving that this was something Kate strongly wanted. With this determination, the audience can explore the Petruccio/Kate relationship and experience one of the most intriguing couples created by Shakespeare.

“We enjoy fighting... I think that fighting - having a fight, an out loud, outrages, ridiculous fight is one of the greatest exercises in marital togetherness”: Elizabeth Taylor stated this in an interview in 1970 while sitting next to her then-husband Richard Burton, who was her co-star in Zeffirelli’s *The Taming of the Shrew* (Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton interview 1970). This couple was not so different from the fictional couple written by Shakespeare, which is perhaps one of the reasons Zeffirelli chose them. Kate is evidently a passionate character and for the first time she has met her match. These two lovers do not come together slowly; rather, their courtship is a battle, and while Shakespeare shows it mostly through their aggressive and powerful arguments, the reader can always trace humour and sarcasm in their dialogs too. There is more to their dynamic than pure anger, which is why the unorthodox wooing softens Kate eventually. The main difference between Kate and Petrucci is that while she is openly aggressive, he is not. He never pursues her sexually, but obviously waits for her to be ready, which at the time he was not required to do. Husbands did not have to wait for their wife’s permission because women were just their property, and if Petruccio was the brute he claimed to be and how many see him even when reading the play today, then he would have done just that. After all, as he says, “She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,/ My household stuff, my field, my barn,/ My horse, my ox my ass my anything” (Shr.3.2.223-25). But after every comment to this effect, he ends the speech with a joke, which I believe is Shakespeare attempt to convey to the audience that his male character is not as chauvinistic as he might appear. Petruccio goes on to ridicule the situation, and by that he not only makes the

audience laugh, but also shows Kate the absurd situation she puts herself in with her erratic, spoiled behaviour, simply through humour. He orders Grumio,

Draw fort thy weapon; we are beset with thieves,

Rescue thy mistress if thou be a man.

-Fear not, sweet wench, they shell not touch thee, Kate;

I'll buckler thee against a million. (Shr.3.2.229-32).

Instead of being violent and verbally insulting, he starts acting like Kate, to prove to her that two can play this game. As Tranio puts it, "Of all mad matches never was the like" (Shr.3.2.235).

Yet when it comes to Kate, she does not hold back her outbursts of violence; as we see in first meeting with Petruccio, she strikes him, but he never retaliates (Shr.2.1.18-19). This was another significant factor separating Petruccio from the tyrannical role he is tied to. No matter how his wife behaved or what she said, he never laid a hand on her. Just like the marital bed, physical abuse such as beating one's wife was not frowned upon in Shakespeare's time nor was it illegal. However, this does not only give more colour to Petruccio's character and make the reader reflect on his values and intentions, but also makes the reader question Kate's influence on him. As mentioned, Kate first introduced the idea of marriage to her father, and then went along with Petruccio, only to be seen crying when she thought he would not show up on their wedding day (Shr.3.2.26-27). So, we see how her affection evolves, not through the process of taming, but simply through human emotions – emotions a woman has for a man. Her actions cause his reactions, as she quickly realises. They are not married for long before being invited to Bianca's wedding; only a week passes, and yet Kate's transformation is unrecognisable. It is hard to imagine a woman with a strong, solid character breaking within a week. But Kate is not tamed. Rather, she took control of her marriage and of the play's storyline. Once she realises that her husband wants her to stop hitting, insulting, and most importantly belittling him, she tames herself. Ballard argues,

Many critics have grappled with the problem of Kate's taming, not least because they find it hard to believe that Shakespeare could be so apparently sexist. They argue instead that the final twist is completely ironic, or that Shakespeare was really attacking those fathers and husbands who expected women to submit to them.
(Ballard)

This quote references the on-going debate about whether or not Kate was tamed. While I argue in this paper that she is not tamed, numerous scholars and readers believe otherwise. One of the most famous adaptations was David Garrick's 1754 famous hundred-year-reigning version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, which he named *Catherine and Petruchio*, which, in diametric opposition to my argument in this paper, portrays Kate as neither a catalyst nor a strong female character. Dash criticizes Garrick's adaptation, stating that he depicts Kate "as a 'shrew cured', rather than an intelligent, spunky woman who finds in Petruchio 'more than a husband in a hostile world: she has found a friend'" (Dash in Hageman 127)

To audiences today it is demeaning and outrageous to think that a play by an author as influential as Shakespeare would be this sexist, but the beauty of Shakespeare is that he leaves room for numerous interpretations and no critic or reader will ever know if Kate is a tamed wife in Shakespeare's eyes or not. What we do know is that she was the most important character to him. Even if we consent to argue that she is unwillingly given away to Petruccio by her father, there is a crucial comment Shakespeare leaves for the audience that is frequently over-looked. Petruccio in his cockish manner tries to seal the deal with Baptista, saying, "Let specialities be therefore drawn between us,/ That convents may be kept on either hand", thinking that Baptista would gladly agree (Shr.2.1.126-27). It is then that Baptista lets Petruccio and the audience know how strong and influential the character of Kate is in the play, "Ay, when the special thing is well obtained —/ That is her love, for that is all in all" (Shr.2.1.128-29). Kate's word is all. The play rises and sets with her. Her father takes into consideration that she needs to agree to this too and he knows very well that if she does not, then all hell will break loose—just as it breaks for much smaller issues that are not to her pleasing. Shakespeare writes the character of Kate methodically - by not

making her perfect in the beginning, which gives room for the audience to wish for her to be a little less spoiled, a little less aggressive, a little less wicked and a little less untamed. The twist of the plot lies in the question of who is the tamer and who is the tamed.

A strong character like Kate does not change within a week, no matter how sleep deprived, irritated or hungry she is. She simply outwits her tamer and plays along with his game to get what she wants: a comfortable marriage. Petruccio,

Acts as a director teaching Katherine to play roles other than the shrew: wood maiden, wife with jealous husband, wife with tyrannous husband, wife with loving husband. Through examples of buyer, wooer, tamer, and husband, he shows her the possibilities of her personality, her ability to be any woman she chooses to be. She is definitely not only as Baptista's daughter or Petruchio's wife, she is an intelligent woman who can play any role she, her husband, or any other person requires her to play. Other characters do not have this ability; they are more one-dimensional.

(Pearson 232)

Velvet Pearson's statement suggests that Kate does not change, but instead, as I stated before, adapts to the situation to forge an advantageous position for herself. She willingly redirects her aggression—as we see her violently drag Bianca and the widow to their husbands, scolding them in front of everyone. It is still the same old Kate, but now she is acting in her own self-interest. As Raul Julia comments on his character of Petruccio when performing in 1981 New York Shakespeare in the Park's production, "Shakespeare is too big to be put into one little way of doing him" (Kiss me, Petruchio, Part 1). This is the greatness of Shakespeare's writing, always so ahead of his time, leaving room for other generations to make their own interpretations. Whether watching Elizabeth Taylor's Kate or Meryl Streep's Kate, in both productions the end proves the same point – Kate is the catalyst. Meryl Streep drags Raul Julia off the stage, showing that her Kate wants to go to bed with him (Kiss me, Petruchio, Part 2), while Elizabeth Taylor leaves the room so that Richard Barton's Petruccio in a panic starts running after her like a puppy. In both versions, the Kates lead their husbands (*The Taming of the Shrew*). Just as they start the plot, they also decide how to finish it – as the ones who have tamed and not the ones who

were tamed. The moment Kate outwits Petruccio and begins to agree with him in order to get what she wants is the moment she seizes control again. For instance, when Kate wishes to go to Bianca's wedding, and Petruccio wants her to call the sun the moon, or an old man a "young budding virgin", she simply says, "And be it moon, or sun, or what you please./ And if you please to call it a rush candle,/ Henceforth I vow it shall be so for me" (Shr.4.6.13-15). Ironically, even Hortensio realises how the game between the two of them plays out. These are not the words of a frightened, submissive women; these are words of a cunning woman who feels no inferiority but finds a way to be the neck that turns her husband's head.

Kate's final speech is the subject of the most scrutiny. It seems,

...strangely cold and generalised. Has she really been tamed or is she simply parroting a socially acceptable, yet totally impersonal, catalogue of honours a wife owes her husband? But this very coldness puts the success of Petruchio's taming into question. Perhaps Katherina is merely saying what she knows he wants to hear for a quiet life? So the text itself draws the audience's attention to an ironic gap between what Katherina seems to be saying in her speech and the sincerity of what she says.
(De Wachter)

De Wachter makes an excellent point, supporting the idea that Kate's submission is an illusion. The way it is delivered leaves ample room to doubt its sincerity. So yet again, Kate moves the storyline in the direction that she sees fit. She takes on Petruccio's role – the one who is in control and subtly teases him to achieve what she wants – while he becomes the hysterical, frustrated one. However, it is undeniable that Kate has changed and that she does have feelings for her husband. She is kinder and more loving, gentler, and feminine – resembling a version of Bianca. "They have an incredible passion for love... it does provide the source of her change", said Meryl Streep when talking about Kate (Kiss me, Petruchio, Part 2).

However, as generations pass, the visibility of Kate's influence and intent needs to become more transparent for the audience. In 1967, Zeffirelli had a Kate who was pretty similar to the original script's character, while in 1981 Christopher Dixon gave Streep more room to wander into feminist territory with her Kate, and in 1999 Gil Junger delivered Shakespeare's play to a modern audience on a feminist platter, but with a twist of chauvinism remaining in *10 Things I Hate About You*. Even though,

10 Things abstains from depicting the misogynist abuse that takes place in the original play, it does not completely avoid the trappings of patriarchy and misogyny. Kat and Patrick's relationship takes place in the teenage romantic comedy genre in which heterosexual union as climax is inevitable, conveying the idea that Kat "will not be complete until and unless a young man enables her self-discovery" (Balizet 130). Furthermore, Kat's poem that she writes about Patrick and recites in front of her class at the end of the film can be likened to Katherine's final speech in the play, as she risks public humiliation, breaks down and cries openly as she "renounces her shrewish feminist politics and announces in its place her dutiful affection for her boyfriend" (Jones 137). In the final scene of the film Patrick apologizes to Kat for his behaviour, but when Kat tries to protest he stops her from talking by kissing her, a silencing which is similar to that at the end of *Taming* when Petruchio also silences Katherine with a kiss, exclaiming "why there's a wench! Come on, and kiss me, Kate" (V.ii.179). As such, despite the contemporary setting, Patrick and Kat's relationship cannot be said to completely overcome the patriarchal structures of the original play. (Birkin)

With each generation, the audience needs to struggle less to see the catalytic role Kate occupies, because the play is reworked and simplified so as to become more appealing and acceptable for the current societal standards.

JULIET

Just like Kate, Juliet has also known her future husband for only one day before she marries him, and yet is unwavering when it comes to this decision – she instructs her nurse carefully and proceeds with her plan. However, the plan turns tragic the moment Juliet is

no longer in control of it and Romeo takes matters into his own hands. He kills her cousin Tybalt, goes into hiding and rushes to Juliet's tomb – where again he shows no patience or maturity by impulsively drinking the poison. Shakespeare gave agency to his female characters, even the most unlikely ones such as Juliet. This, however, does not diminish the complexity and capability of her character, which as a matter of fact is emphasised even more when compared with Romeo's. This idea is supported by Henry David Gray's argument that Juliet, "is the finer character, though it was (as always in this period of his work) the man's fortunes which were more carefully followed" (Gray 126). Through her initiation, strength and determination, all of which will be discussed further, the audience can see how she fulfils the role of a catalyst in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Taking on the role of a catalyst, Juliet from the very start sets the tone of her relationship, which is to be the main focal point in the play and the tragedy surrounding it. Henneman points out that,

It is no external fate or destiny that seems to cause the tragedy: destiny is the logical working out of traits in a man's own nature. Character is destiny. Romeo is precipitate: he goes to the Capulet ball uninvited, he jumps over the garden wall to speak with the girl he has just met, he marries Juliet off-hand, he comes between Tybalt and Mercutio, he slays the bloody Tybalt and later he slays himself at the tomb of his lover - it is all of a piece. The tragedy comes from the qualities of Romeo's character and not from an unfavorable star or frowning Providence. (Henneman 193)

Although, this is a valid point, Henneman excludes one very important ingredient which alters Romeo's character, and with it his destiny, and it comes in the form of Juliet. Even though Romeo came uninvited to the ball, it is Juliet's reciprocation of feeling that led him to jump over the garden wall, and it is she who tells him they should marry, which leads to the heated argument with Tybalt. Had Juliet not married Romeo, he would not have reacted peacefully towards Tybalt's provocations and Mercutio would not have had the opportunity to intervene. Juliet becomes a substantial part in Romeo's character and therefore his destiny, as well as her own, simply because she is the more dominant and

mature character who sparks conflict and action. While Romeo goes with his boyish instincts, oblivious to how the world works or any consequences, Juliet is more pragmatic. She makes it clear from the first time they meet,

If that thy bent of love be honourable,

Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow,

By one that Ill produce to come to thee...

But if thou meanest not well,

I do beseech thee –

To cease thy strife, and leave me to my grief. (Rom.2.1.185-87, 192-94)

She makes it evident to Romeo and the audience that she will choose the path this story takes. The request for marriage was done in a demanding but subtle way, leaving Romeo without many alternatives if he wished to see her again. Once she takes command, she does not cease. Considering that this girl is barely a teenager, it is truly remarkable how much power and superiority Shakespeare grants her over Romeo and all the other characters. Were it not for her proposition of marriage, the events in the play would have played out very differently – that is, there would not have been a tragedy caused by the “pair of star-crossed lovers” (Rom.1.1.6).

