The Lives of Tudor Women in History and Literature

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Content

Introduction

Certain types of behaviour in works written by William Shakespeare may seem quite strange or unclear to us, possibly because we fail to understand the social and cultural context in which the plays are set. Perhaps, by observing and studying the past, there is a way to learn more and at the same time improve our understanding of Tudor England. A discrepancy can be seen in the plays written by William Shakespeare. Out of nine hundred and eighty-one characters he created, less than 16% of them, or one hundred and fifty-five, are women. In order to understand the people of 16th century England, we need to understand how their society functioned. This paper will observe the major milestones in a woman's life. The order in which they will be covered will be chronological. The first to be analysed will be the education a girl might receive in her childhood, followed by marriage and culminating in the observation of her presence in the workforce as well as the positions women held in society. Historical records and information will then be compared with female characters from Shakespeare's plays: Juliet from *Romeo and Juliet*, Bianca and Katharina from *The Taming of the Shrew*, Lady Macbeth from *Macbeth* and Desdemona from *Othello, The Moor of Venice*. The aim of this paper is to observe the similarities and differences in the various portrayals of women, both historical and fictional, and compare them with existing historical records in order to form a baseline from which accuracy of female representation in Shakesperean plays can be established.

1. Childhood and Education

For women, childbirth was a very dangerous experience. Midwives were ignorant and ill-trained, which often resulted in a lack of hygienic precautions. Joseph Lawrence Stone claims that because of lack of hygiene in the birthing room, the puerperal fever, or childbed fever as it is also known, was a frequent occurrence (79). Even high-ranking women such as Queen Jane, the third wife of King Henry VIII, succumbed to it. Elizabeth Norton states that “giving birth was the single greatest danger that any Tudor woman could expect to face, and many mothers endured it upwards of five or six times in their lifetimes. The dangers were starkly illustrated by the fact that of the five English Tudor queens to give birth, three of them died in childbed” (14). The delivery of babies was the domain of women and midwives. A number of women would be present for the birth in order to assist the new mother and offer support. According to Forgeng, “the rate of maternal mortality in childbirth may have been in the region of 1 percent” (43). He concluded that with a 1 percent chance of dying every time she gave birth, a woman who gave birth to five children over the course of her childbearing years would have roughly a 1 in 20 chance of dying in childbed. Once the child was successfully born and baptised, it would be left in the care of women for the next six to seven years of its life. Mothers of lower social ranks would take care of their children on their own and breastfeed them themselves while high-ranking women such as the queen or women of nobility would pass the child into the care of a wetnurse. By passing on the duty of feeding the child to another woman, who was always of lesser social rank, the mother would be able to conceive sooner as she lacked the contraceptive protection of lactation (Stone, 64; Forgeng, 48). That resulted in a higher fertility and birth rate among nobility than in the working class, where women could not afford to hire a paid wetnurse for their child. Once the child was weaned, in the case of a high-ranking family, they would be passed into the care of nurses and servants. Mothers would rarely have the chance to interact and bond with their children so the relationship between a parent and the child was often distant and detached. The nurses who took care of the child often had a greater and closer relationship with the child than its own parents who kept their distance. One of the reasons for maintaining such a distance between the parents and children was the high infant mortality rate (Stone, 72). Chances of losing a child were quite high, which resulted in parents, and especially mothers, purposely avoid interacting with their children to lessen the attachment. This behaviour would continue until the child had

managed to survive up to a certain age after which the mortality rate would start to decrease. Therefore, the children were left in the care of the nurses and governesses, which lasted up to the age of seven, “after which they would be separated from their caretakers and their education would begin in earnest” (Forgeng, 47).

Records that speak of the education that Tudor women received are rare. Most girls received an informal education at home from their mothers around the age of six. “They started to learn skills such as spinning, cooking and basic medical skills which were needed to run a household” (Singman, 49). The majority of young girls had little access to any kind of formal education that was readily available to boys. They could, at times, attend the local village school, also known as a petty school, which tended to teach the basics of reading, writing and accounting. But any kind of education a girl received hinged on the status of her brother's education. According to Elizabeth Norton:

> If there was lack of financial support, the son’s education took priority over the daughter’s and the daughter would take up work as young as six in order for the family to be able to afford the son’s schooling. (34)

After petty school, if a boy showed enough talent to receive a scholarship or if the family could afford it, he would go on to attend a grammar school. “The school might also teach some French or Greek, but the emphasis was on Latin, the traditional language of learning” (Singman, 42). Girls were rarely admitted to grammar schools and those who did, attended school from the age of 7 to 9, while boys attended until the age of 14. Forgeng says that by the 1530s it was starting to become fashionable for the daughters of gentry and nobility to be able to read and write (53). In aristocratic households, for example, mothers held the primary responsibility of educating their daughters by providing instructions in reading, religion, sewing, embroidery, music, dancing and cooking. Girls that were born in wealthy families could be taught by hired tutors instead of attending public schools or being taught by their mothers. A tutor might then be hired to provide an entire education or might just cover some of the subjects not taught at school. The main goal of a girl's education was to mould her into a desirable match.

Although the number of highly educated noblewomen had started to rise in the sixteenth century, access to things like the Bible was still monopolised by men. Men

feared that an educated woman was a dangerous one, that a woman's access to education threatened their influence over them and attempted to maintain their dominance over the fairer sex. As an example, Norton mentions that "a male noble could write and read the Bible and works written by Cicero, while his wife could not even get access to such works". According to Richard Mulcaster, who addressed the issue of education for girls, they should not be permitted to attend grammar schools or universities, but they had some capacity for learning.

> We see yong maidens be taught to read and write, and can do both with praise: we heare them sing and playe: and both passing well, we know that they learne the best, and finest of our learned languages, to the admiration of all men. (168)

He had noticed that girls seemed to learn faster than boys, although he was quick to assure his readers that:

> For though the girles seeme commonly to haue a quicker ripening in witte, then boyes haue, for all that seeming, yet it is not so. Their naturall weaknesse which cannot holde long, deliuers very soone, and yet there be as prating boyes, as there be pratling wenches. Besides, their braines be not so much charged, neither with weight nor with multitude of matters, as boyes heades be, and therefore like empty caske they make the greater noise. (176).

