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The Women of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in Modern Film Adaptations

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Introduction: The Elizabethan World as Presented Today

As we look back over the span of centuries to the plays of William Shakespeare, we encounter a world very different from our own. This world is filled with codes of conduct that have morphed over time and symbolic languages that have been virtually lost. As in countless works of literature, Shakespeare's plays reflect the world that surrounded the author, even though they may be set in other places, like Denmark or Venice. Thus, the Elizabethan age is just as much a part of Shakespeare's plays as the language and characters. But some directors today do not bridge the gap of time and instead allow the Bard's plays to remain firmly in the past. Those who oppose change urge traditional renditions of the Bard's works, but they may not realize that some of the impact that was present in the Elizabethan age has faded.

In a world where books disintegrate and visual mediums flourish, some directors choose to embrace change and adapt Shakespeare's plays into films. They retain some traditional aspects in their renditions, but they choose to alter others. In this paper, we will examine the various routes directors take in order to represent the roles of Ophelia's flowers and Gertrude's sexuality in their film adaptations of *Hamlet*. As we will discover, film offers substantial promise for Shakespeare's plays to live on in the modern world, not just through the text, but also through visual mediums.

A Pansy for Your Thoughts: Ophelia's Flowers in Modern Film Adaptations

In his essay “The World of *Hamlet*,” Maynard Mack describes the unfathomable world that surrounds Hamlet, but he does not dwell on the worlds of other characters. Both Ophelia and Gertrude live within the same world that Hamlet inhabits, but they face other challenges within their own worlds. The world of Ophelia might be imagined to include the Elizabethan age's constricting views of women and pressures of social hierarchy, but it is also a world suffused by flowers. Ophelia speaks through the flowers she distributes while she is mad, positing a deep connection between those flowers and her performance of gender. The symbolism of the flowers was widely recognized at the time in which *Hamlet* was written, and through these flowers, the mad Ophelia can speak within her restrictive world.

Gertrude's world, on the other hand, lacks the patriarchal control to which Ophelia is subjected in the beginning of the play. The queen's sexuality is overt throughout the play, and it poses problems for her conflicted son. Gertrude's possible shift in allegiance from Claudius to Hamlet after the closet scene determines whether her agency at the end of the play leads to a sacrificial death. Directors of film and performance can choose to portray Ophelia's flowers, Gertrude's sexuality, and both women's agency (or lack thereof) in numerous ways that reflect on the characters themselves, as well as their relationships with other characters. We will first examine Ophelia's highly controlled world, and Gertrude's relation to patriarchal control will be analyzed in the following chapter.

Ophelia breaks free of her controlling world through her madness and flowers, but the modern audience typically does not recognize the Elizabethan language of the flowers. Contemporary film directors therefore face a challenge of how to present Ophelia's flowers, and

they choose to do so in a variety of ways. In order to analyze how Ophelia's flowers are translated into film productions, the context of the play must first be examined.

Social structure has a strong influence in *Hamlet*, and Ophelia initially conforms to the social standards expected of the typical Elizabethan woman as she navigates the murky, male-dominated fortress of Elsinore. As Juliet Dusinberre states, women were typically subordinated to men in Shakespeare's time, especially to their male family members (Dusinberre 77). Throughout *Hamlet*, Ophelia is socially required to remain obedient to Polonius' demands, regardless of her own desires. This suppression of Ophelia's wishes for those of her father is not uncharacteristic of the time in which Shakespeare lived, for males controlled their female family members by overriding their wills (Dusinberre 88). Thus, Ophelia is obligated to give Polonius her letter from Hamlet, as well as to obey her father's order to resist the courting of Hamlet. In addition to her father's oppression, Laertes' advice to Ophelia presents another form of patriarchal domination. In this social context, Ophelia's reply to her brother's advice is unusual; she tells him that he should not show her the "steep and thorny way to heaven" if he does not follow the same path (1.3.48). Marianne Novy states that women in the Elizabethan age were viewed as more subject to lust and sin than men, so men believed that it was their duty to protect women from these vices by subordinating them to their more rational male control (Novy 256, 259).

When he insists she go to a nunnery, Hamlet implies this Elizabethan conception of women. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word "nunnery" had two definitions in Shakespeare's time: it either indicated a residence where nuns live or a brothel. Both of these definitions imply the idea that women were more subject to their passions, as Hamlet suggests with his next question: "Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?" (3.1.121-122). If he is

telling Ophelia to join a religious nunnery, Hamlet indicates that Ophelia should live a life of chastity, which would guard her from her lust. On the other hand, Hamlet could be telling Ophelia to go to a brothel, which would serve as an insult because he deems her a whore. In this context, the more accepted definition of a nunnery indicates a benevolent version of male domination, but the other option represents a more hostile attitude toward Ophelia. With either definition, however, Hamlet advises Ophelia to leave Elsinore and its rottenness, which, as he seems to think, would not be the proper atmosphere for her. If he insists she go to a traditional nunnery, Ophelia would experience control, but if Hamlet tells Ophelia to join a brothel, he deems Elsinore as a setting that lacks control over women and allows them to act upon their sexuality; perhaps he thinks of his mother as he comments on the uncontrolled sexuality of women. His instruction also adheres to the traditions of Elizabethan society because he is another male who attempts to subject her to his own will. Also, as a prince, Hamlet surely has some sway in regard to the courtiers and his subjects. Hamlet's power over those within Elsinore who hold ranks beneath him illustrates another feature of the world in which Ophelia lives: the influence and importance of social status.

The Elizabethan aristocracy viewed their daughters as property to be traded from fathers to husbands, typically for the benefit of social status (Dusinberre 52). Polonius uses and protects Ophelia because he and his family would ascend in the social hierarchy if she married Hamlet; if Ophelia did anything that was out of line, she would not be eligible to marry the prince and would likely decrease her family's social status. Polonius' desire for social ascension makes him contradict himself. At first, he tells Ophelia to resist Hamlet's courting, for he does not want her to love a prince "out of thy star" and to risk losing social status due to a possible faux pas (2.2.141). He soon brings the letter between Hamlet and Ophelia to the attention of Claudius and

Gertrude, however, and deems his daughter as the reason for Hamlet's madness. Thus, upon realizing the opportunity that the letter presents, Polonius acts as a pander as he attempts to pawn off Ophelia to the king and queen because of the possibility to ascend in the social hierarchy. He could not easily persuade the royal couple to consider Ophelia as a potential wife for Hamlet if he did not keep a close watch over her, for the property to be traded must remain pure.

Thus, the Elizabethan conception of noblewomen as property also placed great importance on their chastity. Assurance of chastity guaranteed faithfulness to the new husband, and it also promised the impossibility of bastard children "intruding on the succession of property" (Dusinberre 52). The extent of Ophelia's relationship with Hamlet remains questionable throughout the play, and Shakespeare leaves it ambiguous as to whether or not Ophelia has retained her virginity. If she were no longer a virgin, Ophelia would not be considered an acceptable choice for Hamlet's future wife. This uncertainty is overshadowed, however, when Ophelia becomes mad. Due to the absence of the control previously exerted upon her by her male family members, Ophelia acts upon the emotions and passions that were thought to be more dominant in the female mind (Novy 267). "Domestic insurrection" therefore occurs because her father is dead, and her brother Laertes is in France (Dusinberre 88). Thus, instead of being suppressed by her male family members in her final scenes, Ophelia is able to assert her formerly repressed femininity and agency through her madness.

Ophelia's madness indicates the presence of a different force that has previously been subdued—the female Wild. In *The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus and Gender*, Jeanne Addison Roberts describes the world that Shakespeare portrays in his plays as typically containing a male-dominated core that contains "culture," with the "Wild" located outside of the core (Roberts 2). The majority of the action usually occurs within the cultural core, which is the

court of Elsinore in *Hamlet*. The Wild in *Hamlet* is the assumed natural world that lies outside the castle of Elsinore, and it includes women, animals, and barbarians (Roberts 2). Forces of the Wild can only enter into the male cultural core after men tame them, so women must therefore be subjected to the patriarchal standards of society in order to enter the male realm (Roberts 25). Ophelia is initially tamed by her male family members and the social structure of Elsinore, so she is able to inhabit the cultural core. When her male family members are no longer present to control her, Ophelia's relation to the core shifts.

As Roberts argues, the forces of the Wild in Shakespeare's plays are never fully suppressed and are always capable of rebellion (Roberts 25). Ophelia belongs to the Wild simply through her gender, and the slippage of male control allows her reclamation of female liberty near the end of the play. Elizabethans believed that women were more likely to exhibit strong emotions, and Laertes acknowledges that emotions belong to the female realm as he states after he hears of Ophelia's death that once his tears are gone, "The woman will be out" (4.7.187) (Novy 267). Thus, under the Elizabethan context, emotions can be considered a facet of the female Wild, and when Ophelia acts upon her passions in some performances of the mad scenes, she triggers an incursion of the female Wild into the male domain of Elsinore. Roberts defines madness, such as Ophelia's, as "the mingling of human and animal" and states that both madness and animals belong to the Wild (109). Roberts focuses on the male journey into the female Wild, which is embodied by forests and other types of natural landscapes, but I suggest that the female Wild, through the agency of an unsuppressed woman, can also intrude into the male-dominated cultural core (24-25). Therefore, when Ophelia loses her mind and no longer fits into the realm of male culture, she brings both female and natural facets of the Wild into Elsinore, as represented by her flowers.

Roberts connects the female Wild with Nature and plant life (23). The bond between femininity and Nature has become implicit because of its prevalent usage throughout the centuries, and it is portrayed in many of Shakespeare's works. Perhaps the most obvious play that utilizes the female-Nature element is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which the heroes and heroines spend a great deal of the play within the forest outside of Athens, where they encounter unknown and mystical forces that are not present within the cultural core of their world, which is represented by the city. Also, Hippolyta the Amazon has entered into Athens from the realm of Nature because she has been tamed by Theseus; as a part of the female Wild, she has therefore been suppressed and can enter into the male cultural core of the play.

In *Hamlet*, Ophelia's flowers are another form of Nature that enters the cultural core of Elsinore from outside the fortress, but her flowers represent a different, untamed form of the female Wild. As opposed to the tamed Hippolyta who seems to have been rendered virtually harmless, Ophelia's entrance into the court as a changed, mad woman bearing flowers indicates a forceful incursion into the cultural center. When she enters the male-dominated core in her insanity, Ophelia brings the Elizabethan male fear of an uncontrolled woman to the forefront. Furthermore, the flowers that the mad Ophelia carries into Elsinore deliver pointed messages to the members of the court. The language of her flowers, however, would have meant much more to Shakespeare's audience than that of today because the Elizabethans would have typically understood the symbolism.

As J. Harvey Bloom discusses in *Shakespeare's Garden*, the garden was an inseparable part of Elizabethan society (Bloom 4-5). This connection is present in many of Shakespeare's plays, including *The Winter's Tale*; Hermione and Polixenes withdraw to the garden to talk, and Perdita later distributes flowers to her guests at the sheep shearing and describes her reasons for

giving each flower to a specific person. It can be assumed that Elizabethans had at least some knowledge concerning flowers, especially due to the intricate structure of their gardens. Not only should they have known the conditions under which various plants and flowers thrive, but they also understood the meanings of the flowers they planted.

Many allusions to flowers and plant life occur throughout *Hamlet*, such as when Hamlet mutters the aside “That’s wormwood” in response to a short speech by the player Queen during *The Mousetrap* (3.2.191). While the Elizabethan audience understood the signification of wormwood as an extremely bitter plant, the modern audience may instead focus on the murky sound of the word itself (Beisly 150-151, Ellacombe 347). Thus, in films and performances today, the names of the flowers are sometimes pronounced in ways that signify the lost meanings of the flower language. For example, when Mariah Gale plays Ophelia in the mad scene of Gregory Doran’s 2009 film of *Hamlet*, she angrily throws the fennel and columbines to Claudius and then sadly gives Gertrude the rue. Gale therefore provides the modern audience with something other than the symbolism of the flowers—the emotions that Ophelia exhibits toward each character as she distributes her flowers. Thus, the symbolism of Ophelia’s flowers must be replaced with other methods of representation so modern audiences can understand Ophelia’s madness. Contemporary directors, therefore, need to utilize other avenues to display Ophelia’s madness, for she can seem as if she has little method to her madness as she hands out flowers because they seem meaningless to the majority of today’s audience. The female Wild is still present in Ophelia’s madness, however, through the emotions she displays. But Ophelia’s presentation of various flowers to other characters in *Hamlet* would have had resonance for the Elizabethan audience, which would have viewed more of a method to Ophelia’s madness because they would have understood the meanings of the flowers. To observe the transition from

the presentation of Ophelia's flowers in Elizabethan times to how film directors adapt it for the modern audience, we must first examine how Ophelia's flowers were originally interpreted.

In her second mad scene, Ophelia distributes rosemary, pansies, rue, fennel, columbines, and a daisy to some of the major characters of the play. In addition, numerous forms of plant life are used to refer to Ophelia, including roses, a willow tree, crowsfeet, nettles, daisies, long purples, and violets. The plants that are associated with Ophelia can be divided into the three categories of virtues, threats, and beauty based on the meanings that the Elizabethans would have attributed to them. Rosemary, pansies, rue, and daisies signify virtues, while fennel, columbines, and nettles present threats. Roses, violets, long purples, crowsfeet, and willow trees represent beauty. The flowers that other characters utilize as they describe Ophelia reveal how the speaker views her, but some of the flowers used to refer to her also allude to other, sometimes hidden, characteristics, such as the typically overlooked danger of a rose's thorn. In addition to the other characters' uses of flowers, Ophelia also speaks through the language of the flowers in her madness, and she acts upon a formerly repressed feminine agency to reveal the true characteristics of Claudius, Gertrude, and Laertes. Thus, Shakespeare illustrates how the feminine can intrude on the realm of the male and illuminate the situation, albeit in a coded fashion.