Juliet displays initiative but also fearlessness. At this point she already knows that Romeo is the son of her father’s enemy but does not at any time feel discouraged or scared of disappointing her family. As a matter of fact, she becomes even more determined and manipulative. As Kate found a way to get what she wants from Petruccio, so Juliet found a way to get what she wants from her parents – she pretended to be submissive. Going along with her father’s wishes and pretending to be willing to marry Paris, she gives herself the time to carry out her plan. The calm and collected demeanour with which she announces her intentions to do what her parents expect is something that we do not see in any of the other characters in the play. Nor do we see any of them lie as well as Juliet. She contains many layers and they are all shown to us throughout the play, one of them being her manipulative side to which she switches as soon as she catches on that the circumstances

might deviate from what she would like them to be. Going from an innocent girl to a masterful liar, she gives a stunning performance in front of her mother, claiming that she has been weeping for Tybalt when in actuality she has been in her chambers with Romeo all night and additionally with no difficulty telling her mother that she will not be satisfied “with Romeo till I behold him - dead” (Rom.3.5.94). Here we also see another advantage she has over the other characters: the power of foreshadowing. Shakespeare gives Juliet the role of the initiator and makes her a character with the power to predict the tragic ending of the play. She mentions several other times that death will come to her and Romeo, when saying to her nurse to bring Romeo so he “take his last farewell” (Rom.3.2.143), and asking Romeo later on when they are parting if they shall ever meet again, while telling him he seems to her like “one dead in the bottom of a tomb” (Rom.3.5.56). This gives Juliet’s character additional agency and depth. Other characters are not as diverse as she and they do not exemplify her wits, initiative and strength.

Romeo is the first example Shakespeare gives of a character that acts impulsively when he kills Tybalt and later Paris just before he hastily drinks the poison. Where he goes, chaos and destruction follow. Juliet’s father is another example of a mercurial, chaotic male character. His reaction depends on Juliet’s action, which is actually how all the characters function. Once Juliet says she does not want to marry Paris, her father’s love morphs into hate and rage. He goes so far as to wish his own child to “hang, beg, starve, die in the streets”, underscoring how changeable, unstable, and weak he is as a character (Rom.3.5.193). Juliet rises above her male characters. Her decisions reflect greater self-control and maturity. This is supported by Henneman’s argument that,

None of the plays written before 1600 need have had the experience of the Sonnets: all the plays written after 1600 point to some change in the poet’s intellectual and spiritual attitude. Yet it may be merely a coincidence. “Romeo and Juliet” was a tragedy of youth; now first are produced themes which only a mature mind could handle, a mind that seemingly had suffered the disappointment of disillusion and ingratitude. (Henneman 196)

The plot that only a “mature mind” can handle is initiated by none other than Juliet. She remains true to herself and her plan, lying to her parents and even her nurse who up to that point was her closest confidant. Making a dangerous decision such as drinking the potion is more than any of the other characters show strength to do, including Romeo.

Shakespeare peppers the play with subtle proof that Juliet is a powerful player worthy of respect, such as her choosing to have a knife beside her in case the potion does not work, and her waking up after Romeo drinks the poison. Juliet is a character who will not be tampered with, for she decides in which direction the play goes and how the other characters will align no matter the cost, while also proving that she is always one step ahead with a plan B just in case (Rom.4.3.23). Another example of a male character that displays instability compared to Juliet is Friar Laurence, who flees from the tomb once he sees Romeo dead, leaving Juliet behind despite the fact that he is portrayed as a reliable and trustworthy person earlier in the play. Juliet yet again is not swayed from her path and deals the final blow – her death. It is only with this that the ending could have full effect. If it were not for her suicide, the two families would never have come together and the hate would have carried on.

The character of Juliet not only initiates but also gives meaning and force to the other characters. Her decisions form Romeo’s path once he marries her. Her actions have a domino effect, for it is because of Juliet that Romeo lingers at the Capulet banquet, which stirs up Tybalt’s anger towards the Montagues, eventually causing him to kill Mercutio, which in turn causes Romeo to kill Tybalt. Juliet’s plan with the potion brings Romeo to her tomb, where he encounters Paris and kills him. Looking at how the events unfold it is no wonder that directors such as Zeffirelli cast actresses with a strong presence. Roger Ebert, who was present at the shooting, recalls how Olivia Hussey’s energetic performance nearly threw the cameraman to the ground: “I remember the heedless energy that Hussey threw into it, take after take, hurling herself almost off the balcony for hungry kisses. (Whiting, balanced in a tree, needed to watch his footing)” (Ebert). On the other hand, Baz Luhrmann’s version lacked such a Juliet and was openly criticised for it. Claire Danes simply did not have the energy to be a catalyst. Even though Juliet is young and pure, by now it is clear the stakes she holds in the play and the importance of her role. This required

someone who bring Juliet's determination to life, which as David Ansen states, "Danes is less successful: that quality of cloaked emotion that works for her elsewhere makes her Juliet a touch remote, and her petulant intonations bring the soaring poetry down to Valley-girl level" (Ansen).

Since Shakespeare's plays spill from generation to generation, it is important to examine how they inspire other artists and creators and how they themselves pass this on to the new audience. This is why the ending of Zeffirelli's version gives Juliet's character much more credit than Luhrmann's does. Hussey does not waste much time on crying, but rather searches for a solution that would enable her to join Romeo in death (*Romeo and Juliet*). By contrast, Danes weeps her heart out, with trembling lips where the audience can barely understand what she is saying (*Romeo + Juliet*). This is after all a character who is a catalyst, and whether she is initiating the beginning of the story or the end there is a certain composure she must hold herself with in order to be believable. Some adaptations do not do her justice, as Dash criticises Garrick once again, saying,

Garrick's text of *Romeo and Juliet*, a play that focuses on "the responses of a teenage girl to the process of growing up and to the meaning of marriage" (p. 69), the actor-manager begins a tradition that reduces Juliet from her proper status as tragic protagonist by cutting lines that show her remarkable independence and intensity. (Dash in Hageman 127)

This is why every line Juliet is given by Shakespeare must be taken into consideration, otherwise it is very easy to lose track of the influence she has and with what maturity she manages to execute her wishes. Even in the end, it is Juliet whom Shakespeare puts in the lead role, as he states it is a story "of Juliet and her Romeo" (Rom.5.3.310). Romeo belongs to her because she is the one orchestrating the story.

In conclusion, as much as Kate and Juliet differ, their marriages bind them together. Ironically, for these women marriage was a source of power rather than an imprisonment to their husbands' whims. They both use their roles as catalysts to get their way. Kate

finally succeeded in managing manage Petruccio and finding peace within her society, while Juliet discovered a way to stay married to Romeo eternally, in death. Whether in comedy or in tragedy, Shakespeare gives these ladies room to lead the plot in the direction of their choosing.

CHAPTER II

In literature, the mother archetype exudes unconditional love, protection and care toward her offspring as they navigate life's triumphs and travails. The mothers in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Titus Andronicus*, however, seem unlikely characters for such a role. Indeed, it is easy to overlook their roles as mothers, considering all the havoc that unfolds around them, as well as their vivid connections to the villains in the plays. Gertrude is presented to the audience as Claudius' wife and Tamora as Titus' prisoner, to which additionally they are queens with a substantial dose of lust integrated in their character. It is important to see past all that and focus on the core of these women and through that understand their motives to rise as catalysts. Remembering that they are just ordinary women who, due to their motherly concerns, react and act the way they do helps the audience relate to them. Shakespeare always masterfully manages to make characters relatable no matter how eccentric they or their circumstances are. Hageman reminds us of Irene Dash's notion of always keeping an open mind when judging Shakespeare's characters, for they are not so different from us. She explains,

In agreeing with Samuel Johnson that Shakespeare's 'characters are not modified by the customs of particular places' but 'are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply, and observation will always find' (p. 71), and with Pope that Shakespeare's 'Characters are . . . as . . . Individual as those in Life itself' (p. 255), Dash declares that Shakespeare's characters-both male and female-can be analyzed with the same methods that one would use to analyze one's neighbors or oneself. She asserts that the fictional worlds represented by Shakespeare are sufficiently similar to our own world that an understanding of the 'beauty, variety, strength, and intelligence . . . errors of judgment and tragic flaws' of Shakespeare's female characters 'should offer us in- sights into our own world'.
(Dash in Hageman 127)

So, even though Tamora may appear to be a ruthless and Gertrude an ignorant queen, they are nonetheless caring mothers. Gertrude, the gentle and lustful yet oblivious queen,

serves as the main trigger for her son Hamlet's revenge and therefore the unraveling of the rest of the play. On the other hand, we have Tamora in *Titus Andronicus*, the tigress who in response to her son's death takes action and moulds the fates of the other characters. These two queens serve as perfect examples of how Shakespeare used the mothers as catalysts in plays, while at the same time maintaining their affectionate maternal side even though he wrote these women as foils to one another. Interestingly enough, it is because of their sons and through their sons that these women initiate the crucial moves that spur the main action in the plays and lead to the ultimate tragedy. There is no doubt that Hamlet would have taken a different path if Gertrude had not married his uncle just two months after his father died, and with that numerous lives lost would have been preserved. It is arguable that Ophelia, Polonius, Laertes, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Claudius, Hamlet and Gertrude herself would not have died if not for that one act done by Gertrude. This reality will be analysed further as we examine how the character of Gertrude initiates thoughts with deadly consequences for all of these characters.

The same can be said of Tamora, as her thirst for revenge is far greater than any other drive seen in *Titus Andronicus*. It is so great that it devours almost all the main characters starting with her main target Titus and trickling down to Lavinia, Quintus, Martius, Bassianus, Saturninus, Demetruis, Chiron and even herself. The birth of this play is with Tamora, which is apt considering I analyse her primarily in the role of a mother. As St. Hilaire elaborates,

The cause of all calamity in *Titus Andronicus* can be traced back to two pairs of events, both which occur in the play's opening scene and both of which establish the motive and opportunity for tragedy that will unfold. The first, the burial of Titus's sons that includes as part of the ritual the sacrifice of Alarbus, provides Tamora with the impetus to seek revenge against Titus and his family; the second, the betrothal and marriage of Saturninus during which Titus kills his son Mutius, places Tamora in the position from which she might wreak that vengeance while at the same time weakening Titus's ability to fend off attack. (St. Hilaire 311)

Therefore, Tamora is the centre of all future action, since the loss of her son and her swift marriage become the two triggers of the play's main actions and reactions. The effects of Tamora's character and the fate she carves out for all her victims will be analysed further in this chapter, but undoubtedly the common thread is that the characters all end up dead simply because Tamora swore revenge. Some were her direct victims, and others like her sons were collateral damage, but the importance of this massacre is that Shakespeare gave Tamora the power to initiate it. St Hilaire argues that all this bloodshed from her side is unnecessary, but simply happens because Tamora "misses" the point behind the slaughter of her son by Titus (St. Hilaire 317). It should have been "the significance of the sacrifice as a stay against revenge" (St. Hilaire 317). She believes that Tamora's "misreading here is typical of the Goths in Rome", which I have to disagree with, as Titus actually is a character who is not only willing to kill other people's children, but his own as well, as Mutius and Lavinia find out. After all, if the rules of sacrifice were so, Tamora never throughout the whole play kills any of Titus' children. She only remains the catalyst of action.

Supporting evidence will come from the plays themselves as well as from notable adaptations of *Hamlet* and *Titus Andronicus* - such as 1948 film *Hamlet* directed by and starring the inevitable Laurence Olivier and the 1996 film *Hamlet* directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh in the only unabridged film adaptation. Additionally, we will look once again at Franco Zeffirelli, who took on *Hamlet* (1990) as yet another Shakespearian play that needed to be adapted for the better understanding of a younger generation, casting an unlikely Mel Gibson who magically made Hamlet relatable to them. References will be made to the brave Julie Taymor, who is the first director to undertake *Titus* (1999) as a project and transfer it from stage to the big screen as a theatrically feature film with Jessica Lange in the role of Tamora. Unmistakably, these two queens might be very different characters, but what binds them together is their role as mothers and how through that role they become the catalysts in the plays.

Introduction of characters

Shakespeare gives both Gertrude and Tamora a dramatic opening that immediately lets the audience know the position these two women hold. While Gertrude seems gentle and oblivious, Tamora is presented as strong and in control, but what stands out the most is that they are both mothers of troubled sons. It is clear from the start that there is something “rotten in the state of Denmark”, as we find the old king dead and his brother announcing his marriage to the recently widowed queen (Ham.1.5.90). The young prince Hamlet is evidently not happy with the given situation, but it is his first soliloquy that gives the audience a clear picture of the core problem in the play – Gertrude. His first lines resemble suicidal thoughts, letting on what a difficult state he is in; it is not clear at that point whether he is referring to the death of his father, the current state of Denmark, his position as the heir to the throne or his vivid dislike for his uncle. Very soon we see that his main concern is his mother’s marriage, as he laments,

But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two:

So excellent a king; that was, to this,

Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother

That he might not beteem the winds of heaven

Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!

Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,

As if increase of appetite had grown

By what it fed on: and yet, within a month—

Let me not think on’t—Frailty, thy name is woman!—

A little month, or ere those shoes were old

With which she follow’d my poor father’s body,

Like Niobe, all tears:—why she, even she—

O, God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,

Would have mourn’d longer—married with my uncle,

My father's brother, but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules: within a month:
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!
It is not nor it cannot come to good:
But break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue. (Ham.1.2.138-59)

Even though Claudius invites Hamlet to stay with them in Denmark and not go to Wittenberg to resume his studies, trying to reassure him that he looks upon him like a son and attempts to comfort him in this time of grief, Hamlet shows only resentment towards his uncle. His disgust towards his mother's marriage and reference to her "incestuous sheets" prove that her actions are of grave consequence and that she holds the power to either resolve the problem within the play or lead it down a road to tragedy. Gertrude is depicted as rather frail and largely incapable of forming her own opinion as she only tells Hamlet to stay in Denmark once her husband invites him to do so. She also seems oblivious to her son's frustration as she asks him why he takes his father's death so personally (Ham.1.2.75). Shakespeare gives the role of the catalyst to a seemingly weak character, and to make matters worse, she is surrounded by very strong, fixed male characters. This is an intriguing trap set by Shakespeare because it takes the audience by complete surprise when they realize that Gertrude is the character steering the storyline and triggering the tragic ending. She is the character we would least expect to drive the plot forward and give motion to other characters. Even though she is described as lustful by her son, "Gertrude does not marry Claudius because of and insatiable, sexual appetite; rather, the need to secure her roles as monarch, mother, and wife seems the primary catalyst in her decision" (Loberg 64). Her marriage to Claudius may be naïve and simply a way of securing her position after her husband's death, which was not uncommon at the time, since women did not hold much power in courts. Regardless, it is an act that triggers her

son Hamlet's need for revenge, and it is also the beginning of the end of Claudius. From the moment Hamlet becomes fixated on Claudius, it is only a matter of time before he attempts to depose him.

Most adaptations introduce Gertrude as a joyful bride, happily standing by Claudius' side, but Zeffirelli approaches the scene from a different angle. Glenn Close, who plays Gertrude, is found in the beginning of the film weeping over old Hamlet's tomb and then abruptly stops as she looks up at Claudius gazing at her un-approvingly, bowing her head obediently to her new husband (*Hamlet* 1990). This might be a dramatic display of Gertrude's inferiority, but nevertheless it emphasises her character's willingness to please. What remains hidden at first glance is that Claudius never allows himself to hurt or remove Hamlet, because even though Gertrude is portrayed as weak, it is this weakness that blinds the men around her, for they do not realise the grip she has on them. Neither Claudius nor Hamlet acts upon his urge to kill because of her. Claudius even states that he would not let himself bring harm to Hamlet because,

The Queen his mother
Lives almost by his looks, and for myself
(My virtue or my plague, be it either which),
She is so conjunctive to my life and soul
That, as the star moves not but in his sphere,
I could not but by her. (Ham.4.3.11-14)

Gertrude may be a rare major character, with only 76 lines and no insight into her thoughts, as she is given no soliloquies like Hamlet and Claudius, but Shakespeare does surprisingly give her the power to trigger the actions of the mightier players in this tragic royal game. By lighting the fire of revenge in her son Hamlet, she starts to unravel the play and the characters around her.

Tamora has a dramatic, though more pompous, entrance too, and she is a much more articulate character than Gertrude. Indeed, Tamora does not have the timid nature of Gertrude but is rather very vocal: with her first speech, she makes it known that there is nothing she would not do for her sons, whether it be kneeling and begging or killing. This is how the audience is introduced to her, as a mother begging for her son's life (Tit.1.1.107). While she may start off from a place of desperation and wake feelings of pity and sorrow in the audience, this is not how Shakespeare intends Tamora's character to continue throughout the play. Carney describes her as an "intense embodiment of motherhood, grieving for her first-born and protective of her remaining sons", which is the core of Tamora's character in my opinion, as she is first and foremost a mother (Carney 428). The moment her eldest son Alarbus is sentenced to death by Titus, Tamora goes through a metamorphosis from a pleading mother to a vengeful griever out for blood, using her other two sons as weapons. Deborah Willis supports the argument of Tamora's transformation by stating,

Tamora's villainy grows out of her acute sense of humiliation rather than out of her lustful nature. It is as if the tenderhearted mother simply dies with Alarbus and in her place stands an insulted, vindictive queen, bent on a highly inflated form of payback – razing Titus's family and faction – an exaggerated form of vengeance for her damaged self-image. (Willis 38)

She did start off more vulnerable than any other character. Tamora's first lines in the play are spoken as she kneels before Titus, begging,

Stay, Roman brethren! Gracious conqueror,
Victorious Titus, rue the tears I shed,
A mother's tears in passion for her son:
And if thy sons were ever dear to thee,
O, think my son to be as dear to me! (Tit.1.1.107-11)

This is crucial not only for the audience to sympathise with her, but also for the other characters to feel this weakness of hers in order to make her later seem more believable

when she tries to claim that she does not desire revenge. While Gertrude starts off rather innocent and unaware of what is going on around her, Tamora is very well aware of the situation she is in and uses it to her advantage. Going from a prisoner to an Empress of Rome is a big leap, but obviously one that Shakespeare decided to give her. Everything else that happens is a consequence of Tamora's plea to Titus being rejected, because from that point on she strives only for the destruction of Andronici family, using all the other characters available to her to bring this destruction to fruition.

Unlike Gertrude, who wishes to protect her son and her husband, Tamora turns her sons Demetrius and Chiron into extensions of herself that will bring Titus down, but her main source of power is her new husband Saturninus, the Emperor of Rome. His sudden infatuation with the Queen of Goths is a key turning point in the power-shift from Titus to Tamora. The power Tamora has over Saturninus is as a mother, as we see when she accepts his hand in marriage and tells him,

And here, in sight of heaven, to Rome I swear,
If Saturnine advance the Queen of Goths,
She will a handmaid be to his desires,
A loving nurse, a mother to his youth. (Tit.1.1.332-35)

Another vessel of her revenge is her lover Aaron, who seems to be a male personification of Tamora. Many of the dreadful deeds done in this play are the actions of Aaron, but just like the other characters mentioned, he also had to wait for Tamora's trigger. Shakespeare positions the character of Tamora such that the other characters must wait for her in order to proceed and play out their part in the plot. Firstly, her sons show this clearly through their reaction as their elder brother is sentenced to death, when instead of taking matters into their own hands, they wait for Tamora to give them the power to take revenge. Demetrius tells Chiron,

Then, madam, stand resolved, but hope withal

The self-same gods that arm'd the Queen of Troy
With opportunity of sharp revenge
Upon the Thracian tyrant in his tent,
May favour Tamora, the Queen of Goths—
When Goths were Goths and Tamora was queen—
To quit the bloody wrongs upon her foes. (Tit.1.1.138-44)

Here we see how the men invest all hope in their mother, for she is the one who will destroy their foes. Similarly, Saturninus does not attempt to leave Lavinia, but once he meets Tamora, it seems like a very easy choice, especially with the help of his brother seizing her in front of everyone and embarrassing him (Tit.1.1.278). This did not need to cause Saturninus to break off his engagement to Lavinia, especially if he had true feelings for her. If nothing else, Saturninus should have maintained his engagement to Lavinia out of respect for Titus, who helped him become Emperor of Rome, but apparently Tamora had the upper hand. Saturninus becomes very bold once he has Tamora by his side and from then on always takes her council before any decision. This brings us to Aaron, who perhaps says it most plainly – Tamora had to pave the way for him. He acknowledges the influence her actions have on his further acts in the play when he says,

Now climbeth Tamora Olympus' top,
Safe out of fortune's shot;...
Upon her wit doth earthly honour wait,
And virtue stoops and trembles at her frown.
Then, Aaron, arm thy heart, and fit thy thoughts,
To mount aloft with thy imperial mistress (Tit.2.1.1-2, 10-14)

She ignites the fire in all of these men, causing the play to unravel into a tragedy.

Character background

The extent to which we are able to explore a character's background depends largely on how much information the author gives us in the play. In the case of Gertrude and Tamora, Shakespeare was not very generous with the information on the former queen but was a bit more willing with the latter. The audience never seems to gain insight into Gertrude's thoughts and is always left wondering how much she knows of her first husband's murder, and how far she went to protect her son from her second husband. Tamora's character is very transparent; she lets the audience know that she is seeking revenge on Titus and using the people around her to do so. These two queens may be written very differently but their effect is the same – because of their roles as mothers, they become catalysts. Before diving into the exploration of their motherhood, it is crucial to examine the background of the characters and look at them holistically, not just as mothers. The three lenses used to examine Gertrude and Tamora will help me to analyse them in situations as widowed queens, new wives and women who affect other women. The similarities and contrasts among these three situations will help us to better understand the choices they make later on as mothers and how they ignite actions of their sons and of others through their sons.

Both of these women are widowed queens with sons from previous marriages, and these circumstances bind them together. Likewise, their new marriages bring about critical events and, in choosing to enter these new marriages, both women confirm their roles as catalysts. Even though they might seem an unlikely pairing, a deep analysis reveals strikingly similar patterns. They exemplify mothers who create chaos and with it the storyline, due to their different approaches when taking on their motherly roles, which brings greater significance to their actions. Hamlet might be the main character in *Hamlet*, but without Gertrude's influence he would be a very different Hamlet, and *Hamlet* would be a very different play. Ultimately, there would be no *Hamlet* without Gertrude and there would be no Hamlet without Gertrude, since she is the one who gave birth to him and since she is the one that turns his melancholy into fury. The same can be said of Titus, who like Hamlet is the man the play is named after, but he does not carry the weight of the play. If there had been no war between Titus and Tamora, the famous tragedy would have gone in

a very different direction. The first steppingstone in both cases is the fact that neither of these women has a living husband any longer. This puts the women in great danger, especially in court because their power and privilege are directly linked to that of their husbands. Both are quick to find the next husband with whom they can retain the position they had, but their approaches to doing so differ. Through this we see the gentleness of Gertrude that eventually brought down Claudius and the tenacious grip of Tamora over Saturninus, which will be elaborated on later. Gertrude mentions her first husband, but also shows love and passion for the new king when she tells Hamlet to “look like a friend on Denmark” (Ham.1.1.69) and not forever “seek for thy noble father in the dust” (Ham.1.1.72). Here, Gertrude acknowledges the dead king and even calls him noble, but also wants her son to accept his new uncle/stepfather as soon as possible. Tamora never mentions the father of her sons, but then again Tamora is in a more difficult situation than Gertrude, for she is not just a widow but a prisoner as well, begging for her son’s life. As widows they are both put in situations where they must acquire a new source of security in a man speedily and they most certainly do not disappoint. Shakespeare does not place much overt emphasis on this, but their remarriages are a great success for them both, bringing them safety and in Tamora’s case bringing her sons safety as well. But in Gertrude’s case, her plan to protect Hamlet backfires.

The second lens I will use to look at these women is through marriage. Once widowed, both women swiftly sought new husbands, but their second unions are quite different. While both queens are depicted as women of lust, Gertrude shows greater affection for Claudius, protecting him even when she is told by Hamlet that Claudius is responsible for the old king’s death and that he set a trap for Hamlet on his journey with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern (Ham.3.4.201-11). Her display of affection is very clear when, even after hearing all this information, she physically intervenes to restrain Laertes when he tries to attack Claudius, which would have been an easy chance to have Claudius dead while at the same time sparing her son any murderous deeds (Ham.4.2.117). When stopping Laertes, Loberg claims this instance shows, “the Queen’s move from verbal to physical means of defense provides evidence of her complexity. Rather than a one-dimensional character or a screen for Hamlet, Queen Gertrude evolves during the course of

the play” (Loberg 66). These different sides of Gertrude create confusion even for the most dangerous characters like Claudius. Gertrude’s caring nature might have won Claudius over, but it also blinds him to the power she holds. At no point does she tell Claudius what her son told her in her bedchamber, which could have altered the entire course of events. If Claudius had known that Hamlet was only acting mad, he would have had a chance to construe a different plan to have him executed, perhaps a more efficient one. Gertrude clearly takes no sides. Robert M. Smith supports this idea, saying,

The Queen characteristically is henceforth loyal, so far as she can be, to both Hamlet and Claudius – she carries out Hamlet’s injunction of secrecy, she defends him by giving the King an erroneous account of the Closet scene... On the other hand she intercepts Laertes, and leaps to the defense of Claudius (Smith 90).

The other surprise Shakespeare gives us through Gertrude is in making her the character who brings Claudius down as she drinks the poisoned drink. With this act she ruins Claudius’ plan unintentionally. These actions may not seem significant at first or may be interpreted as purely coincidental, but they all point to the importance of Gertrude’s character; she is delicate, but her delicate movements spread like ripples and ultimately create waves of destruction.

Gertrude marrying her late husband’s brother is frowned upon, but Tamora’s marriage is even more unusual since it turns a prisoner into an empress. While there is obvious friction between Titus and Saturninus, the presence of Tamora brings everything to a standstill and eventually to a complete collapse. While Saturninus is betrothed to Lavinia, Shakespeare gives the audience a first taste of Tamora’s power in Scene 1 Act 1. The change we see in Saturninus is immediate and huge, for he does not restrain his vivid attraction for Tamora, assuring her,

A goodly lady, trust me; of the hue

That I would choose, were I to choose anew.

Clear up, fair queen, that cloudy countenance:

Though chance of war hath wrought this change of cheer,

Thou comest not to be made a scorn in Rome:

Princely shall be thy usage every way.

Rest on my word, and let not discontent

Daunt all your hopes: madam, he comforts you

Can make you greater than the Queen of Goths.