While women were not permitted to attend universities like men did, if they were wealthy enough, they could become patrons. Queens or high-ranking ladies often became patrons of printers and universities, such as Margaret Beauford who established Cambridge University or Queen Margaret of Anjou who founded Queen's College in Cambridge. Such actions were unaffordable to a common woman, but it existed as a way for wealthy and powerful women to flaunt their wealth and power as well as show themselves as patrons of knowledge. Valerie Schutte remarks that it is well known that Lady Margaret Beaufort was a pious woman who commanded many books to be translated for the religious benefit of both herself and others (80).

1.1 Juliet (Romeo and Juliet)

Very few children had the luxury of having a wet-nurse who stayed to take care of them long after they had been weaned and continued to take care of them as they grew. Only the very rich families could afford such a luxury. That then resulted in a family dynamic where a child held more of an emotional attachment to the wet-nurse than with their own mother. A good example of being raised in such an environment can be seen in Shakespeare's famous tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*. Juliet was raised by her wet-nurse and throughout the play shows a clear preference for her nurse rather for her mother, which is obvious in the way she interacts with Lady Capulet. The following lines are taken from Act I, Scene III of the play.

Juliet

How now? Who calls?

Nurse

Your mother.

Juliet

Madam, I am here.

(Act I, Scene III; 4-6)

From this brief interaction it is obvious that the relationship between Juliet and her mother is quite stiff and formal, as Juliet refers to her by her title and not as mother. It does not help either that the mother does not even know her daughter's exact age, as she needs to ask the nurse to tell her.

Capulet's wife

Thou knowest my daughter's age of a pretty age.

Nurse

Faith, I can tell her age unto an hour.

Capulet's wife

She's not fourteen.

Nurse

I'll lay fourteen of my teeth-
And yet, to my teen be it spoken, I have but four -
She's not fourteen. How long is it now
To Lammastide?

(Act I, Scene III; 10-15)

These two scenes portray the emotional disconnect between a child and their parent. However, due to the play possibly being set in the 14th or 15th century, it cannot be stated that it accurately reflects the common occurrences in the Tudor families, as the time periods do not necessarily overlap.

1.2 Bianca (The Taming of the Shrew)

Bianca, as a beloved daughter of a rich gentleman of Padua, was afforded the best education she could receive as a woman. As part of an agreement between her father and her potential suitors, Gremio and Hortensio, Bianca received tutors as gifts (Shakespeare, 294). This kind of education was not available to most women of the Tudor period as most parents did not educate their daughters more than it was necessary for them to appear as a desirable bride-to-be.

Baptista

And for I know she taketh most delight
In music, instruments, and poetry,
Schoolmasters will I keep within my house
Fit to instruct her youth. If you, Hortensio,
Or, Signior Gremio, you know any such,
Prefer them hither. For to cunning men
I will be very kind, and liberal
To mine own children in good bringing up.

(Act I, Scene I; 94-101)

The tutors that were brought to Bianca's house were gifts that were given to her but meant as a show of wealth and intention that was aimed at her father, Baptista. The tutors were introduced by Petruchio and Gremio, while the third suitor, Lucentio, who was actually his servant Tranio in disguise, brought a lute and books as gifts. Petruchio came to the house with the intention of asking for her sister Katharina's hand in marriage and brought a tutor with him as show of intention, showing that the same rules Baptista had proclaimed for Bianca applied for Katharina as well. He had presented his chosen tutor as "Cunning in music and the mathematics, /To instruct her fully in those sciences," while Gremio followed that introduction with his own chosen tutor who "hath been long studying at Rhems;/ as cunning in Greek, Latin and other languages, /as the other in music and mathematics" (Shakespeare, Act II, Scene I; 59-60, 84-86). This kind of education that focused on Latin, Greek and mathematics alongside music and poetry was only available to the highest ranks of nobility or to

those who could afford an education at a university, most certainly not even conceivable for women.

2. Marriage

One of the most important cornerstones of life for any man or woman in the sixteenth century was marriage. According to Stone:

> Marriage was the legal rite of passage which marked the transition from youthful independence of a child under the care of their parents to the joint responsibility of adults in creation of a new nuclear family (46).

What was the motive behind marriages, when they happened and how they were arranged was different for the upper and lower classes. The choice of marriage partner for girls and boys was especially important in 16th century English society. When it came to marriage, there were three objectives which Stone identified as "the continuation of the male line, the preservation intact of the inherited property, and the acquisition through marriage of further property or useful political alliances" (42). Forgeng contributes by saying:

> Marriage held large financial and political stakes, so choosing a future spouse was left in the hands of parents while the children were financially helpless and could not have much say or had any power to be able to contradict their parents. (64)

The children of the lower-middle classes had a bit more freedom when it came to choosing their marriage partner but economic consideration and pressure from parents still had a major influence on their choice. Stone believes that the lower classes did not have to worry too much about property since they did not have much to begin with, so when it came to marriage they looked for someone to be their economic assistant rather than an affectionate companion (92).

Occupational endogamy (the custom of marrying only within the limits of a local community, clan, or tribe) was common among the working class, especially among the common traders and less among artisans and craftsmen but it still happened. Statistically, Stone explains, one in five of clothiers, tailors, butchers, shoemakers, and sailors married daughters of members of their own occupation (61). It often happened that a man who came to apprentice under a master in a certain craft would stay and marry the master's daughter if said master had no sons. That way, the new son-in-law

would permanently stay with his master and inherit the business upon his father-in-law's death.

Authoritarian control of parents over their children when it came to marriages was stronger and lasted for much longer in the wealthier families and in aristocratic circles. Stone elaborates that in those circles, marriage was a matter of handling property, power and status (87). In England, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, children of nobility rarely married the person of their choice. The higher a woman was on the social ladder, the more control her family exerted over her marriage. Contemporary conduct books and advice about choosing a wife illustrate the dangers of marriage to a woman of higher social status or of greater wealth.

> Though by law such a marriage makes the husband master of his wife and her goods, in practice contemporary sources suggest unequal marriages often result in domination by the wife. (Newman, 26).

When it came to picking a suitable match, the daughter's interests were disregarded and instead it was considered essential that the match was suitable to the family interests. Karen Newman describes daughters as pawns in the political and social manoeuvres of their families, particularly their male kin (23). The children did have some say when it came to the matches themselves as both the public sentiment and the church law required the consent of both spouses that were entering the marriage but that does not mean that upper-class families did not try to exert as much pressure as they could to ensure that the child would marry a person they deemed a suitable match (Forgeng, 65).