Rosemary, as defined by Henry Ellacombe in *The Plant-Lore and Garden-Craft of Shakespeare*, symbolizes constancy and perpetual remembrance, and Ophelia repeats this meaning for the audience (273). The other meaning she defines is that of the pansy, which indicates thoughts (Ellacombe 207). The symbolism of the other flowers that Ophelia presents is not as specifically defined in the play. She states that rue is also known as "herb of grace o'Sundays" and must be worn "with a difference," but this description seems vague, especially

for a modern audience who typically knows little concerning the symbolism of flowers and herbs (4.5.177-178). Ellacombe states that rue symbolizes the need to repent or have pity, and it was first known as the “Herb of Repentance” (276). The daisy was a common flower that did not receive much admiration in Shakespeare’s time and was also known as the Days-Eye (Ellacombe 76-77). Ophelia also mentions she would present violets, but “they withered all when my father died” (4.5.185). Violets were associated with death, especially the glorified death of the young, and they also symbolized humility, lowliness, and meekness (Ellacombe 332).

Ophelia gives out the fennel and columbines offhandedly, without any comment on them at all: “There’s fennel for you, and columbines” (4.5.175). Ellacombe states that fennel, in *Hamlet*, signifies flattery (91). In *Shakespeare’s Garden*, Sidney Beisly explains that columbines signify thanklessness because they contain no specific virtue or property (158). As compared to the symbolism of the other flowers Ophelia presents, fennel and columbines have darker meanings that represents threats to their recipient.

There are no stage directions, however, that dictate to whom Ophelia gives which flower. *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare* suggests that perhaps rosemary and pansies were given to Laertes, rue to Claudius, fennel and columbines to Gertrude, and the daisy to Ophelia herself (1380). The recipient of the rosemary and pansies seems to be fairly clear upon first glance because Laertes comments on Ophelia’s presentation of them directly afterward: “A document in madness: thoughts and remembrance fitted” (4.5.173-174). After this comment, however, Ophelia continues to distribute the other flowers, and her lines are followed by another comment of Laertes. Therefore, the text leaves the recipients of the flowers ambiguous because Laertes could either be commenting on the others’ receipt of the flowers or on his own. Due to their symbolism of the virtues of remembrance and thoughts, however, the presentation of the

rosemary and pansies is fitting for Ophelia to give to Laertes. She would want him to remember her and Polonius, as well as to think about his memories of them and about his future actions. Laertes does not follow her coded advice, however, because he does not keep his wits about him, as the audience observes when he becomes distraught in response to his father's death and during the graveyard scene, which allows Claudius to manipulate him. The recipients of the other flowers, however, remain unclear.

The violets that seem to be mentioned off-handedly can represent beauty and also death before one's time, especially of someone who is young, which is an event that can be glorified as a tragically beautiful (Ellacombe 330, 332). Ophelia could refer to violets in order to indicate Polonius' untimely death, or they can even signify Ophelia's prediction of her own death. Thus, Ophelia's statement about the violets can be directed toward the entire court because Ophelia references either herself or Polonius when she mentions the flower that represents both beauty and tragedy.

I would reverse the suggestion *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare* offers for the flowers that Ophelia gives to Claudius and Gertrude because of the virtues and threats they respectively signify. While Claudius surely must repent, he has no pity; thus, the presentation of rue to him does not make complete sense if we consider Ophelia as exhibiting a method to her madness. Gertrude, on the other hand, does exhibit pity toward Ophelia, as shown when she allows the mad young woman to speak with her, after some prodding. The queen also has the necessity to repent, especially for her "o'erhasty marriage" to her brother-in-law and for her lust toward Claudius (2.2.57).

While the thanklessness of columbines and the flattery of fennel can be stretched to accommodate Gertrude's character, they are a better fit for Claudius, especially because of the

threats these flowers cause for him. Ophelia should feel at least some gratitude toward Gertrude, for the queen does attempt to calm the mad young woman. Gertrude also states earlier in the play that she hopes Ophelia is the cause of Hamlet's madness, indicating her view of Ophelia as a potential wife for her son. Gertrude later makes her feelings toward the young woman even more clear as she states over Ophelia's grave that she had hoped the young woman would have become Hamlet's wife, and that she wishes she could have been decking Ophelia's bride bed with flowers instead of her grave. Thus, the relationship between Gertrude and Ophelia is at least somewhat amicable. The columbines could be perceived as an accusation of Gertrude's thanklessness, but it is unclear in the play whether this feeling should be attributed to the queen. There seems to be no good cause for Ophelia to be thankless toward Gertrude, nor to accuse Gertrude of thanklessness. The fennel for flattery, on the other hand, somewhat fits, but flattery on Gertrude's part would not be toward Ophelia herself. Gertrude may have flattered Claudius behind the scenes, but this idea involves too much assumption. Therefore, due to the ambiguity concerning her possible thanklessness and flattery, Gertrude does not seem to be the appropriate character to receive columbines and fennel, but the rue is quite fitting for her.

Claudius is a much more likely candidate for the columbines and fennel because these flowers can represent Ophelia's feelings toward him and also his individual character. If she presents columbines and fennel to the king, they become threats to him because they reveal his true nature. By giving him fennel, Ophelia would indicate that Claudius has become king in an unlawful way. Although he did not flatter King Hamlet to take the throne, Claudius must have had to flatter the rest of the court in order to maintain his hold on the crown and to ensure Elsinore remained congenial. Claudius flatters Polonius, for example, in the second scene of Act I as he tells Laertes, "The head is not more native to the heart, / The hand more instrumental to

the mouth, / Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father” (1.2.47-49). In relation to the columbines, Claudius’ thanklessness toward his brother King Hamlet is most strikingly revealed by the fact that he poisoned him. Thus, by giving the king columbines and fennel, Ophelia reveals Claudius’ true persona as thankless and flattering, which are attributes that the king would not want anyone to consciously know. Therefore, the incursion into Claudius’ court by the natural aspect of the female Wild, in the form of Ophelia’s flowers, poses an obvious threat. Through the signification of her flowers, Ophelia reveals aspects about Laertes, Gertrude, and Claudius that had been implicit. While the flowers that signify virtues could be perceived as encouragement or warnings, the flowers with negative symbolism present threats. Thus, as the sole recipient of threatening flowers, Claudius must set a watch on Ophelia as she leaves the court, for he feels the necessity to know what this embodiment of the female Wild is doing at all times.

The daisy can be kept for herself as recognition of Ophelia as the Days-Eye. The daisy represents the virtue of being able to see past facades, as Ophelia does when she distributes her flowers (Ellacombe 77). Revealing each of these characters’ true natures by giving them flowers with coded meanings, Ophelia demonstrates her newfound agency. Her madness enables her to break free of the male-dominated cultural core of Elsinore and instead embody the natural facet of the female Wild. Therefore, through her presentation of the flowers, Ophelia represents an incursion of the female Wild into Elsinore.

In addition to the connection between Ophelia’s flowers and the characters to whom she gives them, several plants are related to Ophelia herself, such as roses, a willow tree, crowflowers, nettles, daisies, long purples, and violets. Ophelia’s brother Laertes calls her “rose of May” when he sees her in her madness for the first time and grieves for it (4.5.159). Beisly

states that Laertes is probably referring to the cinnamon rose, which blooms in early or mid-May, is pale red in color, and smells of cinnamon (9). May can also signify youth and vitality because it is still considered a month of spring in England. Regardless of the specific rose Laertes references, several meanings are universal for all types of roses. Ellacombe states that the rose was deemed the “queen of flowers” in Shakespeare’s time because of its beauty, fragrance, and virtues, as well as its association with the English Scepter (264). Thus, the invocation of the rose asserts Ophelia’s beauty and virtues, and it also places her on a pedestal due to its invocation of royalty. The rose also has a negative connotation, for the “most beautiful [rose] has on it the doom of decay and death” (Ellacombe 265). This symbolism suggests that Ophelia’s fate was inevitable: she has already begun to decay into madness, and the negative association of the rose implies that she will soon die. Modern audiences still identify this particular flower as both positive and negative in the popular saying that “every rose has its thorn.” Even though it is a symbol of great beauty, the rose also has a darker side that is typically overlooked and can cause harm, therefore posing a threat. Although she may be a beautiful young woman, as Ophelia presents flowers to Laertes, Claudius, and Gertrude, she unmask them and reveals their true identities. The association of Ophelia with a rose therefore attributes beauty and virtue to her, yet it also implies that she can present a threat.

Gertrude evokes the willow, crowsfeet, nettles, daisies, and long purples as she eulogizes Ophelia when she relates her drowning to Laertes. She states that Ophelia fell from the “pendent boughs” of the willow with the “fantastic garlands” that she had woven (4.7.172,168). The willow is known as a pliable tree, and, in Shakespeare’s time, its limbs were primary used by both male and female lovers to weave garlands after they were jilted (Ellacombe 343-344). Due to its typical use, the willow represents deep sorrow, but it also indicates beauty. This

combination of meanings relates to Ophelia because she has been jilted by Hamlet and is mourning because of it, yet Gertrude describes the garlands as beautiful. The beauty and depression indicated by the willow tree creates another double meaning for Ophelia that describes her own emotions as well as the beauty of the garlands she wove before she died.

The other plants that compose the garlands Ophelia weaves are crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples. The crowflower was known as the “Ragged Robin,” and it was used to decorate gardens and to make garlands and crowns in Shakespeare’s time (Ellacombe 64). The seemingly common crowflower connects to the everyday quality of the daisy (Ellacombe 76). The daisy can be found in any month in the year according to Ellacombe, which makes the flower common and easy to find (78). Both the daisy and the crowflower are connected to beauty, however, because they are both used in Ophelia’s garlands.

Another plant that Ophelia uses to make her garlands is the nettle. Ellacombe states that the word “nettle” is etymologically the same word as “needle” (187). Although the nettle was first associated with sewing because was used to make thread, it is also known for its stinging properties (Ellacombe 187). The stinging nature of nettles complicates the meaning of Ophelia’s garlands. The nettles could perhaps indicate that Ophelia feels stung by Hamlet as she makes garlands from a material common for a jilted lover, or this plant can refer to the threat that Ophelia herself poses to the court. The nettle is a weed that can grow in constructed gardens, so Ophelia can be viewed as a weed in the seemingly perfect and beautiful court of Elsinore because she distributes flowers and sings songs that dangerously reveal the truth about herself, Hamlet, and other members of the court (Ellacombe 189). Thus, she is the stinging weed in the garden of the court, just as the nettles are present in the beautiful garlands.

Neither Ellacombe nor Beisly have determined the exact plant indicated by Gertrude as she references long purples, but both place them within the orchid family (Beisly 160) (Ellacombe 157). Ellacombe states that orchids were known for their variety and beauty, as well as their fragrances (157-158). The concept of beauty easily relates to Ophelia; however, the difficulty in pinning down the exact flower to which Shakespeare refers shows that elements of his allusions to the language of flowers have been lost over time. Although long purples may have had resonance with the Elizabethan audience, we cannot know without doubt what Shakespeare meant by his reference to the orchid, other than his indication of Ophelia's beauty. Gertrude, however, fills in some of the gaps that have formed over time through her own description of the long purples. She states that "liberal shepherds" give long purples "a grosser name," obviously indicating the penis (4.7.168). Gertrude's allusion to this second meaning of the long purples makes Ophelia's repressed sexuality surface in the description of her death. Although the modern audience may miss the long purples' signification of beauty, Gertrude's description clearly indicates their connection to Ophelia's sexuality, to which Ophelia herself referred earlier through the songs she sings while mad. Thus, through the symbolism of the long purples that Gertrude describes, the beautiful flower is also connected to Ophelia's sexuality.

Unlike the symbolism of long purples, the meaning of violets has withstood the test of time, possibly due to its popularity in works of literature. Laertes wishes that violets would spring from Ophelia's "fair and unpolluted flesh" while standing over his sister's grave (5.1.236). Ellacombe states that violets were associated with the death of the young, and he briefly examines the reference to violets in *Hamlet* as signifying "those who enjoyed the bright springtide of life and no more" (332-333). Violets are also symbols for beauty and sweetness due to their appearance and scent, which relates to Laertes' perception of his deceased sister

(Ellacombe 330). Another meaning attached to the violet was the virtue of honesty, so Laertes could also be speaking of Ophelia's honest character (Ellacombe 334). In the same scene, Laertes attempts to proclaim Ophelia a virgin who lost her life instead of taking it by stating that she deserves her "virgin crants" and "maiden strewments" (5.1.229-230). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word "crants" in this reference as "rites." Another meaning of the word, however, is a garland or wreath; thus, Shakespeare uses the double meaning of the word to bolster Ophelia's connection to flowers while also referring to the rites that have been read over her corpse. Laertes mirrors this reinforcement by referencing violets as he claims that Ophelia has retained her virginity and innocence.

Due to the numerous references to flowers that are made by or directed toward Ophelia, *Hamlet* relies on the language of flowers for some implications to be recognized by the Elizabethan audience. By presenting specific flowers to members of the court, Ophelia reveals a method in her madness. Each flower she distributes to its respective court member presents a threat or virtue that the Elizabethan audience would have likely understood, and the flowers associated with Ophelia reveal the view of Ophelia that the speaker holds. While the Elizabethans would have understood these implications, the symbolism of flowers is lost on the majority of the modern audience, especially for the flowers whose meanings are not explained. Without a background of the language of flowers, a modern audience can easily dismiss Ophelia's distribution of flowers as a manifestation of her madness, especially because her presentation of the flowers seems offhanded and brief compared to the songs she sings, on which she spends more time. The lack of verbal responses from other characters as they receive their respective flowers can also contribute to a dismissal of Ophelia's presentation of flowers, for, in the text, Ophelia distributes the flowers almost without interruption, other than Laertes' brief

interjection. Thus, a member of the modern audience who experiences Ophelia's distribution of flowers in the text encounters an almost uninterrupted block of lines that may not seem to produce a substantial effect on the other characters. The scene thus becomes opaque to today's culture, yet some resonance of the "method in madness" trope remains, and the motif of a pitiful young damsel who has been driven to madness because of her circumstances also endures.