Lavinia, you are not displeased with this? (Tit.1.1.264-73)

Like Gertrude, Tamora has only scant lines in the play, especially compared to the rest of the characters in *Titus Andronicus*, but words are not needed, because the power this woman yields is far greater. With only her presence, Saturnus already promises her more greatness than she has as a Queen of Goths, which indirectly means that she would be Queen of a greater nation – of Rome. Even though Lavinia is right beside him, Saturnus is completely blinded by Tamora and disrespects his current bride-to-be by asking her if she is displeased with what he said to Tamora, knowing that Lavinia does not stand up to him. It is almost by sheer luck that his brother comes and removes the obstacle of Lavinia from his path, allowing him to marry Tamora. With the same speed, Saturninus washes his hands happily of Lavinia and declares Tamora to be his new bride, leaving a mortified Titus who in the meantime kills his son Mutius by trying to get Lavinia back to Saturninus. With impressive skill, Shakespeare makes the power shift in the play this early. The sole character of Tamora dissolves a set marriage, prompts a father to kill his son and rises from a prisoner to a Queen all in one scene. All these actions trigger dire consequences.

However, unlike Gertrude, Tamora never shows true concern for Saturninus, nor does she show any capacity for affection. She keeps Saturninus under control, constantly calming him down like a mother would a child with a tantrum. Through him she plans to exact her revenge and destroy the Andronici, instructing her husband,

[Aside to SATURNINUS] My lord, be ruled by me, be won at last;

Dissemble all your griefs and discontents:
You are but newly planted in your throne;
Lest, then, the people, and patricians too,
Upon a just survey, take Titus' part,
And so supplant you for ingratitude,
Which Rome reposes to be a heinous sin,
Yield at entreats; and then let me alone:
I'll find a day to massacre them all
And raze their faction and their family,
The cruel father and his traitorous sons,
To whom I sued for my dear son's life,
And make them know what 'tis to let a queen
Kneel in the streets and beg for grace in vain. (Tit.2.1.444-47)

Tamora's thoughts are bloody and her longing for a massacre becomes the wheel to turn, making all the other wheels of action go into motion systematically. Neither Tamora nor Gertrude speaks many lines in their respective plays, but they both stir up a brewing hell and wrack havoc on their families and kingdoms.

Finally, a third lens I will use to look at these two queens is other women in the plays. Whether by coincidence or purpose, Shakespeare put before Gertrude and Tamora two young women who are connected to their sons in different sexual, abusive and vengeful ways. For Hamlet, this young woman is Ophelia and for Chiron and Demetrius, the young woman is Lavinia. The way their sons treat these young women and the way the queens use these women as bait may differ, but the final result is the same – both Ophelia and Lavinia die. Gertrude displays no hatred for Ophelia, and has no reason to, since Polonius and she use Ophelia only when needed, while Tamora displays a deep hatred towards Lavinia, whom she views an extension of her enemy – Titus. The queens' conduct

in relation to their sons and other women reveals their true nature. Gertrude is aware that Claudius and Polonius are using Ophelia as a ploy to test Hamlet's sanity. Ophelia is put in harm's way the first time Hamlet rages at her all the frustration he built up because of his mother, telling Ophelia "or if/ Thou wilt need marry, marry a fool, for wise men know well/ Enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery/ Go, and quickly too" (Ham.3.1.134-37). With this in mind, and given the fact that her father is murdered by Hamlet, Gertrude's answer when Ophelia slips into madness and wishes to speak to her is, "I will not speak to her" (Ham.4.2.1). She wants to distance herself from Ophelia as much as possible, naively pretending not to understand what Ophelia would even want to speak to her about, while in actuality knowing all the woe this young girl experienced because of her son. Gertrude simply stands by and agrees with all of it. She never mentions Ophelia after Hamlet kills Polonius, and only displays sorrow once Ophelia kills herself. When that happens, Gertrude attains her role of a mediator by calming the situation, saying she wished Ophelia had been Hamlet's wife (Ham.5.1.222) – a rather ironic and disingenuous assertion since Gertrude stoked Hamlet's anger and willingly failed to protect Ophelia from his wrath. Gertrude is after all the first character to acknowledge the cause of Hamlet's rage – "I doubt it is no other but the main,/ His father's death and our hasty marriage" (Ham.2.2.56-57).

Tamora, unsurprisingly by now, charts a much bloodier course. Her instructions to her sons to ravage Lavinia encapsulate just how far she is willing to go to hurt Titus. She fuels her sons with hatred, exaggerating the conversation Lavinia and Bassianus had with her in the woods, immediately relating her sons' love for her to revenge they should take upon the couple – "Revenge it as you love your mother's life,/ Or be ye not henceforth called my children" (Tit.2.3.114-15) There is something almost incestuous about the way Tamora instructs Chiron and Demetrius to rape Lavinia – "Therefore, away with her and use her as you will./ The worse to her, the better loved of me" (Tit.2.3.166-67). Like Gertrude, Tamora's character has incestuous undertones to her maternal role. Hamlet's numerous comments about Gertrude's "incestuous sheets" (Ham.1.2.157) and his open attack on her sexual relationship with Claudius in Act 3 Scene 4 create a incestuous undercurrent to his relationship with his mother. Some adaptations like Olivier's 1948

version intensify the incestuous implications, while others like Branagh's 1996 version do not. However, this has been an idea many intellectuals have tackled further after Sigmund Freud used Hamlet's case to typify the Oedipus complex in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). The fact of the matter is that this intensified relationship with his mother made Hamlet destructive in his relationship with Ophelia, or any other woman as far as the reader is concerned, since we never hear of him having any interest in another woman. Tamora's actions might have differed from Gertrude's, but they are just as destructive for the other women in her sons' lives; they brutally rape Lavinia as per mother's orders and we never read of them forming relationships with other women. These examples and those previously mentioned lead us to the core of these two Shakespearean female characters as we enter into their realm of motherhood and the power they wield through their sons.

Motherhood

The first and most important piece of information we get from Shakespeare about Gertrude and Tamora is that they are both mothers. One is introduced as she tries to cheer her son up after the death of his father, and the other as she begs for her son's life. These introductions indicate that the role of mother is the main role these two queens will play, and it is precisely through that which makes them mothers, i.e. their sons, that they manage to achieve the purpose they are meant to have in each respective play – the role of a catalyst.

GERTRUDE

To move the play forward, one character must take a significant step, which in turn affects all the other characters. All Gertrude needs to do is turn Hamlet's sorrow over his father's death into rage. After all, she is the link between the ghost, Claudius, and Hamlet who are major characters of action, and she is the one that triggers them. *Hamlet* could easily have been a play about a son simply revenging his father's death, but with Gertrude in the mix it turns into much more. By making her as ambiguous as he did, Shakespeare gives much room for doubt when it comes to Gertrude's intentions, making her even more intriguing.

Many have pondered over the justifications of her charges, as Robert M. Smith names four that are brought against her,

1) hasty marriage; 2) incest; 3) adultery; and, 4) murder. Modern critics who have made extensive studies of the play, Bradley, Stoll, Lawrence, Adams, and Wilson, exculpate her of murder, but hold her guilty on the other three counts. Keller and Van Dam, on the other hand, pronounce her guilty only of hasty marriage and incest. Baudin is one among many critics wholly oblivious to another point too often overlooked, that Hamlet suspected her of murder.... (Smith 84)

That said, I disagree with the last two charges, since there is no evidence that Gertrude enters into a relationship with Claudius before the death of old Hamlet, and as far as murder goes, that is made pretty clear through the passage. Claudius never “exchanges confidence with the Queen as an accomplice in the murder” and she is taken by surprise when Hamlet accuses her of killing the King (Smith 91).

In Zeffirelli’s adaptation, we see Glenn Close be this intriguing, torn woman who effortlessly controls the three men around her – the ghost, her son, and her husband. Close explains to her co-star Mel Gibson, “My Gertrude is very alive. I think she had Hamlet at a very early age, married a much older man and all her sensuality, all her physical comfort she kind of got from her son. They grew up together... She’s the kind of woman that three men are revolving around” (Gibson). Hamlet’s revenge becomes a creature of a different nature. While the audience may expect him to be overwhelmed by his father’s death, it turns out that the main cause of his despair is his mother. In his first soliloquy, on the brink of a mental breakdown, he reminisces about what a wonderful and caring husband his late father was, and how “with such dexterity to incestuous sheets” his mother went (Ham.1.2.157). Just like his dead father, Hamlet is more focused on Gertrude’s actions than Claudius’. Zeffirelli points out that once the ghost tells him how he was murdered, Hamlet does not go after his uncle; instead “the first thing that Hamlet does is furiously cry out against his mother ““Oh, most pernicious woman!”” That’s the first thing he says. He doesn’t take a sword and kill his uncle. He attacks his mother” (Jacobs). His late father the ghost speaks only twice, and in both instances asks Hamlet to take pity on his mother. It is

interesting that Shakespeare brings the ghost back a second time, when Hamlet verbally attacks Gertrude in her bedroom chamber - one of the most intriguing scenes that displays the incestuous undertones of the mother-son relationship. It is also when Hamlet confronts her with the truth. The ghost appears exactly when Hamlet refers to her sexuality,

Nay, but to live

In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,

Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love

Over the nasty sty,--. (Ham.3.4.92-94)

As if to intervene before an incestuous act can occur and, in a way, to lay claim on his wife, the ghost distracts Hamlet. He never encourages or guide his son after the first appearance, but focuses solely on making sure no harm comes to Gertrude, as he instructs Hamlet that he visits only “to whet thy almost blunted purpose” and to remind him not to frighten Gertrude further (Ham.3.4.110-13). As the focal point of her son and late husband, Gertrude is in a position to easily stir and manipulate their emotions and therefore influence their actions, which in turn have consequences that form the plot of the play.

The chamber scene is of great importance because Shakespeare shows that Gertrude's impassive nature is the incentive for the action of others. She decides to not share with her husband what her son reveals to her, and nor does she punish her son for his conduct in front of her. Before analysing Hamlet's approach in the chamber scene, it is worth noting the influential power that grows in Gertrude, as Loberg claims,

Hamlet and Claudius show increasing vulnerability (due to their murderous crimes), and the Queen grows in dominion. The closet scene exemplifies the shifting of power. Hamlet enters his mother's room to charge, “Mother, you have my father much offended” (3.4.11); but he leaves resigned to his fate in England (3.4.207). In comparison, Gertrude begins this scene as Claudius and Polonius' pawn (much like Ophelia, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern); but afterwards, the Queen is viewed as an authority on the subject of her son. Interestingly, she provides the King with a

censured and distorted version of Polonius' murder, creating the best possible image of Hamlet, his actions, and his madness. (Loberg 67)

This argument supports the notion that Gertrude's role as a catalyst grows from a rather concealed position to a more pronounced one as she evolves with the play. Her capacity to play both fields and protect Hamlet and Claudius at the same time grows, as does her ability to manipulate, which is exactly what she does to Hamlet in her bedchamber.

The unusually detailed criticism of Gertrude's sexual acts with Claudius would make any mother wonder what her son's intentions are, but Gertrude remains on Hamlet's side despite the insults. It is not in the plays notes that Hamlet throws his mother on a bed, and yet this scene is almost always staged that way in order to heighten the sexual tone for the audience. Regarding Zeffirelli's adaptation, Roger Ebert pointed out, "indeed, there are subtle physical suggestions that she has loved her son too closely, too warmly, creating the buried incestuous feelings that are the real spring of Hamlet's actions" (Ebert). The three film adaptations differ a lot because in Olivier's version he kisses his mother on the lips as she holds him passionately while lying on her bed (*Hamlet* 1948). Zeffirelli goes even further and allows his Hamlet to simulate sex with Gertrude where she is only able to calm him by kissing him erotically on the mouth (*Hamlet* 1990). Branagh's Hamlet stands apart, as he tried to avoid the incestuous atmosphere, yet he still manages to undo the upper part of Gertrude's dress and as expected throw her on the bed (*Hamlet* 1996). In all three versions, the ghost appears and intervenes, as if to stop incest from happening. This is an important side of Gertrude's relationship with Hamlet because his obsession with her sexuality allows her to control his emotions; Shakespeare essentially lets her do what she will with her greatest weapon – her son. The power she has over him, which she undoubtedly does, no matter how fragile she seems, is the reason Hamlet leaves the chamber set to go to England, instead of confronting Claudius. She lets him believe she is on his side just enough to calm him, but unbeknownst to Hamlet, she remains faithful to her husband at the same time.

Gertrude's sin that ignites the play's plot is her second marriage, which is a peculiar choice considering that Shakespeare was writing in the time of Elizabeth I, whose father was the second husband to Catherine of Aragon. Catherine was married to Arthur, Prince of Wales, but once he died Henry VIII was next in line. True, Henry VIII did not murder his brother like Claudius did, and Catherine did get a dispensation from the Pope after testifying the marriage was not consummated, but the situation does nonetheless resonate with Gertrude's marriage to Claudius. Henry VIII married his brother's widow for the sake of the country and had a child with her; the same widow that Elizabeth's mother Anne Boleyn overthrew and made the King of England leave the Catholic Church. Coincidentally, Jason P. Rosenblatt mentions an interesting take on this matter when recalling "an allusion in *Der Bestrafte Brudermord*" in which there is "reference to a papal dispensation", as Gertrude states, "had not the Pope allowed such a marriage, it would never have happened" (Rosenblatt 356). Her marriage to Claudius is never proven to be illegal in anything but Hamlet's opinion. These subtle details about Gertrude make her a very unlikely catalyst, which she proves to be yet again by not sharing with Claudius all the details from her encounter with Hamlet in her chamber. It seems rather inconceivable that Gertrude would swear to keep Hamlet's secret of his seeming madness, and that she would not tell Claudius of all this if she indeed was plotting with him all along. Instead, she only mentions that he is mad, as Hamlet wishes, and naturally she points out Polonius' death, which would have been impossible to hide. These are not the decisions of a naïve woman. She supports her son and keeps his secret, which is perhaps best shown in Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* where she wishes to intervene in Claudius' plan to send her son off with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, but Hamlet reassures her that he will kill them before they get to him (*Hamlet* 1990).