Due to the influence of Shakespeare, we tend to think that people in England had a habit of getting married young, as was the case with Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, who was pushed into getting married at the age of thirteen (Shakespeare, 1015). Technically, church law permitted marriage at age twelve for girls and fourteen for boys, although parental consent was required for anyone wanting to get married under the age of twenty-one (Forgeng, 65). The average age at which the members of the lower classes were married was around twenty-seven for men and twenty-four for women. Getting married meant setting up their own independent household, which often took time and that affected the age at which they were married. The age at which a person would enter their first marriage was lower when it came to the upper classes.

The gentry married at twenty-seven for men and twenty-two for women, while for aristocracy it was twenty-two and nineteen, respectively (Forgeng, 64). Since daughters got married between the ages of nineteen and twenty-seven, and menopause began around the age of forty, that limited the number of pregnancies and births a woman could have in her lifetime. It also should be noted that “most marriages did not last through the woman’s full reproductive span, as premature death of one spouse or the other was a common occurrence” (Stone, 63).

There was a clear distinction in the age of marriage between the oldest son and heir and the younger sons. Due to the importance that primogeniture played in Tudor society, the eldest legitimate heir took precedence over anyone else in the family, often at the cost of other sons and daughters. Their marriage and subsequent children would guarantee the continuation of the family line, at least for another generation. If the family could not afford it, younger sons often did not receive as much education as the heir and had to seek their fortunes somewhere else. Even the dowry that was meant for a daughter was at risk of disappearing if the parents believed that it would help in securing the heir’s future. The custom of the dowry, according to which brides from all ranks of the propertied classes were expected to contribute a cash sum upon getting married, meant that together with the great sensitivity to status and rank, there was a very high degree of social and economic endogamy (Stone, 60). Marriage was more than just a union of two individuals: it was also an economic transaction. The father of the bride was meant to prepare a suitable amount of money or a dowry that was exchanged with the father of the groom, who was responsible for the living arrangements and expenses of the couple and a pension for the bride in case of widowhood, which was known as jointure. Forgeng believed that for both families to be satisfied with the arrangement, they had to have similar economic standing (66). A dowry was a serious financial burden as the bride’s family did not receive anything back, but it ensured a solid political alliance which was sealed by marriage. The money that the groom’s father received could be repurposed by him and offered as dowry for one of his own daughters when the time came for her own marriage (Singman). Newman states that plenty of written sources from that period, such as marriage contracts and settlements, familiar letters and wills, conduct books and sermons, recognise marriage as an economic transaction based on the exchange of gifts – women, cash, annuities, rents, land (23). According to Ursula Potter, it is rare in early modern drama to find any character given a chronological age, but the exceptions to

this general rule are plays that depict teenage girls whose sexual development is central to the plot (242). She explains that:

> The girl's specific age is likely to be identified in the opening scenes as an audience cue to the risky sexual behaviours commonly associated with the virginal body at puberty and to the opportunities this offers the plot. (242)

2.1 Juliet (Romeo and Juliet)

Marriage in *Romeo and Juliet* is one of the central themes, alongside young love and tragic lovers. Although Juliet's age seemed to be an issue at the beginning of the play, it did reflect the standard procedure that was followed when arranging marriages. Betrothal was first arranged by the groom's and bride's parents and only then were the prospective bride and groom told. In this play, Paris is negotiating with Lord Capulet himself since he is legally recognised as an adult man. In Act I, Scene II we can witness the marriage negotiations taking place. While Lord Capulet is concerned that his daughter might be too young to marry, Paris assures him that Juliet would not be an anomaly as there were other young ladies her age who were already married.

Capulet

My child is yet a stranger in the world,
She hath not seen the change of fourteen years;
Let two more summers wither in their pride
Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride.

Paris

Younger than she are happy mothers made.

(Act I, Scene II; 8-12)

Even her own mother puts pressure on Juliet to get married, exclaiming that at her age she was already a mother and that if she doesn't get married soon, she might become an old maid.

Capulet's wife

Well, think of marriage now. Younger than you,
Here in Verona, ladies of esteem,

Are made already mothers. By my count,
I was your mother much upon these years
Than you are now a maid. Thus then in brief:
The valiant Paris seeks you for his love.

(Act I, Scene III; 70-74)

While the age at which Juliet's arranged marriage is happening might be a bit too early for an actual marriage, the setting of the play does rather accurately depict the way it happened in real life. Her marriage was arranged by her parents as was the custom of the period. They made their decision and expressed their desire for her to marry Paris quite clearly. When Juliet objects to the notion of marriage, her father enforces his will and demonstrates just how much control he has over his daughter. He refuses to have his decision questioned, especially not by his young daughter. As previously stated, children did have some say in the matter of their marriage but in the case of Romeo and Juliet, it is merely an empty gesture given to them, perhaps to ease them into the idea of marriage.

2.2 Katharina and Bianca (The Taming of the Shrew)

It was not just in his tragedies that Shakespeare wrote about marriage. *The Taming of the Shrew* is a comedy that focuses precisely on that topic. The entire play is divided into two parts, each focusing on the marriage and behaviour of one of the brides-to-be. Katharina is a headstrong woman, unwilling to obey her father and submit to her husband. Her aggressive behaviour towards everyone, but especially towards any potential suitor, greatly concerns her father, who is worried that she will never be married off. That is a major problem for all of Bianca's suitors, as Baptista has declared that his younger daughter will not be getting married until her older sister does so first. Enter Petruchio, a boisterous and stubborn man, who agrees to marry the older sister upon being told of the riches he is going to receive as part of her dowry.

Hortensio

Thou'dst thank me but a little for my counsel—
And yet I'll promise thee she shall be rich,
And very rich. But thou'rt too much my friend,
And I'll not wish thee to her.

(Act I, Scene II; 62-65)

His first step towards persuading her to marry him is to woo her with compliments and flattery which do not fool her but confuse her enough for her father to believe that she is consenting to the marriage. Petruchio is animated like a puppet by the idea that a man must command absolute obedience from his wife. Coppélia Kahn says that “he embodies the prevailing system of patriarchal marriage, its basic mechanisms displayed in exaggerated form” (88). When the time comes for the wedding ceremony in Act III, Scene II, Petruchio is tardy. He shows up wearing a tacky outfit, and once the ceremony is over, promptly drags Katharina away without letting her eat at the wedding feast. Once they are properly married and she is isolated at his country estate, away from everyone, Petruchio reveals his true plan of how he intends to break her spirit and make her succumb to his will. It is explained in detail in the soliloquy that he gives in Act IV, Scene I.