The syntax and diction that Ophelia uses in the key flower scene emphasize her youth and innocence and therefore illustrate the mad damsel trope. Ophelia uses short sentences as opposed to the longer, drawn out statements of other members of the aristocracy in Elsinore. For example, Ophelia could have described her flowers in detail while distributing them, but she instead uses simple statements that are strung together in quick succession, such as "There's a daisy" (4.5.178). These uncomplicated sentences contrast with Laertes' more intricate observations, like "Thought and afflictions, passion, hell itself, / She turns to favor and to prettiness" (4.5.182-183). His syntax, along with that of other members of the aristocracy such as Claudius and Gertrude, is more complicated than Ophelia's simple statements in this scene. Ophelia also uses more basic words compared to those who were previously her counterparts at court. By using one- or two-syllable, common words, her diction comes into direct contrast with Claudius' speech in response to Laertes' exclamation after Ophelia leaves the stage. For example, Claudius tells Laertes, "Make choice of whom your wisest friends you will, / And they shall hear and judge 'twixt you and me" (4.5.198-199). Ophelia's simpler language clashes with that of Claudius and therefore places her within the trope of a mad yet innocent young woman.

Ophelia speaks in unmetered prose while she is mad, and, by doing so, she partially disrupts the poetic speech of the majority of the court. Laertes' interjection after Ophelia gives out pansies and rosemary serves as an example of the disarray his sister causes: "A document in

madness: thoughts and remembrance fitted” (4.5.173-174). Instead of using poetic speech as in the majority of the play, Laertes switches to prose. Even though his statements are still more complex than those of Ophelia, the change that Ophelia causes in Laertes’ speech due to her madness illustrates how the intrusion of the female Wild through the language of flowers affects the poetic language of the court. Although Ophelia’s presence as an embodiment of the female Wild disrupts Laertes’ lines, Claudius’ meter during his speech that follows Ophelia’s departure does not deviate from the iambic pentameter that pervades the rest of the play. Instead, the king maintains a level of separation from the young woman, even though he perceives her as a threat and sends Horatio to watch over her as she leaves. Therefore, although Ophelia’s disruption in the court upsets the language of some of Elsinore’s aristocracy, Claudius, by comparison, maintains his self-control, as evidenced in regular meter.

In addition to her disruption of some characters’ meter, the number of lines Ophelia speaks in her mad scenes violates the social norms established in Elsinore. The number of lines dedicated to Ophelia’s songs and her presentation of flowers seems unprecedented when compared to those of the other prominent female character in the scene. Gertrude speaks in the first mad scene only until Claudius appears; then her lines are nonexistent when Ophelia appears in the court for the second time. Under the lens of the analyses of women by Roberts and historians, the presence or absence of Gertrude’s lines in these scenes is due to the male presence that is imposed upon her in the male-dominated core of Elsinore. The queen is not socially allowed to speak for herself in public when a man—such as her husband Claudius—can achieve similar results. Gertrude also relies on Claudius to handle the situation as she tells him, “Alas, look here, my lord” when he enters the scene; therefore, she transfers the responsibility concerning the situation onto him (4.5.37). Ophelia’s lines, however, dominate each of her mad

scenes, as opposed to her small number of lines in most of the previous scenes in which she appears. Speaking the majority of the lines in a scene is typically a male characteristic in Shakespeare's plays because men constitute Roberts' cultural core and, therefore, hold privilege over women. Ophelia, however, is allowed to speak more in her final two scenes because of her madness and the incursion she creates. She brings the female Wild into the male-dominated core of Elsinore through her flowers and madness, and her intrusion necessitates a larger number of lines. A paradox emerges, however, because Ophelia is able to introduce the female Wild into the scenes through her songs and flowers, yet, to do so, she also exhibits the male characteristic of speaking the majority of the lines in the scene.

The paradox that results from Ophelia's number of lines raises the question of what has happened to the world of *Hamlet*. I propose that the structure of Elsinore has been turned upside down because of King Hamlet's murder by the hand of his brother and successor Claudius, and also due to Gertrude's lust toward and remarriage to Claudius. In addition, Hamlet states that the new royal couple is incestuous and that those in Denmark are also corrupt because they are subject to consuming copious amounts of alcohol and tend to participate in many festivities. Something is indeed rotten in the state of Denmark—the state itself. Due to Claudius and Gertrude's actions, Denmark as a whole is rotting from the inside. Ophelia, who represents the female Wild, sheds light on the condition of Elsinore by giving out flowers that hold meaning and relate directly to their recipients. Therefore, Ophelia and her flowers are an ironic and paradoxical intrusion of reason into the corrupted and rotten cultural core of Denmark. Ophelia's incursion of the female Wild becomes that of reason because she distributes a tangible form of Nature to the court to reveal the true state of Elsinore. Nature, however, is ironically a part of the female Wild, while the house of reason is typically the cultural core. Thus, the intrusion of the

female Wild through Nature provides reason under the guise of madness, and this incursion is necessary to expose the rotten nature of Denmark.

This paradoxical intrusion and the method in Ophelia's madness are sometimes lost to the modern audience because the majority no longer understands the language of flowers that Shakespeare employs. Thus, directors of modern films and stage productions must grapple with the problem of how to include Ophelia's renowned flowers in ways that the majority of the contemporary audience can comprehend. Modern directors use two major strategies to convey the incursion of the female Wild. They either substitute highly significant objects in place of the flowers, or they emphasize Ophelia's actions more than the flowers, which then illustrate the emotional aspect of the female Wild and render the flowers seemingly arbitrary. I will use representative examples of filmed versions of *Hamlet* in order to illustrate each of these methods, but we must first examine films in which directors have elected to depict Ophelia in a more traditional manner so we can compare the other two routes directors take to a more standard method of portrayal.

Several twentieth-century film versions of *Hamlet* depict a more traditional version of Ophelia who gives out flowers and plants during her mad scene. This plant life provides a tangible form of the female Wild and directly shows the intrusion of the Wild into Elsinore, which typically seems devoid of nature in the films' mise-en-scenes. The use of the traditional flowers, however, often portrays Ophelia as a young woman who has no method in her madness, so the flowers seem arbitrary and only signify Ophelia's innocence and pitiableness to the modern audience.

The 1948 film version of *Hamlet*, directed by Laurence Olivier, presents audiences with a traditional performance of Ophelia, played by Jean Simmons. This version of Ophelia is exactly

what audiences would expect—a soft-spoken blonde in white clothing who elicits pity from viewers when she becomes mad. After the audience observes her as she picks flowers near the brook that runs outside of Elsinore, Simmons walks into a hall of the imposing and elaborately designed castle with flowers in her hair and more flowers in her hands. Thus, she brings the traditional and tangible form of the female Wild as Nature into Elsinore and gives it to Laertes, Claudius, and Gertrude in the flower scene. Simmons is later shown floating in the brook surrounded by flowers as Gertrude relates her death. While the majority of the modern audience has lost the significance of the flowers that Ophelia presents, Olivier’s film still conveys how Ophelia embraces Nature as she distributes flowers and is destroyed by it as she drowns. Since no one is present to instruct and supervise Ophelia, which was deemed as a necessity by the Elizabethans, she falls prey to her grief. In addition, by drowning in the brook, Ophelia also returns to the female Wild that lies outside of the male-dominated culture of Elsinore.

The 1980 BBC *Hamlet* directed by Rodney Bennett and starring Derek Jacobi as Hamlet also portrays a more traditional version of Ophelia, as played by Lalla Ward. As in Olivier’s film, Ward also parcels out actual flowers. When Ward walks in with her flowers, she holds them to her chest like a small bouquet, and she appears distracted yet calm. This version of Ophelia partially deviates from the tradition of a pitiful damsel by provocatively kissing Laertes as she enters. Additionally, before she exits the scene, she sarcastically states the line, “And of all Christian souls, I pray God;” thus, this version of Ophelia insults the other court members as she leaves (4.5.194). Except for these two instances, however, Ward portrays a classic version of Ophelia’s distribution of her flowers. As in other traditional renditions of the play that utilize flowers for this scene, this version of Ophelia brings a tangible form of Nature into Elsinore. The fairly sparing and unobtrusive mise-en-scene of the palace had been devoid of Nature until

Ophelia brings the flowers inside. Thus, she brings a literal form of the female Wild into the fortress, creating an incursion that is unsettling due to the especially stark setting of this version of Elsinore. While the modern audience may interpret Ophelia's flowers as an intrusion of Nature into Bennett's somber version of Elsinore, the impact of the flowers in this adaptation is diminished because nothing replaces their symbolism, other than the two brief instances of sexuality and sarcasm that bookend her presence in the scene.

As opposed to the more traditional renditions of Ophelia by Laurence Olivier and Rodney Bennett, Kevin Kline's, Grigori Kozintsev's and Franco Zeffirelli's film versions of *Hamlet* use the first strategy of substituting significant objects for the flowers in order to reveal a method to Ophelia's madness. These directors' choices to use different symbolic objects instead of the traditional flowers convey Ophelia's madness to the modern audience—often even better than actual flowers would.

The 1990 "Great Performances" television adaptation of Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival Production directed by Kevin Kline presents audiences with a somewhat modernized version of Ophelia, who is played by Diane Venora. Instead of distributing flowers, Venora gives out pieces of the love letters that Hamlet tore up during their argument. During the altercation between Hamlet and Ophelia, the characters' movements center on a stage that is later used for *The Mousetrap*. The emphasis placed upon the stage reveals much about their relationship: they lack privacy as others watch them and try to control their actions, and they are forced to act in ways that hide their true feelings about each other. Hamlet refuses to accept the love letters at first, as do most Hamlets in response to the "remembrances" Ophelia returns to him. This Ophelia, however, places the letters on the stage instead, which may signify that the contents of the letters are now becoming known to others within Elsinore. Hamlet then rips up

the letters and tosses them onto the stage. After he leaves, Ophelia picks up the fragments, which later reappear in her mad scene instead of the traditional flowers. The love letters enable modern audiences to better understand Ophelia's actions and possibly the cause for her madness, but the reason why Ophelia hands out the pieces remains ambiguous. The letters enable Ophelia to distribute a different type of coded language that not only contains the symbolism of the flowers but can also represent her relationship to Hamlet. Her presentation of the torn pieces could signify her desire to distribute emotions in a world that she sees as lacking empathy, or it could indicate her throwing away of her own emotions, her rejected love for Hamlet. There is a method to this Ophelia's madness, however, because she purposefully chooses to distribute pieces of her relationship with Hamlet to other members of the court. The distribution of love letters instead of flowers indicates a breach of the emotional aspect of female Wild into Elsinore, rather than the natural aspect of the Wild as represented by the traditional flowers, for Ophelia parcels out her passions as she gives out the pieces of the love letters that she had received from Hamlet. For the typical members of a modern audience, the signification of the love letters as a method to Ophelia's madness would not have been possible through the use of traditional flowers, so the love letters instead have more resonance because their symbolism can be more easily interpreted.

In direct contrast to traditional portrayals of Ophelia is the shocking rendition by Anastasiya Vertinskaya in the 1964 film by Soviet director Grigori Kozintsev. The mise-en-scene makes this version of Elsinore the site of extreme control. For example, the restraints placed on Hamlet are symbolized as an iron gate shuts behind him when he enters Elsinore in the film's first scene. In the final scene of the film, Hamlet manages to break free of the confines of Elsinore as he staggers out of the court to die in the open air, outside of the castle's walls. Ophelia is not so fortunate. Kozintsev's version of *Hamlet* features situations in which Ophelia is

rigidly controlled, and Vertinskaya seems suffocated. As servants are attending her after Polonius is found dead, they put her in a corset made of metal and fashioned to look like a cage. Later, the mad Ophelia tries to find Gertrude and struggles against a resistant and clinging black veil. She tries to push the veil off of herself, but she fails in her first attempts. When she finally removes the veil, the servants immediately place it back onto her. Thus, the *mise-en-scene* in this version of Elsinore creates a world that is so repressive that Ophelia and the female Wild cannot break through the male-dominated cultural core in any tangible way. Rather than presenting the female Wild through Nature, which is located outside of the male-dominated core of the castle, this version of Ophelia must use something from inside Elsinore to convey her madness. She picks up the brush from the fireplace as a substitute for her flowers because she is not capable of procuring something from the world outside of Elsinore, where the female Wild and Nature exist. Ophelia's failure to use something from outside of Elsinore might suggest the film's representation of state oppression during the years of Stalin's rule in the Soviet Union. Ophelia can be seen as a victim of the oppressive rule of the state, and she cannot sever herself from the state, even in her madness. Therefore, by choosing to utilize brush from the fireplace, Kozintsev suggests that Ophelia cannot free herself from this controlling version of Elsinore.

Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 film also features a more sinister version of Ophelia, played by Helena Bonham-Carter. Instead of distributing flowers, Bonham-Carter gives out bones and pieces of straw. While both of these objects come from the natural world of the Wild, they are more menacing than the comparatively dainty flowers because they represent death. Also, the audience is not given a location from which Ophelia could have procured the bones. She may have obtained them from the dinner table, but the film suggests that she could have taken them from a dead animal, either killed by her or found dead. Laertes is the only person to receive

bones, given in the place of rosemary and pansies. Gertrude and Claudius, on the other hand, are presented with pieces of straw. This difference is unexpected, considering the seemingly pleasant and caring relationship between Ophelia and Laertes that was briefly shown in the beginning of the film. The bones could be viewed as a warning of her impending death, for later Ophelia is shown sitting on a bridge above the brook outside of the stark fortress of Elsinore, throwing yellow flowers into the water and watching them float with a serious and intent expression. The bones could also be viewed as her sharing the death of Polonius with her brother, especially considering the symbolism of rosemary for remembrance and pansies for thoughts. Regardless of the ambiguity of the bones, Ophelia's presentation of them and the straw indicates the intrusion of the female Wild as a sinister form of Nature into the fortress of Elsinore, and her distribution of these dead objects elicits shock from the recipients. Ophelia's use of these objects also reveals what those in Elsinore have done to the feminine principle. The traditional concept of a lovely and dainty damsel has been corrupted because Elsinore as a whole has been overturned by Claudius' actions. The valence of Ophelia's character is altered because she can now parcel out foreboding omens of the current state of Elsinore and also of what is to come. The modern audience therefore understands and experiences the impact of the ominous bones and dried straw much more profoundly than they would have responded to the traditional flowers.