The degree to which Gertrude interferes is crucial because the more she is involved in the plot, the more different the outcome is. Consider, for instance, a postmodernist provocative adaptation by Margaret Atwood called "Gertrude talks back" where Gertrude lectures Hamlet in her chamber, giving the reader a whole new perspective on her character. As she defends her new husband and her sexuality, she also points out her son's faults: "and let me tell you, everyone sweats at a time like that, as you'd find out if you

ever gave it a try. A real girlfriend would do you a heap of good” (Atwood). The main perspective is to show how much power Gertrude has and how instantly the plot would change if her character changed. She tells Hamlet at the end,

Oh! You think what? You think Claudius murdered your Dad? Well, no wonder you’ve been so rude to him at the dinner table!

If I’d known that, I could have put you straight in no time flat.

It wasn’t Claudius, darling.

It was me. (Atwood)

Through this we see the ease with which Gertrude could change the actions and fates of all the other characters; one only needs to imagine, like Atwood did. The power of Gertrude’s character lies in her ambiguity, as Shakespeare created her with an unnoticeable yet enormous capacity to trigger other characters.

Claudius, the second major character of action, is also affected by Gertrude, firstly because he is constrained by her love for Hamlet and cannot harm him directly, secondly because Gertrude does not reveal to him the important information that Hamlet tells her in her chamber, and thirdly because she drinks from the poisoned cup and ruins his plan. Her influence is directed squarely at Hamlet, as T.S. Eliot states in his critical essay about the play: “to have heightened the criminality of Gertrude would have been to provide the formula for a totally different emotion in Hamlet” (Eliot). This proves that her catalytic role in Hamlet’s life has a domino effect on everyone else. Once Hamlet is set into motion, he becomes a weapon – a weapon that kills Polonius, which indirectly causes Ophelia’s suicide, and murders Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Laertes and finally Claudius.

However, Hamlet still seem to wait for Gertrude to give him the final push, and as any good mother she does just that. He appears to search for further reassurance regarding his father’s murder. Even though he believes the ghost it is not enough in order for him to act upon his oath to revenge. Setting a play for Claudius to re-enact his gruesome deed is just another desperate move made to sum up the courage to kill his uncle. Even in this scene we see Gertrude’s gentle but ever-present grasp on Hamlet as she offers him to sit next to her

while he chooses to sit beside Ophelia pointing out that she is “mettle more attractive”, almost in a mocking tone to make his mother jealous (Ham.3.2.100). Even after Claudius’ obvious distress after leaving the play and his soliloquy where he admits his sins, Hamlet takes out his sword but finds an excuse not to murder his uncle for he is “fit and seasoned for his passage” to heaven, because he appears to be in prayer (Ham.3.3.86). Only once Gertrude drinks from the poisoned cup is Hamlet able to fulfil his long-awaited revenge.

Gertrude catalyses even the very end of the play. By insisting that Laertes’ sword dipped in poison would not suffice and that instead Claudius would need to prepare a poisoned drink, Shakespeare gave Gertrude a unique opportunity to set the actions of the other characters in a different direction. She changes the outcome of the whole play. In Olivier’s adaptation, as in others such as Michael Almereyda’s *Hamlet* (2000), Gertrude is aware of the poisoned cup and drinks it to save her son. But this is not what Shakespeare intended for Gertrude. She may have made the catalytic move, but she always remains neutral. In the play she drinks from the cup and offers it to Hamlet as well, proving that she had no knowledge of Claudius’ plan, and yet she managed to sway it in a different direction (Ham.5.2.269). Only when she is poisoned does Laertes confess, and Hamlet finally does what he has been contemplating the entire play – he kills his uncle. Even in that moment, Shakespeare does not let Gertrude’s character fade, for Hamlet speaks of his mother while forcing the drink down his throat: “Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane,/ Drink of this potion./ Is thy union here? /Follow my mother” (Ham.5.2.303-04). Cleverly, Shakespeare weaves Gertrude into Hamlet’s decisions, but her influence appears to remain just as strong when it comes to the fate of the other characters.

TAMORA

There are three different ways Tamora moves the plot forward in *Titus Andronicus* and all three are connected to her sons, because as with Gertrude, Shakespeare uses Tamora’s role as a mother to initiate all further actions that take place in the play. However, before exploring the three ways in which Tamora drives the plot, it is important to note that from

the start, the audience sees how disposable sons are to Titus, as he returns to Rome with twenty-one of them dead and the other four soon become three because of him. The irony is that he kills a son (Mutius) for a daughter (Lavinia) that he ends up killing anyway. With this in mind, the analysis of Tamora as a mother becomes more complex. She does not see her sons as disposable; rather, she begs for her son's life, and unlike Titus, accepts his death with such deep sorrow that her rage sets the rest of the play in action. A scene in Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999) leaves a lasting impression, where the faces of Tamora and Titus are opposite each other and the flames of war burn in the background as the music swells and lets the viewers know that from that point on, Tamora will get her revenge even if all must die. The flames in the scene depict the fire that is lit inside of her when her eldest son is killed and gives a visual depiction of her state of mind.

The Goth queen turns into such a powerful catalyst because, as Deborah Willis points out, Alarbus' death is more than just his death – it is partially Tamora's death as well. Willis elaborates,

Revenge enables only a perverse form of healing. The experience of damage to self-image that coincides with traumatic loss exerts a pressure that produces revenge's excess. The parent or close relative who survives the child's death struggles, in a sense, with a double death – his own as well as the child's. Tamora's image of the "gnawing vulture (in the) mind" that needs to be eased by revenge is relevant here – the vulture continues to feed on a dead part of the self long after the external death of the child has taken place. The point will be not merely to avenge the dead child with another death but also to avenge the damaged self; hence the revenger seeks out additional targets for destruction. (Willis 32)

This "gnawing vulture" is the animal that turns Tamora into a catalyst of destruction. The first instance Tamora takes on the role of a catalyst is when she decides to avenge Alarbus' death. The second time is when she uses her sons Demetrius and Chiron to ravage Lavinia and attempts to trick Titus into believing they are Rape and Murder in Act 5 Scene 2. By underestimating old Titus, Tamora loses the upper hand and unknowingly serves her sons to him on a platter, which he in turn later serves to her, literally. While she may have hurt

Titus with her two sons, she also loses because of them. The third way Tamora catalyses the play is when she takes on a more masculine role and becomes more like Titus in deciding to sacrifice her own son. The baby boy fathered by Aaron is brought by the nurse with a message from Tamora to kill him (Tit.4.2.66-69). In that moment, she loses any compassion she might have gained from the audience and also loses Aaron's loyalty. There she becomes a catalyst for Aaron's destructiveness, as he becomes the ruin not only of her, but of many others as well.

In Taymor's adaptation, Jessica Lange plays Tamora, a character that has not been put on a film screen before, so her analysis of this queen is quite valuable. An important statement she makes about Tamora is that with the "passion and obsession of motherhood" Tamora "turns everyone's fate around" (Lange). Even though Lange says, "I approached it from the most human departure point-which was this primal, emotional connection between a mother and her sons", she still manages to choreograph this revenge that ultimately proves self-destructive (Painter). There is no doubt that Shakespeare put Tamora on her knees from the start, only to give way to her need for revenge and with it turn her into a catalyst. If Alarbus had been spared, the plot would have been quite different, as there would have been no need for Tamora to use Saturninus as an instrument to set the scene for Aaron and her sons to destroy Titus. Lavinia, Martius and Quintus would not fall victims to the ploy and Tamora would not have taken the next step of involving her two other sons in this tragic game. It was a game after all, because the plot of the play basically amounts to a competition between Tamora and Titus. "Rome is the wilderness of tigers" Titus alludes, and the tiger turned out to be Tamora (Tit.3.1.54). She is referred to as a tiger first by Lavinia (Tit.2.3.143.) and later on by Lucius as he forbids the burial of her body –

As for that ravenous tiger, Tamora,

No funeral rite, nor man in mourning weeds,

No mournful bell shall ring her burial;

But throw her forth to beasts and birds of prey. (Tit.5.3.194-97)

It seems to be an eye for an eye type of game that Tamora starts once her eldest son is killed, and the game does not end until all fall victim to it. With the help of Aaron and her sons, she manages to hurt Titus immensely, but it is the way she does it that is very unusual. At first, she shows great restraint and proves to be an impeccable strategist. This is best demonstrated through her control over Saturninus as she cunningly uses him to let Titus believe that she harbours no ill will towards him and with that makes it easier for her to hurt him. She manages to fool him into thinking that she will persuade Saturninus to pardon Martius and Quintus and spare their lives (Tit.2.4.305), which of course is not the case. Once Lavinia is within her grasp as well, Tamora instructs her sons to not let “this wasp outlive us both to sting” (Tit.2.3.132) and “see that you make her sure” (Tit.2.3.187), meaning that they should kill her once they are done. These are all examples of how meticulous and decisive her actions are, and yet she never gets her hands dirty.

Unfortunately for Tamora, her sons become her undoing as they did not follow her instructions and eventually Lavinia is able to write in the dirt their names, revealing them to Titus. Demetrius and Chiron may simply have been acting out what their mother triggered in them, but their inability to act alone cost them their lives. Tamora did not have the sharp senses once she delivered Aaron’s child, and the audience detects a change in her character as she becomes overconfident, while at the same time Titus starts to regain his strength. The roles of Titus and Tamora seem to reverse at this point when she weakens, and he starts to contemplate his revenge. The thirst for death is a fundamental part of their characters, and once Titus is triggered by Tamora he influences all those close to him, including young Lucius. This is a particularly disturbing moment when the audience witnesses a child proclaim, “I say, my lord, that if I were a man,/ Their mother’s bed-chamber should not be safe” (Tit.4.1.107-8). The mention of her bedchamber implies to rape, and indeed there is a constant aura of sexuality around Tamora as there is around Gertrude. The most evident clue Shakespeare leaves the audience is Tamora’s frequent comparison to Semiramis, who herself was “so sexually voracious, according to some accounts, that she seduced her own son, and even legitimized parent-child union so that she could marry him” (Archibald 27).

Shakespeare constantly intertwines the maternal side of Tamora with her explicit sexuality, which he continuously puts to her advantage. Taymor taps into Tamora's sexuality quite a lot, boosting it as much as possible on screen. This idea of mother/lover duality is best supported by Jo Eldridge Carney depiction of the Goth queen:

While Tamora is a powerful maternal force, even giving birth during the course of the play, she is also depicted as a highly sexualized, a "most insatiate and luxurious woman" (5.1.88.), a duality that would not necessarily have been seen as a contradiction given early modern anxiety about female agency. As Susan Dunn-Hensley puts it, "Perhaps more than Shakespeare's other queens, Tamora illustrates male fear of the transgressive, contaminating female". Her liaison with Aaron, even after she marries Saturninus, broadcasts her licentiousness. In 2.3, just before the murder of Bassianus and the rape of Lavinia, Tamora meets Aaron and tries to seduce him: even then her language conflates motherhood and sexuality, as she imagines that "each wreathed in the other's arms" the birds will "be unto us as is a nurse's song/ Of lullaby to bring her babe asleep". (Carney 430)

She brims with lust for her new husband Saturninus and her lover Aaron, which Taymor also draws upon significantly in her film, depicting Tamora as a very sexual creature. Aaron is aware of her sexual power as he calls her, "This goddess, this Semiramis, this nymph" (Tit.2.1.22), but unlike Saturninus he tried not to be completely consumed by her lust. In Taymor's adaptation this scene is very physical, which helps the viewer comprehend the ease with which Tamora devours men around her (*Titus* 1999). She spreads her will onto Aaron, who does not seem to have a reasonable explanation why he should harbour such hate for Titus, except that he shares the feelings Tamora has. It is evident when he says, "Vengeance is in my heart, death in my hand,/ Blood and revenge are hammering in my head./ Hark Tamora, the empress of my soul", that she triggered these feelings in him (Tit.2.2.38-39).

The final time Tamora ignites action in other characters is when her youngest son is born. Once she decided to take on this Titus-like-masculine figure and see her son as

disposable, she begins to lose her influence. Her motherly nature is the catalytic power Shakespeare gave her, but when she turns more pragmatic and realises her child is black, which would only harm her status and marriage to Saturninus, she loses Aaron. But unlike Tamora and Titus, Aaron did not wish to murder his new-born son (Tit.4.2.70). With this she sets off a chain reaction, sending Aaron to the Goths where he tells of all Tamora has done, revealing her to Lucius. That is the first step to her downfall, while the second is her unrealistic plan to fool Titus into believing she is Revenge. In contrast to the way Shakespeare originally characterised Tamora, now Shakespeare blunts her senses and lets her believe Titus' speech about wanting Rape and Murder to stay with him (Tit.5.2.142-44). Naturally, Chiron and Demetrius listen to her advice and stay with Titus, thereby confirming that their role was simply to be a weapon triggered by their mother. Unknowingly she delivered her two sons to their death, just like she delivered the last one. Once Tamora puts her own demise into action, all others die too: Chiron and Demetrius are baked into pies, Lavinia is killed, and Tamora, Titus, Saturninus and finally Aaron are left to famish. The queen of Goths waged a war of revenge and used her power as a catalyst to leave a trail of blood behind her.