Petruchio

Thus have I politicly begun my reign,
And ’tis my hope to end successfully.
My falcon now is sharp and passing empty,
And, till she stoop, she must not be full-gorged,
For then she never looks upon her lure.
Another way I have to man my haggard,
To make her come and know her keeper’s call.
That is, to watch her, as we watch these kites
That bate and beat and will not be obedient.
She ate no meat today, nor none shall eat.
Last night she slept not, nor tonight she shall not.
As with the meat, some undeservèd fault
I’ll find about the making of the bed,
And here I’ll fling the pillow, there the bolster,
This way the coverlet, another way the sheets.
Ay, and amid this hurly I intend
That all is done in reverend care of her.
And, in conclusion, she shall watch all night,
And, if she chance to nod, I’ll rail and brawl,
And with the clamor keep her still awake.
This is a way to kill a wife with kindness.

And thus I'll curb her mad and headstrong humor.
He that knows better how to tame a shrew,
Now let him speak; 'tis charity to show.

(Act IV, Scene I; 188-211)

His plan is to break her head-strong nature by withholding food, not allowing her to sleep and intentionally causing her emotional distress. Kahn explains that:

> The overt force Petruchio wields over Katharina by marrying her against her will in the first place, and then by denying her every wish and comfort, stamping, shouting, reducing her to exhaustion, etc. is but a farcical representation of the psychological realities of marriage in Elizabethan England, in which the husband's will constantly, silently, and invisibly, through custom and conformity, suppresses the wife's. (94)

The marriage of Petruchio and Katharina reflects the dynamic that existed between the spouses, although somewhat exaggerated. His role as a property-owner is the model for his role as a husband; Katharina, for him, is a thing. Kahn further elaborates by saying "she will become a thing when he has wrenched unquestioning obedience from her, when she no longer has a mind or will of her own" (95).

Petruchio

I will be master of what is mine own.
She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,
My household stuff, my field, my barn,
My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything.

(Act III, Scene II; 235-238)

Baptista is determined not to marry the sought-after Bianca until he gets an offer for the unpopular Kate, not for the sake of conforming to the hierarchy of age as his opening words imply, but because he wants to make sure that both of his daughters are married off, even his less desired daughter. By putting a condition on Bianca's marriage which could only happen if Katharina got married first, Baptista manages to trick the suitors into finding a husband for his older daughter. Later on, he has no troubles picking a husband for Katharina as Petruchio was the only man bidding for her hand in marriage. After successfully marrying off Katharina, Baptista focused solely on the matter of Bianca's marriage. Picking a husband for Bianca was a more delicate

process as she had more suitors to choose from. In Act II, Scene I Baptista awards Tranio/Lucentio with Bianca's hand in marriage solely because he offered more cash and property that would belong to her if she became a widow. According to Kahn, both marriages provide insurance against having to support his daughters in widowhood, promise grandsons to whom he may pass on the management and possession of his property, and impact to his household the prestige of "marrying well" for the wealth of the grooms advertises Baptista's own financial status (91). Petruchio's and Tranio/Lucentio's frequent references to their respective fathers' wealth and reputation remind us that wealth and reputation pass from father to son, with a woman as mere accessory to the passing.

2.3 Portia (The Merchant of Venice)

The representation of marriage in *The Merchant of Venice* both follows and deviates from what is written in previous chapters. Portia is bound by her deceased father's will to marry whoever picks a right casket with her portrait in it. It was a test created by her father involving three chests, made from gold, silver and lead. In one of those chests is her portrait and whichever suitor picks the right chest, wins Portia as a bride. Harry Berger describes her father's control over her as "a paternal lock which is an emblem of wariness and apprehensiveness, of the father's refusal to trust his daughter's discretion in handling his property (i.e., herself)" (156). Since this test decides her whole future, Portia also refers to herself through most of the play as something to be won. Newman further explains that the passives are striking- she casts herself grammatically in the role of object "to be directed"; she and all she owns "is converted" to Bassanio by an unstated agent" (25). Even Bassanio, one of her suitors and the one who will win her, describes himself as one of the Jasons questing for her, while she is described in the following words: "and her sunny locks/Hang on her temples like a golden fleece" in Act I, Scene I (Shakespeare, 204). Even he compares her to an object or a prize to be won. In her speech that she makes after Bassanio chooses the right chest, she fully submits to him and his rule over her.

Portia

Commits itself to yours to be directed
As from her lord, her governor, her king.
Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours
Is now converted. But now I was the lord

> Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
> Queen o'er myself; and even now, but now,
> This house, these servants, and this same myself
> Are yours, my lord's. I give them with this ring,
>
> (Act III, Scene II; 168-175)

The governing analogy of Portia's speech is the Renaissance political commonplace that figures marriage and the family as a kingdom in miniature, a microcosm ruled over by the husband. Newman believes that in Portia's speech, "a woman functions as microcosm to man's macrocosm and as a subject to his sovereignty" (25). But it does more than just show her submission. By listing all of her wealth, Portia is reminding him of her wealth and value, and hence warning him to keep in his mind the obligation he owed her. Berger emphasizes that Portia addresses their relationship as a struggle for power and possession, a struggle which her words register as they shift back and forth between two poles of the division – either "mine" or "yours", but not "ours" (158).

She also gives him a ring as a visual sign of her vow of love and submission to Bassanio. That ring carries a lot of significance, not only in this scene but later on, when Bassanio is forced to forfeit the ring to Baltazar, who is actually Portia in disguise. According to Newman, the ring is a representation of Portia's acceptance of Elizabethan marriage which was characterised by women's subjection, their loss of legal rights, and their status as goods or chattel (24). Further on, she adds:

> It signifies her place in a rigidly defined hierarchy of male power and privilege; and her declaration of love at first seems to exemplify her acquiescence to woman's place in such a system" (25).

Another scene that shows Portia's submission to the Renaissance ideals of womanhood which are that a woman must be silent, chaste and obedient are once again seen in Act III, Scene II when Bassanio leaves for Venice to aid Antonio. She invokes the conventional idea of a Renaissance lady by promising "My maid Nerissa and myself meantime/Will live as maids and widows." while Bassanio is away (323-324). In the same breath she says to Lorenzo, Bassanio's companion, that they will live in a monastery so that they can "live in prayer and contemplation". Shakespeare might have evoked such ideals to demonstrate a behaviour of a proper Renaissance lady but then has Portia transgress it. She shows herself embodying the proper ideals

and once the men have left, she willingly breaks them and becomes an unruly woman. She dresses herself in a masculine disguise to pose as a man named Baltazar in court and then she exerts her power and linguistic prowess over men. When Portia takes off for Venice dressed as a man, she actively participates in public talk on subjects ill-suited to the ladylike conduct she posits as a model and does exactly those things John Knox and other humanists violently attack. She engages, according to Newman:

> In productive labour reserved for men, and not insignificantly, in linguistic labour, in a profession the successful practise of which depends on a knowledge of history and precedent, on logic and reasoning, and on rhetoric, all areas of education traditionally denied to women" (30).