Another method that modern directors use to convey the incursion of the female Wild to their audiences, most of whom no longer recognize the symbolism of Ophelia's flowers, is to emphasize Ophelia's actions more than the flowers, which then seem relatively arbitrary. This choice places more focus on the emotional facet of the female Wild, instead of the natural aspect.

In the 1964 filmed play directed by Richard Burton, one of the few props used in the spare production is Ophelia's flowers, which are replaced by hay. Acted by Linda Marsh, this

version of Ophelia conveys her feelings toward each of the characters by how she distributes the hay. Thus, she relies less on the symbolism of the flowers, even though they are replaced by another object. The only piece of hay that she does not hold out of reach from the other characters represents rosemary, which Marsh places on Laertes' shirt, therefore emphasizing his need to remember their father's death and also Ophelia herself. While acting seriously and even happily toward Laertes, Marsh is angry and accusatory toward Claudius. Her actions toward Gertrude are serious at first, but she soon shows aggression toward her, illustrating Ophelia's mixed feelings for the queen who tries to comfort her but has no power to allay her madness. Therefore, through her actions toward each specific character, this version of Ophelia emphasizes the intrusion of emotion rather than Nature.

In Kenneth Branagh's 1996 film of *Hamlet*, Kate Winslet gives an extremely unnerving portrayal of Ophelia's madness, especially due to the sexual movements she makes while singing some of the songs. Although Winslet's Ophelia is controlled within Elsinore—locked in a padded room and forced to wear a straitjacket—she illustrates the uncontrollable qualities of the female Wild as she grotesquely dramatizes intercourse. In addition, her crazed behavior is further illustrated by her spectrum of emotions as she sings. Winslet quickly shifts from singing a song lightly and cheerfully to bursting into tears and having trouble keeping the tune. As compared to how calm and ladylike she was in the beginning of the film, this Ophelia's vast range of emotional and physical behavior shocks the modern audience. Thus, through her behavior, Winslet's Ophelia unconsciously brings the female Wild into Elsinore by embodying it, even though she fails to produce a tangible form of nature and instead makes sewing motions in the air during her flower scene.

As compared to Winslet's crazed Ophelia, Gregory Doran's 2010 version of *Hamlet* takes a performance by the Royal Shakespeare Company from the stage to the screen and presents the modern audience with an Ophelia who looks like a melancholy, Nature goddess when she appears with armfuls of flowers, weeds, and plants. As Ophelia, Mariah Gale's actions concerning the flowers illustrate her emotions toward the characters. While distributing the flowers, she sadly hands the rosemary and remembrance to Laertes, and then she angrily tosses Claudius the fennel and columbines. Gale proceeds to sadly give Gertrude the rue, but she switches to an accusatory tone when she states, "You must wear your rue with a difference" (4.5.177-178). Afterward, she offhandedly gives a servant a daisy. Instead of using the language of the flowers, this version of Ophelia utilizes the implications of the various emotions she exhibits toward each character in order to vaguely illustrate the symbolism of the flowers. After distributing the flowers, she becomes extremely depressed and kneels on the floor, strewing plants on it as if it were a grave, perhaps the grave of Polonius. The melodies of the songs she sings are similar to those heard in religious settings, which adds to the implication that Ophelia is mourning Polonius' death. Ophelia exits the scene in a miserable state, oblivious to the other characters who sadly watch her go, with the exclusion of Claudius, who instead does not seem to be affected. Laertes is later shown sitting sadly on some stairs while despondently treasuring the teasel that Ophelia gave him in the place of rosemary. Thus, Gale's performance places more significance on Ophelia's actions and the other characters' reactions concerning the flowers she distributes than on the language of the flowers. Also, by carrying armfuls of various plants into Elsinore, this version of Ophelia makes the wildness of Nature intrude into the castle. The unruly appearance of these plants can also signify that she has become uncontrollable. Instead of the flowers exposing the characters' true nature, however, the mise-en-scene of Elsinore does so.

The fortress is filled with surveillance cameras and mirrored surfaces, such as a polished black floor that the characters are forced to look into. Through this staging, Doran displaces the emphasis that Ophelia's flowers typically carry, and he instead makes Elsinore itself expose its inhabitants.

Some critics may decry the loss of Ophelia's lines in modern productions, but, on film, placing emphasis on the visual aspects of the mad scene can have significant impact. Both of the strategies used by modern directors enable their audiences to understand Ophelia better than a traditional production would allow because they decrease Shakespeare's original emphasis on the language of flowers. The visual choices of the directors surmount the loss of the audience's understanding of the language of flowers by emphasizing Ophelia's actions or replacing the flowers with more significant objects. While proponents of original production values may believe that Ophelia should distribute her flowers in a traditional manner, these films prove that the scene can be just as powerful, if not more so, through alternative directorial choices. Therefore, the spectacle of the flower scene endures by transforming tradition to accommodate a modern audience.

The transformation of tradition also extends to Gertrude, the other major female character of *Hamlet*. She can also be portrayed in different ways that contrast to original renditions. As with Ophelia, the visual impact of film and performance, as well as the choices directors make, enable a modern audience to interpret Gertrude's character. Gertrude also typically embodies another form of the female Wild—overt sexuality. In the majority of modern film productions, Gertrude's out-of-control sexuality contributes to the rottenness in the state of Denmark and presents a looming threat to the court at Elsinore.

The “Enseamed Bed:” Gertrude’s Sexuality in Modern Film Adaptations

As the other major female character in *Hamlet*, Gertrude presents another challenge with which directors must grapple. Modern film directors tend to choose one of three routes to represent Gertrude. Some make the choice to adapt *Hamlet* in order to adhere to contemporary theories of family dynamics, but others reject these theories and rely on the original text, which emphasizes Gertrude’s sexuality. Also, some directors opt to displace Gertrude’s sexuality in order to focus upon other aspects of the play, such as Hamlet’s character or the setting of the film. Gertrude’s sexuality—or lack thereof—is often represented by her physical movements; thus, the visual experience of film heightens the audience’s perception of her character. While all three methods can prove provocative, the different effects of the choices to adapt, traditionally present, or displace Gertrude’s sexuality can be highly significant, especially on film.

These divergent directorial choices affect not only Gertrude, the character whose sexuality we are examining in various lights, but also other members of the court at Elsinore. In order to analyze the interplay between Gertrude and other characters, and also Gertrude herself, we must examine her dominant trait as presented in the text. This prominent characteristic is typically accepted as her sexuality, which presents a different facet of the female Wild from that of the mad Ophelia. As we discover early in the play, Gertrude’s sexuality causes her adultery, but it also partially generates the entire plot of the play as a cause of the rottenness within Denmark. Because her adultery occurs before the play opens, Gertrude’s sexuality—and therefore the female Wild as represented in her character—was, from an Elizabethan perspective, already out of control before the play began. Her sexuality is directed toward King Claudius himself, as well as toward Hamlet in some renditions, yet it is not reined in; Claudius indulges

Gertrude's sexuality instead of attempting to control it. The king's actions therefore reveal his view that it is acceptable for his queen to have overtly sexual intentions toward him in front of the court, even though the typical Elizabethan woman would have been frowned upon for demonstrating such behavior. Although he is viewed as the villain of the play, Claudius acknowledges his sincere sentiment toward his relationship with Gertrude as he prays and asks whether his murderous deed may be forgiven: "May one be pardoned and retain the offense?" (3.3.56) In this statement, he questions whether he can be forgiven and still keep his crown and queen. Thus, even though he does not exhibit complete control over Gertrude's sexuality, Claudius still wants to retain his relationship with Gertrude.

Gertrude's sexuality is allowed free reign, but she represents a somewhat tamed manifestation of the female Wild because she is still a member of the court, which houses the male-dominated cultural core of Denmark. Her position creates a paradox, however, because Gertrude's open sexuality is also a manifestation of the corruption at Elsinore caused by Claudius. Through the Ghost's speech at the beginning of the play and Hamlet's comments throughout the work, readers are given an indication of Gertrude's actions while King Hamlet reigned. Although Gertrude hung on King Hamlet "as if increase of appetite had grown / By what it fed on," her sexuality was still present; it was simply directed at King Hamlet instead of Claudius (1.2.143-144). We can assume that the allowance of Gertrude's sexuality within the court, despite the typical Elizabethan views of women, is, in part, a cause of the rotten nature of Denmark, especially because she participates in adultery with Claudius. Therefore, Gertrude's sexuality is representative of the female Wild because it has not been controlled by the patriarchs around her, and, even though she is present within the walls of Elsinore, her character reflects the outside, untamed world of the female Wild.

During the course of the play, Gertrude's sexuality is referenced numerous times by the main characters. The Ghost of King Hamlet gives a different interpretation of Gertrude's sexuality compared to his son's view. As he tells Hamlet of his "murder most foul," the subject of the Ghost's speech vacillates between Claudius' murder and Gertrude's betrayal (1.5.27). Instead of aiming to fix or control Gertrude's sexuality as Hamlet does, the Ghost asks Hamlet that he "Leave her to heaven / And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge / To prick and sting her" (1.5.86-88). Thus, the Ghost blames his "most seeming-virtuous queen" for her actions, yet he asks Hamlet to not "let thy soul contrive / Against thy mother aught" (1.5.46, 1.5.85-86). This request could be made out of love, as the Ghost seems to be quite affected by Gertrude's actions, but it could also serve the purpose of ensuring Hamlet's mind remains upon the task of revenge. In addition, through his implication that Gertrude has thorns that prick her soul, the Ghost shows that he believes Gertrude's adultery is extremely sinful, but he also recognizes—or perhaps hopes—that she feels guilty for her actions. The Ghost also seems to hope Gertrude can repent and be redeemed in Heaven because he asks Hamlet to leave the queen to her fate and allow heaven to judge her. The Ghost's references toward Gertrude also indicate his opinion toward the rottenness of Denmark. He tells Hamlet to "Let not the royal bed of Denmark be / A couch for luxury and damnèd incest," and, although his aim is to get rid of Claudius, Gertrude is also implicated in the act, for it takes two to commit incest and adultery (1.5.82-83). Therefore, in this speech, the Ghost blames both Claudius and Gertrude for the rotten state of Denmark, even though he does not call for Hamlet to act against the queen.

The Ghost's reappearance in the closet scene further illustrates his sentiment toward Gertrude. Although he is given six lines, only two are spent to remind Hamlet to exact revenge, while the majority of the lines refer to Gertrude. The first two lines have a strikingly different

tone from the following four, which seem contradictory compared to the sentiment he expressed toward Gertrude during his speech in Act One. During the first two lines, the Ghost's words sound serious and purposeful, but his tone changes to distracted and upset as his object switches to Gertrude. The Ghost beseeches Hamlet to "step between her and her fighting soul!" (3.4.113). The Ghost believes Gertrude is struggling within her soul, which is reminiscent of his lines in Act One, when he states that the thorns of her sins sting her. Thus, even though Gertrude exhibits an open form of sexuality, the Ghost claims that she is dealing with an internal conflict due to the guilt that stems from her actions. Therefore, although King Hamlet repeats his sentiment from earlier in the play, his concerned tone contradicts the accusatory feeling that he exhibited toward her during his first appearance. Thus, although her betrayal still stings, the Ghost views Gertrude as redeemable because her soul is still struggling over her own actions.

Hamlet's impression of Gertrude is quite different compared to that of the Ghost. The ways in which men generally portray women in works of art of various time periods sheds light on Gertrude's impact upon Hamlet. According to Roberts and other critics, women in art tend to be represented in three different ways that are defined by their relation to males (142). A version of this concept is the Triple Hecate, which consists of the virgin, mother, and crone. Roberts states that Elizabethan men viewed the triangulation of women in terms of maid, wife, and widow, while art historians consider the facets as virgin, whore, and crone (142). Interestingly, the view of the wife is sometimes coupled with that of the whore, and the crone is sometimes paired with the mother (Roberts 142-144). This categorization is problematic for Gertrude because she fits into three categories: she is seen as the wife, whore, and mother. Perhaps the most striking aspect of Gertrude's character is her sexuality; she fits more within the wife/whore category due to the preoccupation within the play regarding her sexuality and marriages. Roberts

states, “Wild women who have been domesticated are also frequently rendered barren” and are chaste, so under Roberts’ lens, Gertrude is not fully “domesticated” within the male-dominated cultural core (144). According to Roberts, the wife/whore concept is problematic for patriarchal figures because it can cause an “explosion within Culture,” or Elsinore, in the case of *Hamlet* (144). Gertrude’s unrestrained sexuality in conjunction with her role as a wife is therefore problematic for the prominent male figures within Elsinore. Males faced with the wife/whore image typically exhibit ambivalence because it is a “nearly impossible task” for them to fit the wife/whore into their cultural contexts (Roberts 148). Thus, the link of the wife to sexuality causes “paralysis, reluctance, and delay” on the part of the man who views a woman in this way (Roberts 142). Hamlet especially encounters the problem that Gertrude’s character creates as he observes his mother and learns about her actions.