CHAPTER III

Every plot has a protagonist, but what complicates a story and makes it more interesting are the obstacles presented by the antagonist. The role of the villain is crucial in order for the protagonists to show their strength and virtue, for the layering of the plot and for the story to move forward. Shakespeare used the villain role to its full extent, making it most effective and even more importantly a catalytic source in *Macbeth* and *King Lear*.

Interestingly, he chose women to be catalysts of these plays, writing Lady Macbeth and Goneril as some of his most famous female villains. Henry David Gray concurs this remarkable choice made by the 16th century author, saying, “There is something most interesting and peculiar in the way Shakespeare seems to have regarded his heroine as an increasingly important factor in carrying forward the action of the play, and more and more as the center of dramatic interest and appeal” (Gray 122). As in most of Shakespeare’s tragedies, women do not have the role of a protagonist; instead, they seem to turn into villains as they begin to strive for more presence, and while doing so they tend to take on masculine traits, for which they are eventually punished. Indeed, female characters who take action of any kind or acquire power are immediately distinguished as more masculine, because strength and ambition are mainly associated with men. Shakespeare makes them shed their femininity layer by layer, and in time they lose the sympathy of the audience, as they become equals to their male counterparts. The importance of masculinity in Shakespeare’s female characters will be explored further in the following chapter, while here the connection to a villainous woman that inevitable begins to display male characteristics will be analysed as she takes on the role of the play’s catalyst.

Lady Macbeth is a primary example of such a woman. We find her at first waiting at home for her husband to return from battle, a typical scene of the time depicting her as an obedient, dutiful wife who has no part in the action of the play; however, we soon realise that once she is done reading her husband’s letter, the whole play is set into motion by her reaction. Goneril in *King Lear* may not be a prominent villain as Lady Macbeth, but she certainly plays the part equally well. When Shakespeare decided to make her character set the tone of how Lear’s question of love should be answered, she became the catalyst for all

further actions that take place. Goneril's lies of exaggerated love for her father affected her sisters and Lear's reaction, which eventually affected the course of the play. In this chapter I will look at the roles of Lady Macbeth and Goneril who as villains become catalysts and yet show an incredible depth to their character, which gives the reader an opportunity to see these women in a different light. The adaptations considered are Justin Kurzel's *Macbeth* (2015), Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971), Edwin Sherin's play *King Lear* (1974) and Richard Eyre's *King Lear* (2018).

Introduction to characters

The situation a character is found in at the beginning of the play allows the audience to form an opinion of them, but also leaves room for that opinion to be changed as their catalytic influence is gradually exposed. Lady Macbeth and Goneril are set up by the main men in their lives to become catalysts for them and for the other characters. We find both of these women in unnatural situations, which are forced upon them and which they take on very cunningly and ambitiously. They would not be catalysts if they had not been pushed into that position, but Shakespeare makes them the match that lights the fire of the male leads. The unnatural circumstances they find themselves in are of great importance because we are allowed to see through this how skilful and ruthless these women are, and we are able to question how they came to take on the traits of men while maintaining their femininity.

Lady Macbeth is introduced as a caring and concerned wife, reading her husband's letter, but what makes her entrance significant is that she is mentioned in the play previously. After a bloody battle, Macbeth is confronted by the witches who plant a seed of hope that he will be king, while also immediately making him insecure by saying that Banquo's children shall be kings, to which additionally he is suddenly given reason to believe that these predictions may come true when he is told that his new title is Thane of Cawdor (Mac.1.3.105). However, Macbeth is deeply disappointed when Duncan proclaims his eldest son the Prince of Cumberland, which creates a great confusion and anger in him, but also gives us reason to wonder if these were not simply Macbeth's own ambitions in

the first place, and the witches were simply a figment of his imagination born out of the thirst for power. Macbeth is obviously not an unworthy man, as he is respected by the king and other nobleman, so it is quite possible Macbeth believed himself to be deserving of such a high validation. What is most interesting here is that after all these events took place, the first person he mentions is his wife. He seems most eager to tell her of the king's arrival (Mac.1.5.46) and even sends her a letter which arrives moments before he reaches her. This strong connection he has to Lady Macbeth is symbolic of her strength and the strength she provides him with.

Once Macbeth's dependence on his mother is established, we are able to see how the storm rises in Lady Macbeth, as she wields her power and becomes the energy that moves everyone in the play. Reading Macbeth's letter, she may have simply dismissed this as her husband's imagination or may even have been frightened by the thought of unearthly beings, but instead she embraces the news wholeheartedly and begins to contemplate the fruition of the witches' prophecies. Her true beliefs become very clear at this point since her first instinct is to question her husband's strength – "Yet do I fear thy nature;/ It is too full o' the milk of human kindness/ To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great" (Mac.1.5.14-16). She takes the initiative immediately by planning to set her husband on the right path to the crown, stating,

Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal. (Mac.1.5.23-28)

The impression of a confined wife quickly dissipates as the audience meets the real Lady Macbeth in her full capacity, hungry for victory and thirsty for power. Of course, this is nothing less than what Macbeth wants, but she is a woman, and these thoughts are not attributed to feminine behaviour, but rather to the violent and bloodthirsty desires of men

going into battle. Yet, she maintains her outward femininity all along. At no point does she show signs of physical aggression. Meanwhile, her inner thoughts remain dark and bloody as she contemplates to use Macbeth as her instrument to gain power.

Her next monologue takes the audience even further into her villainous nature as she detaches herself from a maternal figure, which was the most important part of a woman at the time. Her request to unearthly powers states,

Come, you spirits

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,

And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full

Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;

Stop up the access and passage to remorse,

That no compunctious visitings of nature

Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between

The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,

And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,

Wherever in your sightless substances

You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,

And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,

That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,

Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,

To cry 'Hold, hold!'. (Mac.1.5.38-52)

Her character's role becomes vivid at this point, because not only does she dare to influence her husband, the main character of the play, but she also wishes to become more masculine than him. As we have seen, Lady Macbeth doubts her husband's nature, fearing that he is meek, and yet while believing she is stronger than him, she still wishes for even

more power. Asking to be “unsexed”, wanting to have more male attributes, makes her an even greater villain. Abdicating motherhood and maternal impulses was considered a most sinful desire, as bearing children was a woman’s main role and the core of her existence. Not having a child was associated with witchcraft, and her requests to “murdering ministers” only makes her seem closer to being a witch herself, which of course she is not since she is unable to perform any spells or foresee the future like the other witches in the play. Polanski comments on this frequent notion of Lady Macbeth’s association with witchcraft, saying, “there are three witches already at the beginning, Lady Macbeth doesn’t have to be another witch, they should be young ambitious people, people at those times made great things at the age of twenty or thirty” (Polanski). Her ambition, cruelty and lack of offspring do not make her a witch, but they do make her a catalyst because even though the witches planted the idea of the crown in Macbeth’s, it is his wife who instigates the action after all. The moment she says “ O, never/ Shall sun that morrow see!”, is the moment he starts to consider murdering Duncan seriously (Mac.1.5.59). Children do however play a huge role in Lady Macbeth’s actions as is portrayed in Kurzel’s *Macbeth* which will be analyzed later in the research of the background of her character. Basically, the more a female character displayed these manly traits while rejecting motherhood, having ambitions, killing, or wishing for power, the more she would be considered a villain. However, in Lady Macbeth’s case this also contributed to becoming a catalyst to her husband, while at the same time his ruin. Once she “feeds these ‘mortal thoughts’ to her husband” she becomes the catalyst of their doom (Favila 1). Marina Favila supports this argument when addressing that, “for Lady Macbeth, mortal thoughts become a killing consequence; for Macbeth, thoughts of mortality. His wish to become king is no longer enough. He must be king always (Favila 1).

Goneril finds herself in an equally unnatural situation, as we are introduced to her at a family meeting with her aging father asking his three daughters to express their love for him so that he can accurately distribute his kingdom among them. Lady Macbeth and Goneril share a very obvious trait from the very start – they are both very believable liars. They use this trait to their advantage, making them even more devious and dangerous to other characters. Lady Macbeth contemplates her lies and instructs her husband to lie too:

To beguile the time,
Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under't. He that's coming
Must be provided for: and you shall put
This night's great business into my dispatch. (Mac.1.5.61-66)

This is very similar to what Goneril does to her father – she lies. In response to his unreasonable request that she profess feelings she does not have and should not have for her father, she simply lies. This sets the mood for the rest of the play and becomes Goneril's pattern. She proclaims,

Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter;
Dearer than eye-sight, space, and liberty;
Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare;
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour;
As much as child e'er loved, or father found;
A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable;
Beyond all manner of so much I love you. (Lr. 1.1.53-59)

The extent she exaggerates her love shows two important sides of Goneril. First, she is very well aware of her father's unstable state of mind, and second, she is ready to tackle the issue head on in a manly manner, while veiling her intentions with her femininity. Yet again, we encounter a woman who takes on male characteristics which slowly form her image into one of a villain. These attributes tend to put Goneril in a position to trigger the other characters around her. Only when she proclaims this absolute love does her sister Regan follow-up with a similar speech, and we can reasonably assume that had Goneril made a different sort of speech, Regan would have followed suit. More importantly, Goneril's speech has a big impact on Cordelia, since she is the only one to try to give her

father a reality check. It is irrational to divide a kingdom based on how his daughters verbally express their love, and this is also an unnatural request of a father to his daughter. Placing all three of them in uncomfortable competition with one another where he is both giving away power and asserting it at the same time, leaves the sisters in an awful position. Coppelia Kahn, in her essay “The Absent Mother in King Lear”, offers the insightful interpretations that Lear “wants two mutually exclusive things at once: to have absolute control over those closest to him and to be absolutely dependent on them” (Kahn 247).

This astute awareness Goneril gives her an advantage over the rest of the characters, including her father, as she plays along in his game only to slowly take him out of it. So, while she may have triggered the reactions and fates of the other characters with her reply to Lear, she also briefly exposes her weakness that eventually becomes the cause of her downfall. Goneril is aware that Cordelia was Lear’s favourite and attempts to prevent that from clouding her judgement, she nonetheless resented this and took the opportunity to punish her father, or rather, treat him with indifference. However, this strive for love and preference over her siblings flows into her relationship with Edmund, who like Goneril also lacks his father’s affection because he is a product of an affair. This is the connection Goneril and Edmund have. But later, once Regan begins to desire Edmund, this jealousy towards her sister changed Goneril from a catalyst of reason to a catalyst of chaos. Everything she triggers before that point goes her way and she pretty much sways the plot in the direction she wants, but once she starts competing for Edmund, her focus gets blurred and she instigates death.

Character background

The intention when analysing a character’s background is not to excuse their actions, but to understand them and better appreciate how they have affected the other characters and the plot. In this case, while looking into two women who are built up to be villains, it is crucial to dissect the dynamic of the relationships they have established prior to their introduction in the play, as well as the circumstances they were in before they became catalysts. These relationships and circumstances create the characters’ depth and make them more

provocative, and also help the audience to understand where their villainy stems from. Shakespeare's catalysts always have an intriguing background, yet unfortunately it is never tangible, because the author does not give us much information, but leaves us with traces and suspicions of what might have been.

One of the main, often overlooked, driving forces that turns Lady Macbeth into a villain is her child. Little trace can be found of the Macbeth's elusive child, which she mentions throughout the play but without any details about what happened. The first time she hints at her baby is when she refers to the milk in her breasts that she wishes would be turned to gall (Mac.1.5.45), and the second time is when she exclaims more violent thoughts directed at her infant when she tries to persuade her husband to kill Duncan. The example she gives is disturbing not only for the audience to hear, but obviously for her husband as well, because after this remark he indulges her wishes. It can be inferred that her baby was born recently, as the memory seems fresh when she says,

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this. (Mac. 1.7.54-58)

The only conclusion we can draw is that she gives great meaning to motherhood; though she is discussing motherhood in a negative context, she still brings up this subject in the most heated moments. On the two occasions she mentions her baby, a turning point in her power-shift with Macbeth is about to occur. The first time she speaks of the "direct cruelty" which is necessary in order for her to make her husband kill Duncan, and the second time is when Macbeth tries to back out of their murderous plan, but with the mention of their child she quickly pulls him back in. While it has been argued that her greatest drive is masculine ambition and her downfall is that she forgets her wifely duties

by outmatching her husband, another important aspect has been overlooked is her role as a mother.

In Polanski's adaptation, we encounter an unusual Lady Macbeth who seems gentle, with long blonde hair and a kind expression, almost too fragile for such a villain (*Macbeth* 1971). However, this adaptation does not focus much on the motherhood aspect and how the loss of a child might have affected Lady Macbeth. Kurzel on the other hand uses this subject constantly, weaving it becomes throughout the entire film. Even though Marion Cotillard is a much more typical Lady Macbeth externally, with her dark features, she is considerably more layered than Polanski's, who tried to differentiate his version of the character so much that she almost lost her villainous presence. In Kurzel's version, the Macbeth couple are found together in the first scene burying their baby and expressing deep sorrow, which gives the viewers an idea as to why they turn so bitter and vicious later on (*Macbeth* 2015). Lady Macbeth's madness begins the moment she sees the death of Lady Macduff and her children, which reminds her of the loss of her child and the unstoppable beast she has awoken in her husband, who does not mind killing children at this point. These thoughts drive her into madness, which finally leads to her moving semi-confession that in the original text she speaks in front of the doctor and gentlewoman, but in this adaptation she talks to her imaginary dead child (*Macbeth* 2015).