Closer to the end of the play, once Antonio has been freed from his bond to Shylock, Baltazar/Portia requests the very same ring that she had given to Bassanio on their wedding day. He initially refuses, but after Antonio's exhortation he hands off the ring. Newman posits that "by obeying Antonio and giving his ring to Baltazar, Bassanio affirms homosocial bonds - the exchange of women, here represented by Portia's ring, sustains relations between men" (31). The fact that he gave his ring to a man rather than a woman may seem clear to him, but it points towards a more dangerous tendency of thinking. The act of giving the ring to a man may have the same value as that of giving it to another woman in return for favours, since both acts indicate man's assumption that men are superior to women, that it is men who save each other and the world and who perform great deeds and sacrifices; the pledge to a woman can be superseded by the debt of gratitude owed a man.

Antonio

My Lord Bassanio, let him have the ring.
Let his deservings and my love withal
Be valued 'gainst your wife's commandment.

(Act IV, Scene I; 467-469)

Once again, we see how a culture dominated by masculine imagination devalues women and asserts male solidarity against feminine efforts to breach the barrier (Berger, 161). With the ring back in her possession, Portia regains control and dominance over her husband by forcing him to plead on his knees and promise that

he will behave. With this one act she flips the dynamic in their marriage and regains the control that she previously relinquished.

Bassanio

Nay, but hear me.
Pardon this fault, and by my soul I swear
I never more will break an oath with thee.

(Act V, Scene I; 265-267)

3. Social status and means of living

According to Jefferey L. Forgeng, Elizabethan society was a rigid and orderly hierarchy that discouraged the pursuit of personal advancement (24). People were expected to live within the social class of their parents, a man following his father's vocation or one comparable to it, a woman marrying into a family similar in status to the one in which she was born. He continues by saying that each person was supposed to fit into a stable social network, remaining in place to preserve the steady state of society as a whole (24). In addition to social class, the status of every Elizabethan was governed by whether they were male or female. In fact, gender was an even more determining factor: social class can be vague and flexible, but gender is obvious and permanent (Singman, 17). The main principle of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century social structure was the patrilineal descent principle - i.e., the absolute and unquestionable authority of a father, and later on of a son. Both Gordana Galić Kakkonen and Ana Penjak believe that the absolutist argument of a male dominance was based on theories of divine right royalism. They believed that the argument was based on the belief that God empowered Adam the firstborn with domination over other beings on earth (19). The family that the individual belonged to mirrored the society they lived in and functioned on the similar principles. Because of that way of thinking, the family was also seen as a miniature of the kingdom. The role of the king was played by the husband and the wife, while children and servants, if they had any, were the loyal subjects meant to obey every command of their king. The will of the king as well as the husband was unquestionable. From Stone's perspective, the nuclear family has two castes – male and female – and two classes – adult and child. The male caste always dominated the female, and the adult class the child, but the latter, if he lives, is guaranteed upward social mobility by the time he becomes an adult (22). In the Early Modern period, a female took precedence over a male child, but only up to the age of seven. If a child reached adulthood, the male child might have had some expectations of moving to a position of relative social and economic independence at some point in his life, while a girl would simply exchange subordination to her father for subordination to an employer or husband. Officially, she was under the governance of a man for most or all of her life. The patriarchal daughter had to fulfil three roles in her life within the private family context: a daughter, a wife, and a mother. First defined by the rules of her father's house and later of her husband's house, patriarchal daughters mirrored the real picture of successful socialisation in the family. "Father, mother, natural laws,

and laws of the patriarchal society, customs, and habits" are described as "the alpha and the omega that every patriarchal daughter had to respect and obey" by Kakkonen and Penjak (21). Forgeng observes that a girl grew up under the rule of her father or guardian. He continues by adding: "as a young adult she might go into service under the authority of her employer; and when she married, she was subject to her husband" (42). Mary Beth Rose explains the legal point of view by saying:

> Once a woman got married, she forfeited both agency and identity: for she could not bring suit, and, although she kept nominal possession of any land she owned, her husband retained the rights over and profits from it; her movables also became her husband's property, and she could not write a will without his consent. (292-293)

In the first half of the sixteenth century a woman's legal right to hold and dispose of her own property was limited to what she could specifically lay claim to in a marriage contract. By marriage, the husband and wife became one person in law - and that person was the husband. He acquired absolute control of all his wife's personal property, which he could sell at will. By a judicial interpretation, a husband's debts became by law a prior charge on his wife's jewels and other personal property, although it is necessary to add that the husband also became responsible for his wife's debts (Stone, 157). Rose adds that a mother had no legal rights over the guardianship of her children unless explicitly appointed as a guardian by her husband in his will (293).

Only in widowhood was a woman legally recognized as an independent individual. Widows had a surprising amount of freedom when it came to entering into their second marriage and they were in a grey area when it came to legal status. A widow had much more freedom in choosing her next husband than an unmarried woman preparing for her first. When it came to law and social standing, widows had a surprising amount of freedom. A widow took over as head of her husband's household; if he left her sufficient means to live on, she might do quite well (Singman). In the case that her late husband had willed her his business, a widow could easily continue to participate in it and run it on her own. As an example, Norton uses the records that mention Joan Bradbury, who died in 1530. She ran her husband's tailoring business after his death in 1491, taking her own apprentices and ensuring that her children were well settled in trade. Unlike a single or married woman, a widow could legitimately