In light of Roberts’ description of problematic images of women, Hamlet’s preoccupation with his mother’s sexuality and her relationship with Claudius causes his inaction because he struggles to reconcile the wife/whore image. He alludes to Gertrude’s sexuality and marriage to Claudius numerous times, such as when he refers to the royal bed as rife with “incestuous pleasure” (3.3.90). Another example occurs as he speaks of Gertrude’s shoes, which she wore when “she followed my poor father’s body” and also when she was married, illustrating the betrayal of the lustful wife (1.2.148). Hamlet must therefore grapple with an internal conflict because he views Gertrude as the wife of both his father and stepfather who also acts the role of the whore due to her open sexuality. As the Ghost reveals, while Gertrude was married to King Hamlet, her lust caused her to commit adultery, yet Claudius follows his brother’s footsteps and does not reign in Gertrude’s sexuality, which instead continues to promote the contradictory wife/whore image. Hamlet’s anger in the closet scene portrays his internal struggle over his

mother's character, for he places her sexuality under severe consideration that is coupled with contrasting views of her husbands. Although he is not her husband, Hamlet feels it necessary to exert male control over Gertrude in order to tame the female Wild that manifests due to her sexuality. In order to tame the female Wild, however, Hamlet must reconcile the images of wife and whore in his conception of his mother. Until then, Gertrude is not fully tamed, and the presence of the female Wild continues to exist within Elsinore. Roberts states, however, that "the unreliable, unsettling female remains a Wild presence never wholly contained," so she implies Hamlet's struggle is futile: the female Wild embodied in Gertrude can never be fully tamed and is always capable of resurgence (117).

The text portrays Gertrude, including her role as the wife/whore duality of the female Wild, as a source of hesitation for her son. Hamlet demonstrates the indecisiveness that Gertrude causes as he peers in on Claudius and ponders whether to kill the usurper as he is praying. While the primary reason Hamlet refrains from exacting revenge is to avoid sending the praying Claudius to heaven, the thought of Gertrude also intrudes on his reasoning: ". . . And that his soul may be as damned and black / As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays" (3.3.94-95). Thus, his mother intrudes on his thoughts, which implicates her in Hamlet's hesitation. In addition, the "incestuous pleasure of his [Claudius and Gertrude's] bed" comes into Hamlet's short speech a few lines before the thought of Gertrude surfaces; thus, Hamlet hesitates due to the "villain [who] kills my father" and also because of the sexual relations between this villain and Gertrude (3.3.90, 3.3.76). Therefore, under Roberts' lens, Gertrude's contradictory role partially causes Hamlet's hesitation to exact revenge because he is unable to reconcile the images of wife and whore within his mother. While he views her as his mother and the wife of his father, Hamlet also sees Gertrude as the second wife and the sexual object of the man who murdered her first

husband. Thus, Hamlet views contradictory images within Gertrude: the positive images of wife to King Hamlet and his own mother war with the negative ideas of wife to his father's murderer and adulteress. As Hamlet prepares to kill his mother's second husband and refers to Claudius' crimes, thoughts of Gertrude creep into his mind, for she is tied to Claudius' acts of murder and incest. His mother is therefore connected to Claudius in such a way that thoughts of her intrude upon Hamlet's consideration of avenging his father's murder, and the wife/whore image that she presents contributes to the reasons as to why Hamlet stays his hand.

Hamlet's view of his mother's sexuality is also portrayed in the emotionally charged closet scene. At the beginning of the scene, Gertrude seems to feel betrayed by Hamlet's accusations as she states, "What have I done that thou dar'st wag thy tongue / In noise so rude against me?" (3.4.39-40). Hamlet proceeds to denounce his mother's sexuality, asking her "What devil was't / That thus hath cozened you at hoodman-blind?" (3.4.76-77). While these lines imply that Hamlet does not directly blame Gertrude for her actions, other lines contradict this sentiment. For example, Hamlet states that Gertrude has intentionally committed "Such an act / That blurs the grace and blush of modesty, / Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose / From the fair forehead of an innocent love," and so on (3.4.40-43). Notably, as Hamlet continues on his tirade, he loses the iambic pentameter that is dominant within the play. An example of this disruption in Hamlet's meter occurs as he states, "Nay, but to live / In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed, / Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love / Over the nasty sty" (3.4.91-94). These lines lack the usual meter of the play, which reveals how strongly Hamlet's raging emotions against his mother have affected him. Gertrude, on the other hand, retains iambic pentameter throughout the scene, perhaps illustrating her ability to present the illusion of some form of composure, even though she reacts emotionally toward Hamlet's rage.

After the Ghost leaves Gertrude's closet, Hamlet's purpose and tone change as he explains that he is not mad. His tone morphs from accusatory to beseeching, and he regains iambic pentameter, perhaps to further deny his madness. When Hamlet asks her not to tell Claudius the true nature of his feigned madness, Gertrude answers with lines that illustrate her close relationship with her son: "Be thou assured, if words be made of breath, / And breath of life, I have no life to breathe / What thou hast said to me" (3.4.197-199). Thus, Hamlet debatably wins the support of his mother. In addition, Hamlet uses his influence over his mother as he instructs her not to succumb to her sexuality and go to his uncle's bed; thus, he attempts to exert his male control over Gertrude's sexuality and the female Wild she embodies. Gertrude reveals her willingness to accept Hamlet's direction as she asks him, "What shall I do?" (3.4.180). Hamlet seizes the opportunity and urges sexual restraint by sarcastically telling her to do the opposite as he attempts to disgust Gertrude with details of her own sexual relations with Claudius: "Not this, by no means, that I bid you do: / Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed" (3.4.181-182). Thus, Hamlet attempts to control Gertrude's sexuality, and, through this action, he tries to separate the wife/whore image and instead endeavors to replace it with a wife and queen who is "fair, sober, [and] wise" (3.4.189). Therefore, by telling Gertrude to not succumb to her sexuality, Hamlet attempts to remove the whore image that he has attached to Gertrude and to instead replace it with the image of a queen who must not allow her king to "ravel all this matter out" by provoking the lust she feels toward him (3.4.186).

I propose that the relationship between Gertrude and Hamlet at the end of the play has changed due to Hamlet's instruction of his mother in the closet scene. Gertrude still seems to be overly attached to her son, such as when she insists that she wipe his face during the fencing match, but Hamlet is also quite concerned for her. As she dies, he states, "O villainy! Ho! Let the

door be locked. / Treachery! Seek it out” (5.2.294-295). His instant mental jump to betrayal reveals his preoccupation with various forms of betrayal, especially Claudius and Gertrude’s actions toward King Hamlet. As Hamlet dies, he even says farewell to his mother: “Wretched queen, adieu!” (5.2.316) Thus, their loving relationship remains, but Hamlet addresses Gertrude as queen instead of his mother; this designation indicates an element of separation because he acknowledges her political title instead of her position in their private relationship. Perhaps this switch occurs because he has altered the wife/whore image and has removed the image of the whore from his conception of Gertrude. Due to this change, Hamlet is able to commit the deed upon which he had been hesitating since the beginning of the play—the murder of Claudius. Notably, it seems that Hamlet kills Claudius in revenge for his mother’s death instead of his father’s murder. This unexpected decisiveness within Hamlet occurs perhaps because he has finally exerted control over Gertrude through the closet scene and has repressed the female Wild that is represented by her sexuality. Thus, Hamlet’s hesitation to kill Claudius dissipates because he has shattered the wife/whore duality by exerting male control over her sexuality.

Gertrude’s sexuality is most easily perceived in performance. Her movements reveal much of her lust and desire, so the visual medium of film is perhaps the best way to capture and illustrate her sexuality for modern audiences. Numerous directors of film adaptations of *Hamlet* characterize Gertrude as a sexual figure and present their own interpretations of how she appears in the text. In their portrayals of Gertrude, directors choose to represent her sexuality in various ways, and each adaptation portrays its own version of Hamlet’s attempt to control the female Wild within her during the closet scene. While some film adaptations present a more traditional view of Gertrude’s sexuality, some modern filmmakers make Gertrude a hyper-sexualized figure. For example, the film adaptations directed by Kevin Kline, Kenneth Branagh, and

Michael Almereyda each illustrate different variations of Gertrude's sexuality—and the control imposed upon it—through contrasting methods.

Kenneth Branagh's 1996 film adaptation of *Hamlet* presents Gertrude's sexuality in a more controlled and suppressed form. As the court scene opens in this film, Gertrude's expression gives viewers numerous questions on which to speculate because, instead of looking happy, her expression is serious. Is she is upset, resolute, or sad? When Claudius kisses her hand, Julie Christie as Gertrude looks almost disgusted. Perhaps her response reveals that she was forced into the marriage, or it could mean that she is still not wholly comfortable with her relationship to Claudius. While business is held during the court scene, Gertrude continues to look uncomfortable. As she speaks to Hamlet, however, she becomes persuasive, yet she does not speak as lightly as some other actresses in other film adaptations. As Claudius speaks to Hamlet, Branagh uses close-ups of Gertrude appearing sad, which seem to imply her grief for King Hamlet. Thus, the first scene establishes negative emotions within Gertrude's character.

The focus placed on Gertrude's emotions provokes audiences to visualize Gertrude in a different light. Although Branagh does not emphasize Gertrude's sexuality in the court scene, he presents his audience with a more suppressed version of Gertrude. This Gertrude seems to feel guilty from the opening of the film, as opposed to most film versions of her character. Claudius seems to control his new wife throughout the scene, for she only responds to his physical actions toward her and does not initiate any actions toward him. As the couple walks out of the court, Gertrude's outward emotions quickly shift as she reflects Claudius' happiness. Therefore, in this scene, Claudius exerts control over the emotions and sexuality of this version of Gertrude, even though her expressions imply that she would prefer another situation for herself. This conception of Claudius' control is later augmented as Gertrude and Claudius celebrate within the castle

while Hamlet speaks of Denmark's high regard for parties. As Gertrude happily follows Claudius into their bedroom and jumps onto the bed with him, she seems to have fully succumbed to his control and focuses her sexuality upon the new king. Thus, Branagh's film adaptation of *Hamlet* emphasizes the control Claudius holds over Gertrude's sexuality and, therefore, the female Wild.

Kenneth Branagh's version of *Hamlet* is greatly affected by Gertrude's sexuality, and his emotions toward his mother are emphasized during his soliloquy after the court scene. Hamlet begins his speech with a depressed tone, but he vacillates between anger and sadness as he speaks his lines. Toward the end of his soliloquy, he becomes depressed again and seems to hold back tears as his voice becomes slightly choked. The scene in which the Ghost tells Hamlet of Claudius and Gertrude's deeds also gives the audience an idea of Hamlet's sentiment toward his mother. During the Ghost's speech, Branagh presents his audience with flashbacks to Claudius' adulterous relationship to Gertrude while the queen was still married to King Hamlet. Perhaps the most striking cut shows a corset on the torso of a woman as it is being roughly unlaced, which seems to imply a sexual encounter and to confirm the queen's adultery, given the context in which it is shown. Close-ups on Hamlet's face are cut into the scene as the flashbacks occur, placing emphasis upon his emotions. At first, he seems surprised at the Ghost's words, and he then becomes upset as he recalls a brief flashback of a happy scene shared between himself, King Hamlet, and Gertrude. As the flashbacks concerning Gertrude's infidelity continue, Hamlet looks betrayed, and this expression changes to distraught as the Ghost's focus shifts from Gertrude's actions to Claudius' crime. After the Ghost leaves, Hamlet exhibits profound sadness as he begins to deliver his soliloquy, but his emotions soon change to anger, especially as he references his mother.

Hamlet's anger toward his mother reaches a crescendo in the closet scene of Branagh's version. As in some other film versions, Gertrude's clothes soon become partially undone, so that the undergarments beneath the upper portion of her dress can be seen. As the scene progresses, Gertrude's hair also becomes undone, which adheres to the concept of hair as a universal signal of sexuality. In conjunction with his focus on Gertrude's clothing, Branagh also provides emphasis on her bodily positions. Each time she moves within the room, long shots ensure that the audience recognizes how she sits, stands, or lies. This focus on Gertrude's physical positions makes Gertrude an object of the male gaze, which is a term developed by Laura Mulvey (833-844). Through the male gaze that is directed by the camera, Gertrude becomes a sexual object. An example of the camera's emphasis on Gertrude as its object occurs when Hamlet begins to wring Gertrude's heart. With numerous long shots occurring, Hamlet shoves Gertrude onto the bed, and he later pushes her onto her back. Gertrude remains in this position for a few seconds, which shows the centrality of sexuality within her character. In addition, she sits on the bed with her legs open, again indicative of her sexuality. Both of these shots on the bed focus on Gertrude as an object of male desire and augment Branagh's interpretation of Gertrude's sexuality.

While the Ghost is present, however, Gertrude stands up from the bed, and she does not return to it during the scene. After the Ghost leaves, Hamlet pulls his mother from beside the bed and instead sits on a cushioned bench with her, as if he cannot hold a serious conversation with her while upon a central part of her sexuality, the bed itself. Therefore, although the sexuality of Branagh's Gertrude is controlled during the court scene, her sexuality erupts and is dramatized during the closet scene, and Hamlet must avoid places that involve sex—like the bed—in order to hold a serious conversation with his mother. Hamlet feels betrayed and angered by his

mother's sexuality due to the Ghost's speech and her actions, and his movements away from the bed suggest his attempts to control it. Branagh's version of Gertrude is therefore controlled by Claudius during some parts of the play, but the female Wild is not wholly extinguished, as shown in the closet scene.

Kevin Kline's 1990 filmed play also presents Gertrude as a somewhat controlled sexual presence within the court of Elsinore, but she is less restrained than Branagh's version of Gertrude. As Kline's film opens on the court scene, focus is immediately placed upon Gertrude's sexuality: Claudius and Gertrude share a passionate kiss as the court assembles in a room adjacent to them. Claudius then leads Gertrude into the main room and kisses her hand before giving his address to the court. Additionally, he speaks directly to her as he references their marriage, which he follows by initiating another kiss. Through his treatment of Gertrude, Claudius' actions make his sexualization of his wife clear for the audience. Gertrude's physicality is also emphasized in this scene. As she attempts to persuade Hamlet to remain at Elsinore, she easily pulls him out of his chair, touches his arms and torso several times, and makes several bodily motions as she speaks to him. In addition, Gertrude's full body is typically within the shots of her in this scene, even though Claudius and Hamlet are often seen in close-ups and mid-shots. Thus, through her interaction with Claudius and her physicality toward Hamlet, Gertrude is immediately established as a sexual figure in Kline's opening court scene.