It should be mentioned that Polanski did include the meaningful death of a child in his film too, but in a very different way. His wife Sharon Tate was killed by the Manson family, as was her baby. This historical event resulted in great intrigue and criticism being directed at his film. Making a movie in which his lead female character speaks of smashing the brains of her baby and having a scene where Lady Macduff begs for her children's lives as they are slaughtered was a bit too familiar. These tragic, barbaric acts seemed too close to the real events that occurred, which is why Polanski had trouble finding a production studio to finance his movie and ended up working with Playboy Enterprises, making the whole project even more unsettling for the audience. In both adaptations, the theme of a child is intertwined in the story and affects the character of Lady Macbeth, with

the exception that Kurzel's brings up a plausible theory to help the audience comprehend how she became the antagonist. The child is of even greater relevance once we observe the influence it has on Macbeth and his relationship with his wife. It can be interpreted that to some extent he drowns in hopelessness because he has no successor, which creates a void between him and his wife. His resentment of Banquo lets the audience know how Macbeth feels about not having sons:

He chid the sisters
When first they put the name of king upon me,
And bade them speak to him: then prophet-like
They hail'd him father to a line of kings:
Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding. If 't be so,
For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;
For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd;
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man,
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings! (Mac.3.1.57-70)

In referring to his "fruitless crown" and "barren sceptre", Macbeth shows how much he longs to have a child and how greatly not having one affects his life. Lady Macbeth's main role as a woman and a wife was to give the family a child, and she failed. Not long after this speech, Macbeth seeks the council of the witches because his wife's council is not enough for him any longer. Her influence begins to fade.

In the case of *King Lear*, Goneril is not a mother in the play but is being forced to become one by her father. Kahn's essay argues that the effect of an absent mother is one of the main reasons for Lear's erratic and irrational behaviour, as well as the reactions of his daughters. It is clear that the king shifts from father to infant as he himself knows not what he wants. Kahn describes,

With age and loss of vigor, and as Freud suggests in "The Theme of the Three Caskets", with the prospect of return to mother earth, Lear feels those needs again and hints at them in his desire to "crawl" like a baby "toward death". Significantly, he confesses them in these phrases the moment after he curses Cordelia for her silence, the moment in which he denies them most strongly. He says, "I lov'd her most, and thought to set my rest/ On her kind nursery". (Kahn 248)

If there had been a wife to nurse Lear in his old age as he wished, he would not have needed to find a substitute, meaning his daughters would not have had to answer the question of who loves him the most. There would have been a healthy father-daughter relationship in the play, which still may have differed since his favouritism of Cordelia affected his other two daughters, but it would not have devolved into them having to nurse him. He shows signs of infancy not only in the beginning of the play when he wants to relieve himself of his duties and wishes to be nursed, but also later on, as Kahn notes,

And so Lear exits running in this scene, asserting his kingship "Come, come, I am a king" but behaving like a mischievous child who makes his mother run after him "Come, and you get it, you shall get it by running,". When he reappears, he is as helpless as a child, sleeping and carried in by servants. (Kahn 257)

Goneril and Regan are presented in a negative light from the start, as they are wives who have no children, which automatically associates them with witches and villainous women. But because of their masculine traits, especially Goneril, they remain important, while a gentler character such as Cordelia is left out of most of the plot. Through her villainy, Goneril catalyses the actions of the others. Henry David Gray supports the argument that Goneril has a much stronger impact in the play than Cordelia, stating,

Cordelia is absent after the opening scene till toward the close of the play. She has 112 lines to speak out of the 3332 which this drama contains. That Shakespeare himself regarded her only as a minor character is perhaps the explanation of her needless and uncaused death. But Goneril, backed and shadowed by Regan, produce by her evil determination and desires the tragedy of Lear. (Gray 127)

Despite Goneril's dominant nature, she never receives love or respect from her father. In the absence of their mother, Lear shows no respect for any of the women in this play, dismissing them from his life as he sees fit, wishing them the most horrid things when they disappoint his expectations and in general alluding to the weakness of their sex. A good example of the last point would be his perception of tears as "he calls his tears 'women's weapons' not only as a way of deprecating women for using emotion to manipulate men but also because he feels deeply threatened by his own feelings" (Kahn 254). Another example of his view of women is that he only refers to his late wife once, and it is in a negative context, saying to Regan, "I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb,/ Sepulchring an adultress" (Lr.2.4.124-25). Kahn argues, "thus Lear makes use of patriarchal ideology to serve his defensive needs: he denies his debt to a mother by denying that his daughters have any debt to her, either" (Kahn 252). This treatment Goneril receives from her father most certainly influenced her behaviour towards men—and especially towards him. There is no trust established between them or natural loving feelings because Lear only makes demands.

This brings us to another aspect affecting the father-daughter relationship: Lear's treatment of his favourite daughter Cordelia, and the way he openly prefers her to nurse him, is greatly concerning because of its incestuous connotations. He puts Cordelia in an impossible situation where she should proclaim all her love for her father, moments before being given a husband. This does not go unnoticed by Goneril, who says, "he always loved our sister most; and/ with what poor judgment he hath now cast her off/ appears too grossly" (Lr.1.1.287-88). Cordelia is well aware that if she needs to marry Burgundy and

France moments after that, she cannot give her full love to her father nor should she. Cordelia answers her father accordingly,

Why have my sisters husbands, if they say
They love you all? Haply, when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty:
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all. (Lr.1.1.97-101)

Once rejected, like a jealous man Lear tries to ruin her prospects with her other suitors by presenting her in the most unattractive way, as a good salesman who secretly wants to keep the best goods for himself. – “Will you, with those infirmities she owes,/ unfriended, new adopted to our hate,/ dow’r’d with our curse, and stranger’d with our oath,/ take her, or leave her?” (Lr.1.1.200-03). Boose’s analysis of the situation supports this statement:

But Lear the father will not freely give his daughter her endowment unless she purchases it with pledges that would nullify those required by the wedding ceremony. If she will not love him all, she will mar her fortunes, lose her dowry, and thus forfeit the symbolic separation. And yet, as she asserts, she cannot marry if she loves her father all. The circularity of Lear’s proposition frustrates the ritual phase of separation: by disinheriting Cordelia, Lear casts her away not to let her go but to prevent her from going. (Boose 333)

These inclinations towards incest undoubtedly influence how bitter, crude, vengeful and cold yet wary Goneril becomes around her father. Suffering this or growing in such a household would make any woman a survivor, and Goneril displays such skills, which build her into a character strong enough to catalyse others. Many adaptations explore this incestuous side of Lear further, for instance,

The folktale that shares the most DNA with both Holinshead and Shakespeare’s stories is the old tale “Allerleirauh” or “thousandfurs”, which predates both Lear and

Holinshead. Folklorist Maria Tatar's research reveals many versions of this story, which all feature an aging monarch who requires a demonstration of love from his daughters. In each story, when the youngest daughter (the character Shakespeare named Cordelia) fails to flatter her father he casts her out. Their most important difference, however, is the youngest daughter's motive. In several versions of this tale the King is besotted with his wife. When she dies, the king, possibly senile, looks at his daughter and sees his wife's mirror image. He begins to court her as if he would marry her, something he could easily do as king. In another version the king actually molests his youngest daughter, and she must find a way out before this incest is formalized through marriage.

These alternate stories were widespread, and widely known during Shakespeare's time, and audiences would have known her as a daughter trying to escape her father's house. They would have understood Shakespeare's Cordelia in the context of the old tales, as complex, a loving daughter who is horrified when her father's attentions become romantic and sexual. We might even imagine that Regan and Goneril have either been molested themselves, or that they see their father's new attention toward Cordelia as rejection and hate him for it. When Cordelia reminds her father "You have begot me, bred me, loved me" she may be trying to make him see her as a daughter, not a wife. (Wojczuk)

The Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *A Thousand Acres* is also an adaptation of King Lear, which was later made into a film in 1997 starring Jessica Lange and Michelle Pfeiffer, who play versions of Goneril and Regan living on a ranch owned by their abusive old father. The plot is similar to the play, with the exception that they openly discuss the sexual abuse they suffered under their father and their attempts to save their younger sister (*A Thousand Acres* 1997). This is all not roaming far from the original plot in which this disturbing behaviour is present to the very end, with Lear trying to convince Cordelia that living in a prison will be wonderful; after she asks if they will meet Goneril and Regan, he goes on to say,

Come, let's away to prison:

We two alone will sing like birds i' th' cage;
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
And ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies... (Lr. 5.3.8-13)

This statement gives a sense of a romanticised future of two lovers that will find happiness together no matter where they are placed. There is no clue of fatherly protection or concealer that his daughter will rot away in a prison. There is no empathy for her young years that will be wasted or her life ruined; the only idea on Lear's mind is this unnatural longing for Cordelia's eternal companionship.

Villains

These two women may be villains in the plays, but their complex backgrounds make way for numerous different portrayals in adaptations. Here, I will focus on the effect a villainous character has on the role of an initiator, because being the antagonist is a trigger on its own. It gives reason for other characters to be tested and explored, but once the antagonist becomes the catalyst, the plot becomes even more complex and entertaining. We will look how these two characters initiated crucial actions in their plays and how each of their villainous deeds affected the outcome of the plot step by step.

LADY MACBETH

Creating a character who initiates action is complex on its own, but making them a villain as well requires a certain genius, and Shakespeare proved to have that time and time again. Lady Macbeth is a higher art form, as she infatuates audiences even today. Her character is precisely balanced and structured with extreme care, giving her precisely the right amount of villainy without overshadowing Macbeth. She needs to be hated, yet sympathized with, possessing the violence of a man but a touch of a woman. Most importantly, she must have just enough spark to initiate but not eclipse the characters she affects. For Lady Macbeth "greatness must be divorced from goodness", just as she believes once "unsexed" from her

womanliness, she would be left with male virtues, which are the only real virtues in her opinion (Ramsey 287). The paradox of her character lies in the dominance she asserts, the greed she flaunts, and the violence she seeks, while never asking for anything for herself. Her strive to obtain the crown, power and dominance are never for her own sake; this is a wish she has for her husband. The unfortunate tragedy of her character is that she can never see past her subordinate womanly role, simply because she herself looks down on women as weaker beings. This idea makes her a catalyst rather than a protagonist.

As mentioned in the introduction, Lady Macbeth sets everything in motion when deciding her husband's fate after reading his letter, but so delicately is this scene put together that the audience can see her villainous thoughts form and she prepares to pour her "spirits" in her Macbeth's ear, while also not wishing to be seen as a villain. She calls upon darker powers to help her become more like a man, give her additional strength, hide the wounds she makes with a "thick night" and stop the heavens from "peep[ing] through the blanket of the dark/ To cry, 'Hold, hold!'" (Mac.1.5.24,48,51-52). Through this we see that "these allusions, of course, carry with them the obvious associations of impure intent and evil. But, in this instance, they also reflect Lady Macbeth's need to conceal and hide her own weakness and misgivings from herself and from Macbeth" (Donkor). This is the exquisite balance of Lady Macbeth, where she manages to keep the audience in suspense wondering how much power she holds and whether she is more a villain or a catalyst. It cannot be denied that she initiated Duncan's murder, but she uses Macbeth to carry out that deed. However, she is responsible for the efficiency of the plan as well, as she instructs her husband in detail how to act innocent in front of the king so as to prevent him from suspecting their trap. This is no easy task for Lady Macbeth because her husband dismisses her at first, saying, "We will speak further" trying to stall his wife, to which she stands firm telling him to "leave all the rest" to her (Mac.1.5.69-71). Here we see the first and most crucial triggering effect Lady Macbeth has, as she awakens the monster in her husband and sets him into motion, which consequently affects all further actions.

Her next victim, King Duncan, is also fooled by her once she welcomes him as warmly and convincingly, just as Goneril lies to Lear, and sets him up for Macbeth to kill. This is a strategic move, as her husband was not yet in a state of mind to carry out their plan and additional time is needed to convince and encourage him further. This is the cue that she needs in order to “bring the radical transvaluation of his code of manliness that will lead to his ruin”, and consequently the ruin of them all (Ramsey 288). She does not refrain from insulting her husband and provoking him by questioning his courage and manhood, when asking,

Was the hope drunk

Wherein you dress'd yourself?

...

Wouldst thou have that

Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,

And live a coward in thine own esteem,

Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'

Like the poor cat i' the adage?

...

When you durst do it, then you were a man;

And, to be more than what you were, you would

Be so much more the man. (Mac. 1.7.35-51)

This insistence on manliness, which Lady Macbeth sees as an asset and wishes more of for herself, is in her eyes the key to provoke her husband and bring out the courageous side of him. Unknowingly, he takes his manliness so far as to be absorbed by sheer brutality.

Jarold Ramsey's essay “Perversion of Manliness”, supports my argument, as he explains,

The more Macbeth is driven to pursue what he and Lady Macbeth call manliness – the more he perverts that code into a rationale for reflexive aggression – the less

humane he becomes, until at last he forfeits nearly all claims on the race itself, and his vaunted manhood, as he finally realizes, becomes meaningless. (Ramsey 287)

Yet, while spurring Macbeth into action, Lady Macbeth displays more masculine behaviour than her husband yet retains her femininity when "...using womanliness she renounced seconds before – to flirt with and coerce Macbeth into action. Their conversation here, and Lady Macbeth's persuasion, is full of seduction and unsettling sensuality." (Donkor)

At this point it is not enough to set Macbeth on his path of action because he is still not strong enough to act on it alone. So, Lady Macbeth takes on the role of a catalyst yet again when she cleans up her husband's mistake of bringing the daggers back with him. Taking matters into her own hands when Macbeth says that he is afraid to go back, she takes the weapons into Duncan's chamber in order to cover Macbeth's tracks. Without her initiative, Macbeth would have been a suspect the next day. She also continues to comfort him as though he is a child, telling him to not be "lost so poorly in" his thoughts (Mac.2.2.75). However, Macbeth does not handle the situation very well: once Macduff discovers Duncan dead, Macbeth goes on to say that he just killed the men in Duncan's chamber, which takes Macduff by surprise. Unconvincingly, Macbeth tries to rationalise his actions, saying: "Who can be wise, amazed, temp'rate and furious,/ Loyal and neutral in a moment? No man." (Mac 2.3.105-6). Lady Macbeth keeps the plot in line yet again by fainting and diverting attention from her clumsy husband.