maintain her own household and conduct business. In most towns she inherited her husband's freedom, sometimes even his apprentices. Women could not enter guilds themselves as that was only allowed to men, but they could profit from it and have an honorary position among men. Men were afraid of widows because they did not fit into the age's concept of a hierarchical cosmic order. Charles Carlton describes widows in the following words: "being without a man to guide them they were, so to speak, a weak link in the great chain of being" (126). He also adds that in order to fight that fear and 'weaken' widows, men created stereotypes about them that may be found in the plays they wrote, in the sermons they preached, or in the gossip or jokes they exchanged in taverns. In all of these scenarios, Carlton says, the widow was made into a stock character, a figure, at best, of fun, and, at worst, ridicule, who was highly sexed, and, through second hand, was much courted, especially by virile young men; and who, in general, became silly in her independence from male tutelage (119). Rich widows were often seen as a splendid opportunity for ambitious young men. A good example of such a stereotype can be seen in *The Taming of the Shrew* when Hortensio brags "I shall be married to a widow ere three days pass" (Shakespeare, 305). The truth was that few widows were actually as rich as the myth would have it. In the 1523 tax assessment, between a third and a half of the urban population that were listed as having no goods were poor widows. Even the widows of prosperous men experienced a severe decline in their standard of living (Carlton, 123). Most of the property and wealth was inherited either by the eldest son or closest male relative, and only if it was specifically stated in the will did the widow receive anything. Additional demographic evidence shows that widows rarely remarried, and if they did, seldom chose younger men. When widows did remarry, it was often because marriage was the best way of repairing damage in a broken family. Widows would remarry if they did not have children who were grown up to take care of them or the rest of their family.

Stone believes that in that period, a married woman was expected to be silent in church and in the home, and at all times submissive to men (199). The subordination of wives to husbands certainly applied to the upper and upper-middle classes, but the situation, as Stone explains, is less clear among artists, shopkeepers, smallholders and unskilled labourers:

> In these classes at any period of pre-industrial society, husband, wife and children tended to form a single economic unit, like the crew of a ship, in which the role of the wife was critical. (199)

Although economy was organised around men, women played a crucial role in the economic life of the country. Regarding gender roles, Forgeng has described them as:

> Notionally divided along the lines that had been determined millennia before with the emergence of agriculture: the man did the labour of farming at a distance from the home, while the woman was responsible for the work inside and around the house. (40)

Even in urban homes where the man might work from home as a craftsman while the woman left the home every day as a laundress or seller, the idea of the home as the boundary between female and male worlds persisted (Forgeng, 41). In lower social classes both husband and wife were expected to work, although she was normally engaged in labour that could be done at home. According to Stone, woman's main responsibilities were housekeeping, as well as breeding and raising children (198). After that, one of her primary responsibilities was tending the family livestock. Carding and spinning wool could easily be done at home, and many if not most women practised them daily as a means of supplementing the family income (Singman, 29). Her other domestic responsibilities included marketing, cooking, cleaning, and basic health care. The woman also had to take care of the garden, a common feature of both rural and urban households (Forgeng, 41). Those gardens provided the family with vegetables for cooking as well as medicinal herbs which could be used to treat maladies. Women might also take part in men's work during the harvest season. In rural families, female members of the household assisted in the fields at harvest and haymaking time, since the pressures of the season required as many hands as possible (Singman, 31). As men had to work in the fields, the task of travelling to the market to buy and sell goods often fell to the woman. In towns, women engaged in a wide variety of work: they were especially likely to be employed as seamstresses, laundresses, and street vendors. The wife of a craftsman or tradesman often helped her husband in his work. Women could also engage in part-time work to supplement the family income. According to Forgeng, some worked as petty-school teachers or tutors, others engaged in home industries such as spinning and knitting (41). For

women, Stone says, the opportunities for advancement in pay or position were very limited, almost non-existent (200). Alexandra Shepard adds on that by saying:

> Far from equal partners in family enterprise, enjoying a ‘rough and ready equality', women have been shown to be clustered in the lowest paid and lowest valued sectors, denied access to formal training, and paid derisory wages by contrast to men. (2)

That was because they were not in a position to accumulate wealth or power independently of a husband. The only real way a woman might advance in society was if she managed to marry a man of significantly higher social station. While the idea of women working in order to support their families was welcomed by their contemporaries, the idea of independent women and girls working to support themselves without a male guardian to watch over them was unthinkable. Single women were concentrated in service, explains Shepard and adds that their work principally served the interests of their employer (13). There were some concerns regarding women being employment which were eased by the fact that employment of women and children facilitated early marriages. It has been pointed out that textile workers tended to marry early, partly because unmarried girls could quickly accumulate a dowry through their earnings, and partly because wives and young children could be gainfully employed in spinning (Stone, 52). According to Forgeng, a successful family needed the wife’s cooperation, and if their husbands ever became overbearing or abusive, women had means by which they could escape the situation (42). Informally, women had networks of support among themselves, socialising at church, at the alehouse, while laundering, and on other occasions that brought women together. If the informal systems failed, women had the option of seeking help from the law. According to Forgeng, Common Law courts were not open to married women, but Equity courts were, as were the church courts, which were the primary legal vehicles for addressing issues relating to marriage and family (42). The case such as Katherine’s from *The Taming of the Shrew* was a rare case indeed and would not have happened in the real world. It is a dramatized representation of what was happening in Tudor households. In short, women were in a subordinate social position but they were not powerless. They seemed to have enjoyed an unusual measure of freedom compared to other parts of Europe, concludes Forgeng (42).

3.1 Lady Macbeth (Macbeth)

Lady Macbeth is an example of a woman who refuses to follow social norms and fulfil the duty that is expected of her as a woman and wife. While the central themes of *Macbeth* are personal ambition and political tyranny, the text may also be understood as a comment on the consequences that might arise if a woman deliberately rejects her “essential” nature and role in the cycle of human life. Her rejection of her supposed nature is seen as a perversion, and as a consequence of that, her intentions backfire. In the iconic speech that she gives in Act I, Scene V, she asks the spirits to unsex her, to fill her with cruelty.

Lady Macbeth

Under my battlements. Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood.
Stop up th’ access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
Th’ effect and it. Come to my woman’s breasts
And take my milk for gall, you murd’ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature’s mischief. Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
To cry “Hold, hold!”