Hamlet is greatly affected by Gertrude's sexuality in Kline's film. During his soliloquy after the court scene, Hamlet's cheeks become wet with tears, and, instead of delivering the speech in an angry tone, Kevin Kline as Hamlet becomes melancholy as he begins to guess the true nature of his mother's actions while also reminiscing over Gertrude's relationship with his father. Disbelief adds to his saddened tone as the speech continues, but very little anger is present

in his speech. As the Ghost later relates what had truly happened, Hamlet is again cast into sadness by his mother's actions. Kline places emphasis on Hamlet's reactions to the Ghost's relation of Gertrude's adultery through a slowly zooming close-up on Hamlet's expressions. Although other close-ups are used within the scene, those of Hamlet's face while the Ghost focuses on Gertrude are closer; thus, Kline emphasizes to his audience that Gertrude's actions as provoked by her sexuality affect her son more than the other aspects of the Ghost's speech.

Kline's film portrays Gertrude's sexuality in the closet scene through many visual cues. In this scene, there are again several shots in which the queen's body is completely in the frame, yet there are also numerous mid-shots. As Hamlet restrains his mother from setting him to those who can speak to him, her clothing becomes disheveled; as the scene progresses, her cloak is undone, and the sleeve of her dress slides down her shoulder. Therefore, Gertrude becomes somewhat undressed in her bedchamber, which calls attention to her sexuality. Kline also chooses to return his focus upon Gertrude's physicality as Hamlet uses it against her. He utilizes physical movements throughout the scene as he attempts to force her attention upon her actions: he grabs her several times, pulls her into his lap and arms as he compares the pictures of her two husbands, and pushes her to the floor. As Hamlet instructs Gertrude to not go to Claudius' bed, he mimes the action of paddling her neck, which shows his disdain toward her sexuality.

Therefore, in the beginning of Kline's adaptation, Hamlet succumbs to his mother's physical actions toward him during the court scene, but he soon despises her sexuality after the Ghost confirms Hamlet's vague ideas concerning his mother's lust. In the closet scene, Hamlet is enraged by Gertrude's sexuality, and he conveys his disgust toward it through his exaggerated physical actions. Kline's connection between physicality and sexuality capitalizes on the visual medium of film. There are few stage directions between Gertrude and Hamlet within the text

itself, so Kline adapts the scene and focuses upon their movements on the stage. He chooses to link sexuality to physicality, and Hamlet reacts against these attributes of Gertrude by presenting her with a parody of her physical and sexual actions as he attempts to convince his mother of her misdeeds.

Michael Almereyda's 2000 version of *Hamlet* presents Gertrude's sexuality as excessive, and Claudius does little to control it. As in Kline's version, Claudius and Gertrude share a kiss during the court scene, which is modernized into a press conference. Gertrude seems quite happy during this scene and even dances briefly with Claudius after the press conference comes to a close. She is almost continually attached to Claudius after the press conference, and this action recalls Hamlet's image of Gertrude as hanging on King Hamlet while he was alive. As they walk down a city street, Gertrude links her arm with Hamlet's and, in a serious tone, attempts to convince him not to mourn for King Hamlet's death. As Hamlet attempts to explain his grief, he takes off his sunglasses, and Gertrude becomes the only character in the scene who is wearing sunglasses, which, based on Hamlet's removal of his sunglasses in order to convey emotion, seems to imply that Gertrude constructs a barrier in regard to her grief toward King Hamlet. She takes her sunglasses off, however, as she asks Hamlet in a soft tone not to let her lose her prayers, so she does convey emotion to Hamlet, but not toward his deceased father. Through this focus upon the characters' symbolic movements, Almereyda establishes an emphasis on actions that carries through the rest of the film.

Gertrude's sexuality is strikingly exhibited later in the film, when Guildenstern and Rosencrantz report Hamlet's actions to Claudius over the phone. This scene opens with a close-up on Gertrude lying in bed while wearing heavy makeup and appearing to be naked. Claudius' conversation with the two men overlays this cut. The next cut of the scene features Gertrude in

the same position, but it gives the audience enough distance to see that she wears a red dress, and Claudius is sitting on the bed with the telephone on speakerphone beside him. Gertrude toys with Claudius with her leg and scoots up behind him, positioning him between her legs. She then kisses him and begins to undo his shirt buttons. The two proceed to kiss as the conversation ends, and Claudius pushes her onto the bed as the scene closes. Thus, in this scene, Gertrude plays the role of a lustful seductress, for she initiates the sexual encounter and provokes Claudius' actions, therefore illustrating an unrestrained sexuality.

In Almereyda's adaptation, Hamlet's speech after the court scene occurs as a depressed internal monologue in his apartment; while delivering his lines, he intently watches films of his mother and father while they were happy together. The tone of this version of Hamlet does not change to anger as in Branagh's version, but instead he retains his saddened and betrayed feelings. The Ghost's words concerning Gertrude deepen Hamlet's sadness rather than arousing his anger. As the Ghost relates his story, Hamlet looks shocked, depressed, and betrayed, and these emotions continue until the scene ends.

Hamlet's anger toward Gertrude and her sexuality, however, bursts forth during the closet scene. Almereyda uses the established theme of Gertrude's clothes exposing her, for her silk robe slowly comes apart to reveal more flesh as the scene progresses. Hamlet reacts against Gertrude's sexuality by ripping the sheets off of the incestuous bed, which has off-white sheets, some red pillows, and a red headboard, symbolizing Gertrude's stained purity due to her choice to move from Hyperion to a satyr. As Gertrude attempts to stop Hamlet, he yanks her onto the bed and wraps the sheets around her neck, as if to show how she is enslaved by her own lust. She remains on her bed for the remainder of the scene, but Hamlet gets off of it as he speaks to her, perhaps indicating a view similar to that of Branagh's Hamlet toward the bed.

After leaving with Polonius' body, Hamlet calls Gertrude on a payphone to finish the conversation that traditionally occurs while he is still in his mother's room. His instruction makes the teary Gertrude resolve to follow his wishes, and she tells Hamlet with a serious tone that she will keep his secret. Thus, through his actions in the closet scene, Hamlet secures his mother's support in this version of the play, which had emphasized Gertrude's out-of-control sexuality up to this point. After this scene, Gertrude's sexuality is largely reigned in, so Hamlet succeeds in convincing his mother of her misdeeds and also lessens her sexual tendencies. It is interesting to note, however, that even though this version of Hamlet exhibits some control over Gertrude's sexuality, Gertrude herself also has a part in suppressing the female Wild within herself. Almereyda's modernization of *Hamlet* allows this different type of control to exist, for Gertrude is presented from the beginning of the film as a woman with more agency than most of the other film versions of the queen. She initiates the sexual encounter with Claudius earlier in the film, and she also has the power to control her sexuality, with some direction from Hamlet.

While the previous filmed versions of *Hamlet* emphasize Gertrude's sexuality, other directors use a different lens through which to interpret the queen. Several directors utilize Sigmund Freud's influential theory of the Oedipus complex to focus on the relationship between Gertrude and her son. Directors who utilize the Oedipus complex project the modern world onto the Renaissance drama they are adapting—with varying degrees of success. The decision to portray Gertrude in light of this modern theory produces numerous differences within the film because her relationship to Hamlet becomes changed, and the force of her sexuality becomes altered. With the Oedipus complex in play, Gertrude's sexuality acts to either actively provoke or passively enable Hamlet's Oedipal desires. In order to examine these differences, we must first establish the framework of the Oedipus complex itself.

Sigmund Freud states that the Oedipus complex, as named due to Freud's use of the tragedy *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, arises because of a son's sexual impulse toward his mother and jealousy and "murderous wish" against his father; therefore, the son wishes to gain the position of the father in order to gain exclusive intimacy with his mother (Freud 816) (Krimm ix). These emotions toward his parents are the first of their kind for the child, and they become repressed as he grows older (Freud 816). Freud states that as an adult, a son may dream of having sexual relations with his mother, but he will react to his dream in horror and astonishment (Freud 817).

Freud compares *Oedipus Rex* to *Hamlet* in his analysis, and he claims the treatment of the Oedipus complex in literature has changed over time. According to Freud, the repressed emotions of childhood resurface in adulthood and, in the case of Oedipus, are fulfilled in reality, instead of in a dream. Hamlet, on the other hand, continues to repress his "Oedipus complex," and "we only learn of its existence from its inhibiting consequences" (Freud 817). Freud argues that the consequence of Hamlet's repressed Oedipus complex is his inability to exact revenge upon Claudius because the new king has achieved Hamlet's childhood wish for his father's death and position (817-818). Thus, Freud states, Hamlet's unconscious is to blame for his inaction because he finds himself "no better than the sinner whom he is to punish" (818).

According to Ernest Jones, Freud's disciple who wrote *Hamlet and Oedipus*, Hamlet's Oedipus complex awakens within his consciousness before the play begins, with the death of his father and the second marriage of his mother (24). Having repressed his Oedipal desire, his mother's sexuality fills Hamlet with repulsion (Jones 24). Jones argues that Claudius claims the role that Hamlet once yearned to achieve—he has usurped the throne by murdering King Hamlet and has also married Gertrude (Jones 24-25). Moreover, as Jones states, this usurper is a member

of Hamlet's own family; therefore, Claudius even commits the act of incest, which further increases the similarity between Claudius' actions and Hamlet's repressed desires (25). Due to these actions that reflect his own Oedipal wishes, Hamlet's repressed desires "are once more struggling to find conscious expression" (Jones 25). In most film adaptations, the fight within Hamlet's unconscious is demonstrated through his repulsion aimed at his mother's sexuality.

Franco Zeffirelli's 1990 film version of *Hamlet*, which features Glenn Close as Gertrude and Mel Gibson as Hamlet, provides an example of Hamlet's obvious repulsion. In the closet scene, Zeffirelli chooses to represent Hamlet's actions toward his mother as an obscene eruption of Oedipal desire. During his tirade against Gertrude's sexuality, Hamlet shoves his mother onto her bed in a prone position and positions himself on top of her. The camera does not give the audience a full view, but it seems as if Hamlet is shoving Gertrude in a motion reminiscent of sexual thrusting. This impression is augmented by Gertrude's reaction; she responds with a combination of sobs and screams at each shove. Additionally, her hair becomes disheveled as the movement progresses, which resembles an encounter in bed. Gertrude's actions manifest her overt sexuality, and, under the lens of the Oedipus complex, Hamlet is acting upon his repulsion toward his mother, as well as his repressed desires. Thus, through his seemingly sexual actions, Hamlet dramatizes for Gertrude his disgust toward her relationship with his uncle and tries to force her to recognize how repulsive the relationship is, at least to him. Gertrude, however, responds in a pseudo-sexual manner, illustrating her sexuality.

Interestingly, when the Ghost appears shortly after this physical interplay, Hamlet hurriedly gets off of the bed. This action is repeated in many filmed productions of *Hamlet*. In the versions that present the Hamlet-Gertrude relationship in Oedipal terms, perhaps Hamlet hurries from the bed because he is ashamed to be seen in bed with his mother; he may be

embarrassed to appear as if he is acting upon his repressed desires. In other film versions that do not dramatize the Oedipus complex, Hamlet may move from the bed because he feels guilty; the ghost catches Hamlet not following his original command to leave Gertrude to heaven.

Zeffirelli's version of Hamlet climbs back into the bed after his father bids him to speak with Gertrude, which could indicate that versions of Hamlet with Oedipal desires view the bed as the best avenue to talk to his seductress mother. Additionally, as he forces Gertrude to look at the picture of Claudius on Gertrude's necklace earlier in the scene, Hamlet yanks the necklace that encircles his mother's neck, causing her to jerk forward and choke. This action suggests her imprisonment to her sexuality. Hamlet's rough and sexual actions toward his mother reveal his repulsion in reaction to the eruption of his own repressed urges. Zeffirelli, therefore, is quite concerned with Gertrude's lust during the closet scene, as well as the Oedipal relationship between her and Hamlet.

Through the lens of Jones' work, Henk de Berg argues that Hamlet is only vaguely aware of his resurfacing Oedipal desires and the ensuing internal conflict between his "conscious social wishes and his unconscious antisocial, Oedipal wishes," even though it determines many of his actions (80). This "inner conflict between contradictory impulses" causes *Reaktionsbildung* within Hamlet, a term de Berg defines as "the attempt to repress a desire by pursuing its opposite" (80-81). Therefore, perhaps the most notable way that Hamlet's repressed desires manifest themselves occurs in his actions toward the two women in the play: Gertrude and Ophelia (Jones 26). An example of *Reaktionsbildung* occurs when Hamlet spurns his mother's request to sit by her during *The Mousetrap*. He opts instead for Ophelia, whom he terms as "metal more attractive" (3.2.108). According to de Berg, Hamlet seems to purposefully court

Ophelia under the public eye in order to make his mother jealous. Under this analysis, Hamlet acts against his repressed desires by flirting with Ophelia, the opposite of his mother.

Hamlet, however, is not the only figure responsible for his Oedipus complex, for Gertrude's actions toward Hamlet also contribute to the unconscious wishes of her son. According to Jones, two characteristics of the queen support her son's feelings toward her: her "markedly sensual nature and her passionate fondness for her son" (Jones 23). Although Hamlet may have somewhat disengaged himself from his mother and fallen in love with Ophelia, some remnants of his attraction to his mother remain (Jones 23). In his choice of a lover, however, Hamlet finds in Ophelia a strikingly opposite person from his mother, demonstrating *Reaktionsbildung* (de Berg 80). While Ophelia is innocent, modest, and chaste, Gertrude is open with her sexuality. Jones states that Hamlet may have unconsciously chosen Ophelia as his lover because she is a woman who would not easily remind him of his mother (23). Therefore, under Freud's theory as expanded upon by Jones, Gertrude is inextricably involved in Hamlet's Oedipus complex and even contributes to it through her characteristics and her presence, which create a necessity within Hamlet to rebel against his unconscious desires.