Once Macbeth is set into motion, all begins to unravel - Duncan is killed, his sons flee, Banquo is murdered and most importantly Macbeth becomes king. Still, his wife must influence his actions because his conscience keeps getting the better of him. However, an important turning point occurs in Lady Macbeth, as she begins to realise that her husband is overtaking her as a villain, and she slowly begins to lose her grip over him. While counselling him and encouraging him not to dwell on his thoughts because, "What's done is done", she also suspects the murder of Banquo and a power-shift occurs between the spouses, with Macbeth now trying to shield his wife from the gruesome crimes he is

responsible for by telling her to “be innocent of the knowledge” (Mac.3.2.12, 44). Edith Williams argues that Macbeth says this to his wife because he “has an intuition of her incipient frailty when he does not make her part to the murder of Banquo. To evaluate the character of Lady Macbeth in terms of her expressed intention before the murder of Duncan without regard for the radical alteration afterward is to misread the character” (Williams 222). Williams’ notion supports my argument that Lady Macbeth undergoes a shift in character and begins to lose grip over her husband. However, I do not agree that there is any evidence to indicate that Macbeth does this out of compassion or a need to shield his wife; instead, this occurs because Lady Macbeth’s power as a catalyst begins to wane. The monster in Macbeth is fully grown at this point and does not need the support of its creator any longer.

Following this, Lady Macbeth performs the role of a catalyst once more. She tries to calm Macbeth in front of their guests, as he begins to hallucinate Banquo at the dining table, but even though she appears in control and tries to overpower him by questioning his manhood again, the effect she wishes to have upon Macbeth is lost. She manages to spur him just enough to stop him from spilling his deeds in front of the guests and keep him on a steady road to maintain his position as king. Yet, she is not influential enough to remain her husband’s counsellor, so instead he turns to the witches and seeks their prophecy. This is a crucial turn of events and the catalyst that triggers them is Lady Macbeth. Were it not for her, Macbeth would have been too transparent in front of his guests and would have become a murder suspect. Also, if she had not let herself be taken aback by her husband’s further killings of Banquo and an attempt on his son, she would have maintained the strength and authority to make her husband continue heeding her advice and not leave him to the witches. By having a change of heart, she indirectly shifts her husband on a different path – a path to the weird sisters.

Lady Macduff’s death seems to foreshadow Lady Macbeth’s fall, as the former is a foil to the latter. Lady Macduff embodies a womanly outlook onto the world, believing until her execution that if one does good, good will be done in return. This is a very naïve

belief and very different from the attitude of Lady Macbeth, who is more inclined to take matters into her own hands. However, to observe Lady Macbeth as a one-dimensional character whose sole intent is to do evil would be a misreading of the play. The shift Shakespeare gives her is confusing yet necessary. He takes her back to her kind, gentle womanly emotions, which may be interpreted as madness or simply a return to her core. To be a strong catalyst is a huge part of her character, but to destroy is not. Williams acknowledges, “her despair that her hands will ‘ne’er be clean,’ her whimsical moment of tenderness for the dead Lady Fife, her longing to ‘sweeten this little hand’ speak of a conscience far from dead” (Williams 222). And it is this very conscience that gives Lady Macbeth a multi-dimensional character which is also a “manifestation of an inescapable guilt which is consuming her being” (Williams 222). And so, once Lady Macbeth descends into madness, she foreshadows her husband’s end. As she is a catalyst for everything else in his life, she is a catalyst for his death. It is after his famous speech of “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow” that we see him decline and give into his fate that a man not born of a woman will take his life (Mac.5.5.19.). There is no Lady Macbeth to spur him on, and the fire in Macbeth is extinguished.

GONERIL

We can consider Goneril a catalyst only after taking into consideration the analysis of her background. Without it, she seems a simple villain out for revenge. Unfortunately,

Goneril and Regan are much less psychologically complex than most Shakespearean characters of comparable importance. Few of their lines carry hints of motivations other than cruelty, lust or ambition, characteristics of the archetypal fantasy image of woman as enemy. Shakespeare gives them no humanizing scruples. ... He does not allow them to point out wrongs done to them in the past ... or to question the fairness of their society’s distribution of power (Novy)

Goneril’s cruel treatment of Lear can be disputed since she does show reason in the beginning of the play and gives valid arguments. The film adaptation by Eyre will be used to explore Goneril’s catalytic role further as it presents her in a more realistic and gentler

way by Emma Thompson, compared to the traditional way she is played by Rosalind Cash in the Shakespeare in the Park production of *King Lear*.

The analysis of Goneril's catalytic effect on the characters in *King Lear* will start with her lie regarding the love she has for her aging father. With this act, she becomes not only architect of villainy but also instigator of further action taken by the other characters. Had she spoken the truth, Regan may have followed, and Cordelia would not have been the only one punished by her father - the outcome of Lear's decision would have been very different. Another aspect that should be examined is the father-son relationship happening parallel to Lear's. A question is raised whether Edmund would have managed to poison Gloucester against Edgar if Lear and his daughters had not already set the tension and drama. Gloucester might have kept his eyes, because there would have been no feud between him and the sisters, which in turn would eliminate the opportunity to come across Edgar again and reconcile. In conclusion, Goneril's decision to lie to her father spurred many other acts among the rest of the characters.

Once she establishes the mood at the start of the play, Goneril sets herself an impossible task to live with her father under the same roof peacefully. To be his keeper and his subordinate at the same time. With him living in her residence now, she is susceptible to her father's changeable disposition and the men that follow him. By making him leave, she triggers his remorse for discarding Cordelia and his wish to move in with Regan. However, it is not without good cause that she does this, as we see her distraught in Eyre's adaptation, trying to protect her servants from her father's abuse while protecting herself as well from his bursts of fury (*King Lear* 2018). Lear is depicted by Antony Hopkins as very aggressive, which he is in the original script as well, as we observe him strike Oswald for no reason (Lr.1.4.75), which he has apparently done previously as well. Additionally, his knights are portrayed as barbarians and a menace to Goneril's household. This we do not see in the play's production, where James Earl Jones plays a confused old man who is bullied by a wicked daughter. This does not align with Goneril's portrayal in the play, because she states that,

By day and night he wrongs me; every hour
He flashes into one gross crime or other,
That sets us all at odds. (Lr.1.3.3-5)

Nor does Lear at any time deny her accusations of his knights, when she tells him,
Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires;
Men so disorder'd, so debosh'd and bold,
That this our court, infected with their manners,
Shows like a riotous inn: epicurism and lust
Make it more like a tavern or a brothel
Than a graced palace. (Lr. 1.4.206-11)

This all proves that even though Goneril's reply at the beginning of the play did influence Lear's further actions, including his decision to stay with her, it dismisses any compelling evidence that she grew into a villain on her own, but more through the actions of her father. However, once she suggests that it is unnecessary for him to keep a hundred knights, instead reducing the number to fifty, he shows his aggressive side again. In Eyre's adaptation he calls her a "degenerate bastard" (Lr.1.4.220) and strikes her cheek, while going on to wish her the worst thing one could wish a woman at the time – to be barren (*King Lear* 2018). He rages,

Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful!
Into her womb convey sterility!
Dry up in her the organs of increase;
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honour her! If she must teem,
Create her child of spleen; that it may live,
And be a thwart disnatured torment to her! (Lr. 1.4.243-50)

All this makes Goneril even more wary of her father, as she tells her husband, “Safer than trust too far... I know his heart”, and consequently becomes a catalyst for her sister Regan as she goes on to send her a letter informing her of Lear’s behaviour (Lr. 1.4.299-301). The chain reaction of this moves the play forward, as Regan firstly decides to punish Kent, obviously influenced by her sister who is a catalyst for Cornwall as well (Lr. 2.3.137), after which Regan goes on to use the same technique as Goneril and belittle her father by offering him now half of the soldiers her sister offered him. As a matter of fact, this is interpreted as belittling more so in the play than the film since Lear does willingly give up his status and shows signs of deteriorating mental health. It is a rather sensible idea to request that he use the servants and knights his daughters have, since he is staying with them now and wants to be nursed like a child. Eventually Lear becomes furious with his second daughter too, leaving him at this point with no children that he has not dismissed and insulted. All this is initiated by Goneril’s letter, but to make sure that what she triggers is seen through, she comes to Regan’s household. Once Lear tries to go back to her, she offers him a home but no knights, spiralling her father into even worse regret for treating Cordelia badly. Her influence is ever present, as we see when Regan tries to make an excuse that she would take Lear in too without his knights, following her sister’s choices as usual (Lr. 2.4.284). Still, Goneril does not stop there; as we come to the scene when Gloucester is to be punished for helping Lear, even though Regan says to Cornwall they should hang him, Goneril says “Pluck out his eyes” – and that is exactly what they do (Lr. 3.7.5). The power Goneril has as a catalyst exceeds that of anyone else in the play, as this example shows the smallest statement makes the events turn into her favour. Just like Lady Macbeth, she gets others to carry out the violent deeds while she only spurs them into action. The gouging of Gloucester’s eyes affects his relationship with Edgar, showing that Goneril’s actions affect even the most unlikely situations.

Indeed, Edmund is impacted by the removal of his father’s eyes, since this triggers his brother into action to come and seek revenge, ending in Edmund’s death. Once Goneril begins an affair with Edmund, she becomes the catalyst of her own downfall as well as

everyone else's. Her relationship with Edmund enrages her husband Albany, and after he reacts to that she provokes him further by emasculating him, calling him a "milk-livered man" and telling him "Marry, your manhood, mew" (Lr. 4.2.34, 39). This contrasts with the way Lady Macbeth questions her husband's masculinity to provoke him to achieve what she has set her mind on. But Goneril's insults lead Albany down a different road – a road that becomes problematic for her. To make matters worse, she turns her sister, who by then is a widow and eligible to marry Edmund, into an enemy. Goneril's letters play a crucial part in her catalytic role, as the letter she writes to Edmund asking him to murder Albany ends up in Albany's hands, giving Edgar an advantage by putting Albany on his side and allowing the duel to take place between the two half-brothers.

Once Goneril blooms as a villain, she sets off action again, this time to end her sisters. Regan, she poisons, and Cordelia she sends to her death. Edmund, in his last attempt to show a glimpse of good in his nature, reveals that Goneril and he sent an executioner to Cordelia's cell, telling Albany, "He hath commission from thy wife and me/ To hang Cordelia in the prison" (Lr.5.3.226-7). With so much destruction caused, Goneril, like Lady Macbeth, takes her own life, which seems symbolic of female catalysts who are cast as villains. These women kill themselves as if to prove that they are not fully villainous and they do have a conscience. However, the last to fall in *King Lear* is Lear himself. Unshaken by the death of his two elder daughters, he is destroyed by the death of his beloved Cordelia. After all, "in King Lear, the father who imagined that he 'gave his daughters all' extracts from his daughter at the end of the play the same price he demanded in the opening scene-that she love her father all" (Boose 335).

Conclusion

This paper has taken a feminist approach to Shakespeare's timeless and endlessly fascinating plays, examining the surprisingly critical role played by seemingly secondary female characters. Shakespeare was a playwright for all time, and interpretations of his work differ from generation to generation and from adaptation to adaptation. Through the six characters analysed in this paper, I shed light on unlikely, unknown, underappreciated and underestimated protagonists—those whose necessity is only perceived through in-depth analysis and close reading. These characters do not assume the usual roles of protagonists as most female characters in Shakespeare's comedies do; instead, they pursue a much more difficult path set by their author – one as a catalyst. Analysing Juliet and Kate through their marriages makes clear that even through an institution known to subordinate women, they thrive and find their own voice and independence. Their endings differ, but as catalysts they put into effect a sequence of events that brings about their desired outcomes. Kate finds independence through Petruccio, while Juliet finds it with Romeo in death.

Two very different mothers, Gertrude and Tamora, are regarded in this paper as women who in contrasting ways manage to catalyse their sons to execute revenge. While Gertrude is an example of a subdued mother, her power of initiation is no less effective than that of the domineering Tamora. They both prompt others onto paths which lead to the destruction of their enemies, but also their sons.

Finally, this paper examined the excess of power achieved by Lady Macbeth and Goneril as they take on the role of catalysts in the shape of villains. This I have demonstrated through analysis and adaptations that depict their evolution from the ascent to power to their demise. This particular pair of female characters additionally depicts how obtaining masculine traits becomes lethal when pursuing a dominant role in a tragedy, which ultimately deems them villains.

Thus, it is important to acknowledge that when it comes to female catalysts in Shakespeare's plays, they may not be the overt protagonists, but they often wield less visible but equally monumental power. They create the play. Catalysts ignite the spark that sets the other characters into action, and these characters like flames join together to form a bonfire which has been burning since the end of the 16th century until now, captivating people from different countries, cultures and backgrounds to behold the mesmerising genius and nuance of William Shakespeare's plays.

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