(Act I, Scene V; 47-61)

This speech does more than just demonstrate her willingness to commit high treason and regicide. She asks the spirits to take from her everything that makes her a woman, her womb and breasts. According to Velma Bourgeois Richmond, Lady Macbeth renounces her womanliness in vivid and specific terms, denying herself gentleness and tenderness and aggressively asserting her unwillingness to serve as a mother, the role in which a woman consummately realises herself (20). Her assertion of strength becomes a significant weakness not just for her but also for her husband's ambition. In order to further Macbeth’s ambition, she tries to turn herself into a strong person,

which in her mind she can only achieve if she removes all that makes her a woman. For Lady Macbeth, being a woman means being weak, and she needs to be strong for her husband, who is incapable of such strength. Richmond further adds that in order for Macbeth to gain the crown, he needs the supporting enthusiasm of his wife; and she was able to summon strength to encourage her husband's ambition, even to the point of tyrannical murder, only by destroying herself as a woman in the fiercest terms possible (21). While her transformation bears fruit in the beginning, as the story progresses cracks slowly start to appear. As Macbeth starts to rise and grow into his role as king, Lady Macbeth, now queen, starts to crack under the pressure of her own decision. Her deteriorating mental state can be witnessed in Act V, Scene I where she sleep-walks, subconsciously reliving the trauma of murdering the previous king as she desperately tries to wash away the non-existent blood on her hands. In the opening scene she does not hesitate to embark upon murder with the idea that such disruptions of nature are easy for men (Richmond, 23). The feminine sensibility that she so easily tries to set aside emerges in her nightmares and sleepwalking, where her guilt manifests more openly.

Macbeth lacks heirs who will succeed him and rule the kingdom after him. The lack of an heir is a significant failure in kingship, and the anxieties about succession in the Elizabethan period could be found in many tragedies. Some of Shakespeare's plays such as *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear* deal with the problems of civil war and legitimate succession. In *Macbeth*, these themes are expressed just like in the previously mentioned plays, only this play also contains the feminine point of view, the one belonging to Lady Macbeth. Richmond explains that just like Desdemona and Cleopatra - indeed almost any woman in Shakespeare - Lady Macbeth fails because she distorts her essential femininity by excessive zeal in the world of men's affairs which her own point of view has distorted (21). She wilfully denies her nature as a woman, deciding instead to embrace what she views as masculinity, all in an attempt to cultivate her husband's ambition. Lady Macbeths breaks the gender norms, which, as the play progresses, results in the destruction of the social order. Her polarised view of masculine and feminine qualities and the exaggerated assumptions she forms regarding them make this woman a destructive rather than a creative force. By seeking things which are not appropriate, "natural" to her, she forfeits everything good which she and her husband might have attained for themselves and for their heirs.

3.2 Juliet & Desdemona (Romeo and Juliet; Othello, The Moor of Venice)

When it comes to portraying social order on stage, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* can serve as dramatizations of what happens when order is disturbed. Romen and Juliet as well as Othello and Desdemona disturb the established order by violating the norms of the society in which they lived. Those norms are strict filial obedience and loyalty to the traditional friendships and family alliances. Both Juliet and Desdemona defy their fathers by marrying someone of their own choice in secret. With those actions they show their lack of filial obedience, and in the case of Juliet, she also shows no loyalty to her family by marrying one of their sworn enemies. By eloping, both brides bring shame to their families, especially to their fathers.

Believing that his daughter Juliet is an obedient daughter, Capulet arranges her marriage with Count Paris without ever asking for her consent or opinion (Kakkonen and Penjak, 22). He does that because he believes that daughters are their father's property, so it is his right to pick a spouse for her. When Juliets refuses the match, Lord Capulet as her father affirms his paternal authority and discredits her right to choose a future.

Capulet

An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend.
An you be not, hang, beg, starve, die in the streets,
For, by my soul, I'll ne'er acknowledge thee,
Nor what is mine shall never do thee good.
Trust to 't; bethink you. I'll not be forsworn.

(Act III, Scene V; 230-207)

Potter says that by refusing her father's decision, Juliet consciously violates the ritual of marriage, the nature of what it means to be a woman in that society, and the role and the decision of her father. By depriving her father of the right to give her away to the husband of his choosing and by eloping in secret, Juliet has broken the social norm and suffers consequences because of that. From the moment she got marriage, the odds were stacked against her. Several small misfortunes and misunderstandings ends up culminating into a situation where she feels that suicide is her only option. This tragedy, as much as it is a story of young love, is also a cautionary tale. While such an elopement was freely shown on stage, it was never going to have a happy ending. The young love drew people in, but at the end, their deaths served as a reminder of

consequences that might befall young couples who decide to deviate from social norms.

In the case of Desdemona, the wife of Othello, her breach of social norms results in the same sentence as did Juliet's. She dies at the end of the play, but unlike Juliet, who commits suicide, poor Desdemona is murdered by her own husband. The tale of Othello and Desdemona resembles a large number of plays that were performed in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. These tragedies were known as "domestic tragedies", as they culminated in the murder of a wife, the reason almost always being her infidelity. The plays construct these murders, often led up to by beating and torture of the wife, as tragedy, yet endorse them as a form of justice, concludes Ruth Vanita (341). These "domestic tragedies" suggested that the events happening in it are private, originating from a familiar relationship, unlike tragedies which involve political murders and take place in the public sphere. Society condemns Desdemona for marrying a man in secret, without her father's approval and blessing. In Act I, Scene III she is brought before the Duke to confirm the fact that she willingly married Othello. If she confirms that she married him willingly, that will mean that she does not care about filial obedience. In this scene, she is publicly asked by her father Brabantio to confirm where her loyalties lie, with him or with the man she eloped with.

Desdemona

My noble father,
I do perceive here a divided duty.
To you I am bound for life and education.
My life and education both do learn me
How to respect you. You are the lord of duty.
I am hitherto your daughter. But here's my
husband.
And so much duty as my mother showed
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord.

(Act I, Scene III; 208-218)

In *Othello*, the rupture of the marriage ritual dramatizes the father-daughter rupture. The father here has only one daughter, who he loves possessively and has denied several suitors. Hearing that Desdemona has run away from home in order to marry

Othello, without the parental blessing but out of love, Brabantio sees it as an act of treason and his own failure (Kakkonen and Penjak, 25-26). By publicly stating her loyalties to Othello and not to her father, Desdemona has found herself disinherited by her father and isolated from her fellow Venetians. The disinherited Desdemona is a stranger in Cyprus, her only status being that of Othello's wife (Vanita, 344). While she lacks connections and familiar bonds in Cyprus, her new husband Othello has many friends on the island.

Othello

How does my old acquaintance of this isle? —
Honey, you shall be well desired in Cyprus.
I have found great love amongst them.