Laurence Olivier's 1948 film version of *Hamlet* with Eileen Herlie as Gertrude is typically referred to as the first major film that dramatizes the Oedipus complex as an element of Hamlet's relationship to Gertrude. Herlie establishes Gertrude's overt sexuality early in the film when she deeply kisses Hamlet after he agrees to stay at Elsinore instead of going to Wittenberg. She is also lascivious toward Claudius throughout the film. For example, she creates and prolongs the sexual current between herself and the king by sitting extremely close to Claudius as Polonius walks in to give them his opinion on Hamlet's madness. As Polonius enters the room, the royal couple separates only slightly after they are interrupted from looking into each

other's eyes with their faces only a few inches apart. Therefore, Olivier cements Gertrude's character as sexual from the beginning of the film.

Due to her sexuality, Herlie's version of Gertrude seems to enable her son's Oedipal desires when Hamlet comes to speak with her in her bedroom. When she tries to walk past her son early in the scene, Laurence Olivier as Hamlet grabs Herlie's arm and violently throws her onto the bed. Gertrude's actions remain centered on the bed as the scene continues, and as the Ghost enters, Hamlet shoves his mother onto the bed. Gertrude, however, does not fall back in a heap, but she instead lands in a provocative position, with her dress sliding off her shoulders. After the Ghost leaves, Hamlet embraces his mother from behind. They also share a passionate kiss before Hamlet leaves. Therefore, in Olivier's closet scene, Gertrude's sexuality enables Hamlet's Oedipal desires to exist and even provokes him to act on those desires. Her bed makes a reappearance at the end of the film as the camera follows the procession of the soldiers who carry Hamlet's body out of the castle. Due to the importance placed on the bed within the film, the tragic ending seems to be partially caused by lust. Thus, in Olivier's film version of *Hamlet*, Gertrude's open sexuality responds to the obvious eruption of Hamlet's own Oedipal desires and is even identified as a cause for the tragic ending.

Another aspect of the Oedipus complex that Ernest Jones details is the son's relation to his father. The son's repressed wish toward his "successful rival" is "not only that the father should die, but that the son, taking over the sexual role of the father, should then espouse the mother" (Jones 21-22). Some film productions dramatize this concept by having Hamlet force sexual movements upon his mother in the closet scene, but Hamlet's reason for this action seems to be a matter of disgust more than sexual pleasure. The film adaptations directed by Rodney Bennett and Franco Zeffirelli (as we have seen) both feature versions of Hamlet who position

themselves on top of their mothers in bed to make sexual, thrust-like movements during the closet scene. In this scene, instead of *Reaktionsbildung*, Hamlet's repressed sexual wishes manifest themselves in a violent fit of disgust. Instead of fulfilling his repressed desire to bed his mother, Hamlet demonstrates a mockery of copulation that not only reveals his own disgust but also demonstrates his intent to make Gertrude realize and become disgusted at her deeds. Thus, these films suggest Hamlet's repressed Oedipus complex to the audience as it manifests itself in his movements.

Hamlet's repressed desires can also be seen as bubbling to the surface in other parts of the play. For example, Hamlet's insistence that Ophelia should go to a nunnery so she would not be a "breeder of sinners" implies his belief that, as a woman, she cannot control her sexuality (3.1.122). Other comments of this nature are present within the scene in which Ophelia attempts to return Hamlet's remembrances, such as Hamlet's comment that women make "your wantonness your / ignorance" (3.1.145-146). Toward the end of his conversation with Gertrude in her closet, Hamlet reproaches his mother with an "almost physical disgust which is so characteristic a manifestation of intensely repressed sexual feeling" (Jones 27). This disgust, however, is in reaction to Gertrude's acceptance of Claudius' actions toward her, such as his "pinch[ing] wanton on your cheek" and "paddling in your neck with his damned fingers" (3.4.183, 3.4.185). Henk de Berg argues that Hamlet's condemnation of Gertrude's sexual actions with Claudius expresses both surface disgust and unconscious, repressed sexual desire because he uses such graphic detail to express his imagining of Claudius' actions (84).

In some film versions of *Hamlet*, the title character presents his disgust and desire as he details Claudius' actions by physically acting them out. In order to mock his mother's sexuality, Kevin Kline as Hamlet pulls Gertrude into his lap as he asks her not to "let the bloat king tempt"

Gertrude to bed, then he paddles her neck as he states the next few lines (3.4.182). Hamlet thus parodies the actions of Claudius as he describes them in disgust, and he tries to make Gertrude feel the same emotion toward Claudius by doing so.

According to Jones, Gertrude also plays a large role in her son's Oedipus complex, even though the male child is the one who exhibits the psychological behavior. As Jones states, a mother's "attraction" toward her son can "exert a controlling influence over the boy's later destiny" (20). Jones also determines that if the "awakened passion" a boy feels toward his mother is not sufficiently repressed, the boy "may remain throughout life abnormally attached to his mother and unable to love any other woman" (20). In some film productions, Hamlet's tone reveals that he still retains some love toward Ophelia when he instructs her to go to a nunnery and leave Elsinore, yet this concept is contrasted by his callous treatment toward Ophelia earlier in the scene, when she attempts to return his remembrances at the order of her father.

Toward his mother, however, Hamlet can seem overly attached, especially in some modern films. For example, in the Gregory Doran's 2009 film adaptation of a stage production, David Tennant as Hamlet and Penny Downie as Gertrude share many embraces during the closet scene that are reminiscent of lovers' actions, so their relationship appears somewhat inappropriate. In this version, however, Hamlet seems to give more affection to his mother than she does to him. As in other versions, he is in almost complete control of the movement within the scene as he aggressively shoves her around the room at the beginning; in addition, toward the end of the scene, Hamlet acts as the sole initiator of their embraces. While his actions propel the scene forward and expose Gertrude's sexuality, such as when he rips the sheets off the bed, Gertrude yields to his actions. For example, after Gertrude agrees to not tell Claudius about Hamlet's knowledge of the murder, the mother and son embrace in a strange manner because

Hamlet places them in an odd position. Gertrude is sitting on an ottoman, and Hamlet hugs her from a kneeling position; he then rests his head upon her lap and positions his arms around her hips. This embrace seems reminiscent of the love of a young child for his mother. As he realizes the childlike position he has placed himself in, Hamlet pulls away from his mother and leans against the nearby bed. This brief reversion to childlike tendencies is Oedipal on Hamlet's part, but Gertrude does not provoke the action and instead simply allows it. Thus, Hamlet's insufficiently repressed Oedipus complex affects his overly affectionate relationship with his mother, but, as Doran's version shows, Gertrude does not always reciprocate this Oedipal affection in the same way. She can either allow it to happen, as in Doran's interpretation of Gertrude, or she can contribute to it, as in Olivier's version.

As described by Ernest Jones, Hamlet's relationships to his mother, father, and stepfather as dictated by his Oedipus complex cause his inaction and, therefore, are a large force in the overall play. Due to his repressed desires, Hamlet is at an impasse. Jones argues that Hamlet's Oedipus complex has been somewhat awakened by his mother's incestuous remarriage and the murder of his father, but "the more vigorously he denounces his uncle, the more powerfully he stimulates to activity his own unconscious and repressed complexes" (Jones 28). Jones states that Claudius took Hamlet's desired role as he murdered Hamlet's father, married his mother, and proceeded to have sexual relations with his mother, so the new king represents the "deepest and most buried part of his own personality" (Jones 29). Thus, Hamlet cannot follow his deceased father's command for revenge without also killing part of himself, hence his suicidal wishes (Jones 29).

Hamlet faces the choice to either fully detest his uncle and exact his revenge or to ignore his father's command. The former, however, makes his Oedipal desires rise to the surface

because he would take the place for which he yearns in his unconscious. According to Jones, Hamlet decides to take the route of inaction, which allows him to somewhat prevent his repressed desires from becoming more active (Jones 29). Henk de Berg states that, due to his reawakened Oedipus complex, Hamlet is both drawn to and repulsed by the idea of murdering his second father (de Berg 82). As Jones argues, Hamlet cannot kill Claudius because the murder would provide the partial fulfillment of his repressed desires (Jones 29). In killing Claudius, Hamlet would succeed in murdering the husband of his mother and taking his place, for Hamlet is next in line for the throne. Thus, as Jones states, Hamlet would achieve half of his Oedipal desires by replacing his father. With the repression necessary for the Oedipus complex to remain firmly in the unconscious, Hamlet must therefore choose inaction (Jones 29).

Hamlet's relationship with his closest family members partially drives the action—or inaction—of the play. Freud's theory tries to untangle this complex family dynamic that centers on Gertrude's remarriage. His theory, of course, was not available at the time that Shakespeare wrote the play. While some film directors choose to utilize Freud's influential theory in their renditions of the Renaissance drama, others ignore the Oedipal interpretation entirely. Some of these other films present Gertrude as a sexual figure without attributing Oedipal desire to Hamlet. Another route that a few directors take is to decrease Gertrude's sexual role and render the Oedipus complex almost nonexistent in the performance. The choice to decrease the emphasis on Gertrude's sexuality produces a different portrayal of her relationship with Hamlet compared to the other two methods directors utilize, and the dynamic of her character changes as a result.

Richard Burton's 1964 filmed stage play of *Hamlet* decreases Gertrude's sexuality and makes it nearly nonexistent. Instead of replacing her sexuality with another characteristic,

however, Burton fashions Eileen Herlie as Gertrude into a blank canvas for other characters to take advantage of, especially Claudius. For example, as Polonius attempts to convince the royal couple of Ophelia's role in Hamlet's madness, Claudius turns to Gertrude with slight concern and asks what she thinks. Unlike some other versions, which emphasize Gertrude's anxiety at this moment, this version of Gertrude mirrors Claudius and replies with a similar amount of concern. During the play scene, she forces a cheerful disposition upon herself as she speaks to Claudius that only falters as Hamlet mentions his father, which causes her to become quietly upset. This version of Gertrude, however, continues to converse and laugh with Claudius during the dumb show, which reveals how quickly she can hide her own feelings and reflect those of Claudius. Thus, she seems to have little agency in the beginning of the filmed play, for she acts as Claudius' mirror.

The true emotions of Burton's Gertrude finally appear in the closet scene, as she becomes increasingly upset by Hamlet's words. She sobs throughout the majority of the scene and seems pained as Hamlet forces her to face her deeds. After this scene, Gertrude's own character appears, which illustrates her division from Claudius. For example, she seems sad and shocked when Ophelia first appears as a madwoman, yet Claudius maintains his composure. She also displays immense emotion that is reminiscent of the closet scene as she relays Ophelia's death. In addition, a sense of her own agency manifests as she attempts to stop Laertes from threatening Claudius because she refuses to release her grip from Laertes' sword arm until Claudius orders her to do so for the second time. Thus, Gertrude tries to take control of the action in this scene, which is further illustrated as she hurriedly steps in front of Claudius in an attempt to protect him. Her agency declines afterward, however, for she does not make much of an attempt to calm Laertes and Hamlet as they fight over Ophelia's grave. Although she starts to run toward Hamlet

as she shouts his name, this version of Gertrude quickly stops herself from approaching him and instead watches the scene play out from the sidelines. At the end of the film, Gertrude drinks from the poisoned cup even though Claudius begs her not to, but she remains unaware of the poison until she dies. Thus, Burton chooses to de-emphasize the sexuality of his version of Gertrude in order to focus on the changes in her agency as the play progresses. Yet this Gertrude is not fully autonomous by the end of the play, for she retrains herself from attempting to control the action over Ophelia's grave and even dies as a result of her newfound, partial freedom.

In Grigori Kozintsev's 1964 version of *Hamlet*, Gertrude's character reflects the highly stylized court world; thus, the typical emphasis on her sexuality is displaced. The sexuality of Gertrude, played by Elza Radzina, is still present, as shown when Claudius leads her into a private room before the scene in which Hamlet first meets the Ghost, but it is de-emphasized. As she leaves the room in which Claudius addresses his courtiers at the beginning of the play, Gertrude walks down some stairs to meet Hamlet. Almost immediately after she enters the room, her courtiers hand her a mirror that she looks into as she speaks to Hamlet, illustrating her vanity. In addition, this version of Gertrude seems quite happy and is full of smiles during the first half of the play, which sometimes suggests she is hiding her inner thoughts. An example of this action occurs during the play-within-the-play scene: she acts as if she does not feel snubbed by Hamlet's comment that he would prefer to sit next to Ophelia because she is "metal more attractive" (3.2.108). This version of Gertrude therefore seems to hide behind her smiles and vanity. She also hides behind her courtiers and the castle itself; for example, Hamlet must traverse an elaborate system of rooms and dodge courtiers in order to reach his mother's closet. Gertrude cannot completely hide behind her façade, however, for her annoyance bubbles to the

surface when she tells Hamlet during the play scene that she thinks “the lady doth protest too much” (3.2.226).