(Act II, Scene I; 224-226)

Othello is aware of Desdemona's helplessness and lack of support when he contemplates divorcing her in Act III, Scene III. He says: "I'd whistle her off, and let her down the wind / To prey at fortune" (Shakespeare, 1132). Desdemona's death can be seen as a karmic punishment for her secret elopement and defiance of her father's will and power he wielded over her. Just like in most domestic tragedies, the repeating presentation of the torture, self-abasement, and death of the guilty wife was intended as a warning to women, and these domestic tragedies often display a near-sadistic delight in the woman's sufferings, while the audience is invited and guided to pass judgement onto these women (Vanita, 351). Viewing her death from the male perspective, in Act V, Scene II we see the true nature of Othello's love in the word "sacrifice" that he uses. Leon Golden posits that:

> In taking Desdemona's life, [Othello] does not act to destroy but to preserve the profound beauty and integrity of the relationship. When he has smothered her and finds her not quite dead, he shows that it is love, not hate. (149)

In that same scene of the play (Act V, Scene II;.282-371), Othello calls himself an "honourable murderer." For "naught did I in hate, but all in honour.". Othello is inordinately concerned with his reputation. Moreover, his pride in his reputation is of a piece with his acceptance of the reputations of others (Hodgson, 314). As a husband,

it is his right to punish his wife for the alleged sins that she has committed. This is a judgement that everyone on stage affirms.

3.3. Portia and Jessica (The Merchant of Venice)

In The Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare gives us two versions of the daughter's solution to the repressive demands of the father. In each, the father follows the folktale motif of imprisoning his daughter in an attempt to retain her for himself (Boose, 335). As previously mentioned in 2.3, as part of her father's will, Portia's physical self has been symbolically locked up inside a lead casket. The presence of such a "will" suggests that her father had a desire to maintain both legal and physical possession of her, even after his death. Jessica, the daughter of the tragedy's 'villain', is meanwhile literally locked up inside her father's house. Throughout the play, Shylock refers to that house as "my sober house" and its casements as "my house's ears" so the house becomes an "anthropomorphic refiguration of the father himself" as Boose describes it (336). Both daughters eventually escape the confines their fathers placed them in, both doing so by getting married, although there are some differences in how each of them did it. Portia follows her father's will to the letter and left her numerous suitors struggling to solve the puzzle. She did not have the free will to choose for herself. While the death of the father does free a male heir like Petruchio to choose an independent future, it does not likewise free the rich heiress left in Belmont (Boose, 337). When Bassanio came along, Portia adds clues into her speeches, hoping to direct Bassanio towards the correct chest and in this subtle way, towards her. She cannot live an independent life, nor can she openly choose a husband on her own, but she could at least subtly influence her choice of a husband in order to achieve what she wants. In Act III, Scene II she instructs the servants to play a song while Bassanio picks his chest. All ending words rhyme with lead, perhaps in a subtle attempt to direct him towards the correct chest.

> Tell me where is fancy bred,
> Or in the heart, or in the head?
> How begot, how nourishèd?
> Reply, reply.
> It is engendered in the eye,
> With gazing fed, and fancy dies
> In the cradle where it lies.

Let us all ring fancy's knell.
I'll begin it.
Ding, dong, bell.

(Act III, Scene II; 11-20)

Meanwhile, in order to escape the repressive will of her father, Jessica climbs out the casement window carrying "a casket" full of Shylock's jewels and money, gilding herself with her father's ducats and, according to Boose, essentially sells herself to Lorenzo, who seems as interested in the acquired ducats as in the daughter who stole them (336). Jessica's theft here is dual in nature. From the symbolic house of the father, she simultaneously steals both herself and her father's fortune, leaving the House of Shylock empty in every sense of the word. This connection between Jessica and the stolen ducats is further confirmed in Act II, Scene VIII when Solanio reiterates what he hears Shylock exclaim in public.

Solanio

I never heard a passion so confused,
So strange, outrageous, and so variable
As the dog Jew did utter in the streets.
"My daughter, O my ducats, O my daughter!
Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!

(Act II, Scene VIII;12-16)

Conclusion

Women in Tudor England faced challenges and had to struggle for any kind of position or personal power in society (Rose, 291). It is important to recognize that the experiences of women during the Tudor period, as in any historical period, were diverse and shaped by various factors such as social class, race, and individual circumstances. While some women managed to exert influence and achieve a degree of autonomy, many others were excluded from positions of power and faced significant societal barriers. The aim of this paper was to establish how historically accurate were the actions and behaviours of women in the following plays: *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello* and *Macbeth*. These plays were chosen because they contain depictions of important milestones in the lives of women and girls (such as education that girls might have received, how marriages were arranged, and what kind of career opportunities women had) as well as depictions of treatment of women in Tudor society. *Romeo and Juliet* serves as an example of the childhood that girls might have experienced as well as the attitudes that might have existed regarding marriage. *The Taming of the Shrew* as well as *The Merchant of Venice* demonstrate the power men had over their wives and daughters, as well as the social expectations that were placed on women. Both *Othello* and *Macbeth* dramatize the consequences that might befall women who took fate in their own hands, defied social expectations as well as how society decided to punish them for their actions. This paper is a result of the comparison of abovementioned events and milestones in the lives of women and girls with the ways they are portrayed in the plays, as well as with academic sources which contain information regarding historical records from the Tudor period.

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Abstract

The aim of this graduation thesis entitled The Lives of Tudor Women in History and Literature is to create a solid base of knowledge regarding the pivotal parts in the life of a Tudor woman. The presented research aims to observe such moments from a chronological viewpoint, starting from childhood and concluding with old age. By expanding the field of research to the female characters that appear in comedies and tragedies written by William Shakespeare I was able to further expand the understanding of what it meant to be a woman living in that distinct period of English history. After researching historical facts and sources to create a solid base for the study of the lives of Tudor women, the relevant details of selected plays were examined.

Key words: Shakespeare, female representation, history, plays, historical accuracy

Sažetak

Cilj ovog završnog rada pod naslovom The Lives of Tudor Women in History and Literature je formiranje temeljnog znanja o ključnim trenucima u životima žena iz tudorskog razdoblja. Namjena rada je proučavanje tih trenutaka iz kronološke perspektive, od djetinjstva do starije dobi. Proširujući polje istraživanja na ženske likove koje se pojavljuju u komedijama i tragedijama koje je napisao William Shakespeare, uspjela sam proširiti shvaćanje o tome što je značilo biti žena koja je živjela u tom specifičnom razdoblju engleske povijesti. Nakon istraživanja povijesnih činjenica i izvora te analize ključnih detalja iz odabranih dramskih tekstova, stvorena je pouzdana bazu znanja o životima žena iz tudorskog razdoblja, koja je sažeta i prikazana u ovom radu.

Ključne riječi: Shakespeare, zastupljenost žena, povijest, kazališne predstave, povijesna točnost