The closet scene is the turning point for Kozintsev’s Gertrude, and, from then on, her true emotions are more present within the film. Hamlet seems to have convinced her of the folly of her relationship with Claudius, which rids her of the façade of vanity, smiles, and many closed doors. After Polonius’ funeral, for example, she is teary as she lies in bed with Claudius, and she moves away from her second husband as he tries to comfort her. In addition, her concern for Hamlet is quite apparent during his fights with Laertes at Ophelia’s gravesite and at the fencing match. As she tells Claudius that she will drink from the poisoned cup, she looks annoyed, and Kozintsev leaves it ambiguous as to whether she knew if she poisoned herself. Thus, the sexuality of this version of Gertrude is not emphasized, and Kozintsev instead displaces it to focus on her emotions. With an increased freedom of her emotions after the closet scene, Gertrude seems to be more concerned for Hamlet, as illustrated by her actions later in the film. Additionally, Kozintsev displaces Gertrude’s sexuality and portrays a shift in her character in order to contribute to the political message of his work. This film version was made in Soviet Russia, and Kozintsev uses *Hamlet* to examine the decadence of the Russian aristocracy, as illustrated by the vain and false qualities of Gertrude’s initial personality. Hamlet causes her later shift and also the tragic ending of the play, and he purges Elsinore of the rottenness of the state, which is the aristocracy itself, under Kozintsev’s lens. Thus, Gertrude’s sexuality and shift both focus on the character of Gertrude herself while also furthering Kozintsev’s goal of conveying a political message for his audience.

In the previous two film versions we discussed, Gertrude experiences a change in character during the closet scene when Hamlet succeeds in forcing her to come to her senses.

While some versions of Gertrude change after the closet scene, others remain virtually the same and do not disengage themselves from Claudius. The effect of the closet scene on Gertrude can typically be viewed by observing her actions during the final scene of each film. In the text, there are few stage directions concerning Gertrude's actions during the final scene; Shakespeare only makes her actions clear when she drinks the poisoned cup, when she falls due to the effect of the poison, and when she dies. Due to the spare stage directions, directors can exert a great deal of liberty as they interpret Gertrude's actions, for Shakespeare leaves Gertrude's discovery of the poison unclear: Did she know and willingly sacrifice herself for Hamlet, or was it truly an accident? In Michael Almereyda's adaptation of *Hamlet*, Diane Venora as Gertrude so closely aligns herself with her son after the closet scene that she runs up to him as Claudius tries to give him the poisoned wine and drinks it herself with full knowledge of the poison. She therefore sacrifices herself for Hamlet's sake and refuses to stand by as her husband's plans unfold. Franco Zeffirelli's version presents the audience with a different type of Gertrude. Glenn Close as Gertrude adheres more to the tradition of playfully and smilingly drinking the goblet, completely unaware of the poison it contains. Her allegiance after the closet scene does shift, however, as symbolized by changes in her clothing. Near the beginning of the film, Close wears a flowing dress and has her hair down, and her youth is emphasized through her giddiness toward Claudius, which makes it difficult to believe that she is Gibson's mother. In the final scene, however, her hair is partially hidden behind a wimple, she wears a more elaborate, stiff dress, and she has donned a long necklace with a cross that hangs directly over her genitals. Thus, her sexuality is mostly restrained in the final scene, which contrasts to the beginning of the film, when Gertrude's sexuality was more free and lively. Almereyda and Zeffirelli therefore present two versions of Gertrude who act in different ways in the final scene. Both of these directors take

the liberty to interpret the text in different ways and act out their choices through the visual medium of film.

In the films in which Gertrude's sexuality is emphasized, as in Almereyda and Zeffirelli's versions, there seems to be little relation between the portrayal of Gertrude's sexuality and her self-sacrifice. Three films in which Gertrude knows about the poisoned cup are the versions of Laurence Olivier, Michael Almereyda, and Gregory Doran. Olivier's Gertrude promotes her son's Oedipus complex, and Doran's version allows it, yet Almereyda's Gertrude is simply sexualized. Regardless of how her sexuality is presented, each of these Gertrudes demonstrates her own agency at the end of her respective film. After the closet scene, the allegiance of these Gertrudes has changed, and, in each film, she chooses to align herself with Hamlet instead of Claudius. This shift causes Gertrude to exhibit more agency, which she demonstrates through her defiance of Claudius as she sacrifices herself in the final scene, even though she is aware of the consequence. Thus, in these films, Gertrude's own will rises in response to Hamlet's entreaties.

All three of these Gertrudes are given more agency than the other film versions of Gertrude who remain unaware of the poison, for each of them displays her love for and devotion to Hamlet, whether or not it is sexually charged or promotes Hamlet's Oedipal desires. But by the simple defiance of Claudius' wishes, aware or unaware of the poison, all of the film versions of Gertrude gain some degree of agency at the end of the play by ignoring her husband and king as she chooses to drink from the poisoned goblet.

The impact and meaning of Gertrude's sexuality and agency within the final scene is best presented on film or in performance, for her lines and stage directions within the scene are spare and can be breezed over as the reader focuses on the title character. In this scene, Gertrude exhibits a profound change that depends on her reaction to Hamlet's instruction in the closet

scene. If her actions toward Claudius change after the closet scene, her sexuality is no longer directed toward her second husband. Thus, the sexual aspect of the female Wild is somewhat reigned in due to Hamlet's instruction in the closet scene. Her agency still erupts in the final scene, which demonstrates the inability of men to suppress the female Wild entirely. She rebels against Claudius by drinking the wine, whether she knows about the poison or not. On the other hand, if Gertrude does not show a change in her regard for Claudius after the closet scene, the female Wild erupts in a different way. Through this interpretation of Gertrude, the female Wild as represented by her sexuality would never have been fully controlled, so her choice to ignore Claudius' command reveals that lack of control. In both modes of interpretation, regardless of the degree to which Gertrude's sexuality is controlled by the end of the play, the female Wild rises up and rejects Claudius. This view of Gertrude can perhaps be overlooked in the text itself, but film and performance provide focus on Gertrude's actions during the final scene. The effect of visual mediums upon the reception of Gertrude displays her growth and resulting strength of her character in the final scene because it is clear that she no longer submits to Claudius' control.

Shifts of the Female Wild: A Case Study of Franco Zeffirelli's *Hamlet*

After our examination of both embodiments of the female Wild within Elsinore, a question arises: How do these two forms of the Wild interact with each other? Some film directors do not adapt *Hamlet* with this issue in mind; instead, they may wish to focus on other aspects of the play. For example, Laurence Olivier places more emphasis upon the character of Hamlet, as well as his relationship to Gertrude. But some other directors, especially Franco Zeffirelli, choose to portray the interplay between the characters of Gertrude and Ophelia as much more profound, particularly under the consideration of the modern theory Jeanne Addison Roberts postulates.

As we have discussed, Ophelia embodies the female Wild in her madness. If she distributes actual plant life to the court, she presents a tangible form of the Wild, which threatens the fortress of Elsinore under Claudius' rule. Depending on a director's choice concerning the portrayal of Gertrude, the queen's relation to the female Wild either decreases or remains virtually the same after the closet scene. As discussed in the previous chapter, we can observe this possible change by examining her actions after this iconic scene, especially during the final scene of the play.

Gertrude and Ophelia's roles in relation to the female Wild shift as the play progresses. Gertrude can remain the same, a figure of overt or perhaps slightly restrained sexuality, as in Olivier's version, or her allegiance can shift from Claudius to Hamlet due to her son's intervention in the closet scene, as in Almereyda's film. Ophelia, on the other hand, almost always switches from a controlled entity to an unrestrained, active force of the female Wild, either through her emotions or through the Nature she presents to the court.

Some films, however, present these shifts as separate and almost unaffected by each other. For example, Gregory Doran's version of Gertrude seems frightened by Ophelia's actions during the young woman's first mad scene, and she attempts to comfort her, but Gertrude does not seem to be affected by Ophelia's madness as the film progresses. Instead, Doran's film adaptation seems to place more emphasis on Gertrude's relations to Hamlet and Claudius rather than her possible connection to Ophelia. Some other film directors, like Franco Zeffirelli, choose to focus on the relation between Gertrude and Ophelia in order to portray shifts of female agency within their adaptations of *Hamlet*.

Franco Zeffirelli's film adaptation of *Hamlet* features two transfers of the female Wild—and its connected agency—between Ophelia and Gertrude. After the characters' respective turning points, each takes on the manifestation of the female Wild originally associated with the other character. In Zeffirelli's adaptation, Gertrude's change in character occurs after the closet scene, in which Hamlet gains her support and forces her to realize the revolting nature of her sexuality. Ophelia's shift in character seems to have occurred off-screen, in response to the death of Polonius. The changes in each character cause the women to exhibit altered forms of the female Wild, which enables each of them to act with increased agency.

When Zeffirelli's Ophelia appears in her first mad scene, she is not the pitiful damsel that other films sometimes portray. Instead, Helena Bonham-Carter's performance as Ophelia is explicitly sexual during the first part of her initial mad scene. As Gertrude watches the young woman from a window in the castle, Ophelia approaches a guard on the battlements. While she states her lines, this version of Ophelia strokes the guard's face and hair rather roughly as he nervously tries to ignore her. Then, she pulls on his leather belt as she says, "By Cock they are to blame" (4.5.61). Coupled with her pun, the belt clearly signifies male genitalia. This gesture can

symbolize her undressing of the guard to reach his penis, which illustrates the sexuality aspect of the female Wild that had been previously associated with Gertrude. This overt sexual gesture of Ophelia is later coupled with her presentation of the bones and dead straw as a sinister form of Nature, so Zeffirelli provides his audience with a forceful embodiment of the female Wild.

Due to the unrestrained sexuality that Ophelia briefly exhibits, Zeffirelli's version of Ophelia claims a form of the female Wild that was previously Gertrude's domain—her sexuality. After the closet scene, Gertrude's sexuality obviously becomes restrained, similar to how Ophelia's sexuality was suppressed earlier in the film. The queen's clothing choices give us a clear indication of Gertrude's shift in sexuality. Her hair, which is a trope that indicates freedom of sexuality, is completely hidden by a wimple during Ophelia's funeral. Additionally, this version of Gertrude, played by Glenn Close, wears a long necklace with an oversized cross pendant that covers her genitals during the final scene; she symbolically and literally bars her sexuality from Claudius. Instead of acting upon her sexuality during the fencing match, she becomes a concerned mother. For example, she wipes Hamlet's face and then wipes her own face with the same cloth, illustrating the close relationship she feels with her son.

As Gertrude's sexuality becomes restrained, Ophelia's becomes open. The sexuality facet of the female Wild therefore shifts from Gertrude to Ophelia in Zeffirelli's film adaptation of *Hamlet*. As she becomes mad, this version of Ophelia embodies the female Wild by also exhibiting the sexuality typically associated with Gertrude. The queen, on the other hand, takes the more restrained position originally inhabited by Ophelia through her clothing choices and actions.

This transfer of sexuality allows Zeffirelli to create more impact with Ophelia's presentation of the Natural form of the female Wild. Ophelia's power in the flower scene seems

to be stronger than in other film versions because she embodies the sexuality aspect of the female Wild in conjunction with the facets of Nature and madness. The characters involved in the flower scene, as well as several courtiers, must look for Ophelia, and they discover her in the throne room. This action deviates from the text, in which Ophelia breaks into the conversation between Laertes, Gertrude, and Claudius. Her power is most strikingly established by the location in which the other characters find her: she is sitting on Gertrude's throne. While her position in the scene illustrates the threat that Ophelia presents to the court, it also shows that Ophelia has taken over Gertrude's position as the embodiment of the female Wild.

Ophelia's death, however, allows Gertrude to partially retake her power as part of the female Wild. While she is almost completely desexualized during Ophelia's funeral, Gertrude's sexuality somewhat resurfaces in the fencing match, as illustrated by her clothing, which portrays her as a moderately structured yet unattainable form of the female Wild. She wears her hair in constructed braids, and her dress is more elaborate than the one she wears to Ophelia's funeral. As previously mentioned, Gertrude's cross pendant symbolically bars the site of her sexuality. This version of Gertrude is not a-sexual and retains her sexuality, as well as her relation to the female Wild, but her choice of clothing indicates her action of taking control of it herself. Through this different form of control, Gertrude defies Claudius' order and exhibits her own agency by drinking from the poisoned cup. This rebellious action coincides with the clothing choice that represents Gertrude's self-control. Thus, at the end of the play, Gertrude reclaims her agency as a member of the irrepressible female Wild, but she uses it herself as she defies Claudius instead of spurring on his lust.

Therefore, two shifts in female agency occur during Zeffirelli's adaptation, and these changes are accompanied by transfers of the female Wild. Gertrude retains some agency until the

closet scene because of her sexuality, for she partially causes the rottenness in Denmark. After the closet scene, Gertrude has realized the repulsiveness of her actions, and she places herself in a restrained position, as compared to the virtually nonexistent control Claudius held over her. As Gertrude's sexuality is restrained, Ophelia comes to embody various forms of the female Wild, including Gertrude's previous attribute of uncontrolled sexuality. After Ophelia's death, Gertrude regains some agency and accidentally takes her own life as she disobeys Claudius' order to not drink the poisoned wine.

Zeffirelli's adaptation of *Hamlet* capitalizes on the shifts in the roles of Ophelia and Gertrude, especially in consideration of Roberts' concept of the female Wild. While some other films also enact these changes, Zeffirelli's film adaptation most strikingly reveals this transference to the modern audience by visually presenting Ophelia with symbols of her power and sexuality when she temporarily takes over Gertrude's role as the film's representation of the unrestrained female Wild. In addition, the clothing choices of Gertrude throughout the film give the modern audience an idea of her changing agency. Therefore, Zeffirelli's visual choices clearly display the shifts in roles between Gertrude and Ophelia in ways that create impact for the modern audience.

Conclusion: Adaptation for the Modern Generation

As we have seen, the visual medium of film enables a more profound interpretation of Ophelia and Gertrude among modern audience members. Film directors who adapt Gertrude's sexuality and Ophelia's flowers often create more impact by capitalizing on the visual nature of film. By giving Ophelia different, symbolic objects or increased emotions, film directors overcome the difference between the Elizabethan world and that of today by skirting the Elizabethan language of flowers. In addition, the numerous ways directors interpret Gertrude's sexuality enables her character to step forward from the past by illustrating her relationship with Hamlet and Claudius in different ways. Instead of remaining in the world of the Elizabethans, some film directors adapt Shakespeare's plays and superimpose contemporary interpretations with tradition, creating films geared toward the modern audience.

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