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Women in Youth Literary Adaptations of Hamlet: contemporary visions of a classic.

**Trabajo de Fin de Grado en Estudios Ingleses**

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## INTRODUCTION

**Importance of the topic:** Love is a remarkable topic in most Shakespearean plays, considered a social entertainment of the Elizabethan period. Although this pastime involved both men and women, the latter were not fortunate as regarded their wish and opinion. Symbolised as fragile, sensitive and unintelligent, their voice was undermined around the topic. Since literature is a powerful tool to spread meaning, remodelling and challenging certain productions is undoubtedly required throughout history. Adaptations of masterpieces to juvenile literature are therefore crucial to reach youngsters in the reading community. As ways of writing evolve through time, so does the conception of love. This does not mean readers are moving away from the essence of what Shakespeare tried to convey, but that this term needs to find a different path to fit into 21st century society instead. The topic helps as well to challenge the definition of ‘emotional intelligence’ or ‘affective responsibility.’

**Structure:** This project will be focused on the representation of love in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. A comparison will be drawn upon how affective and romantic relationships are portrayed in the play and in juvenile literary adaptations: *Dead Father’s Club*, written by *Matt Haig*; *Ophelia*, by Lisa Klein and a postmodern contemporary novel titled *Nutshell*, by Ian Mc Ewan. To do so, there will be a focus of analysis upon different perspectives. First of all, a general overview of each text under analysis will be provided, in terms of main characters and contextualization. Secondly, the focus of attention will switch towards an analysis of emotions influenced by the concept of love in *Hamlet*. Thirdly, the analysis will extend towards how the concepts of emotional intelligence and affective responsibility shape the female figure, paying special attention to Gertrude as both mother and woman. In both the second and third chapters of the project, a comparison will be drawn between *Hamlet* and *Ophelia* and those characters from the other novels: *Dead Father’s Club*, *Ophelia* and *Nutshell*.

**Method:** In order to achieve the scope of my investigation, a qualitative method will be utilised, comparing three literary adaptations with the 16<sup>th</sup> century play.



1. Introduction to plays and main characters.

***The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark:*** Written by the Elizabethan playwright William Shakespeare in 1603. Set in the Court of Elsinore, Denmark, Shakespeare narrates a plot in which the heir to the throne, Hamlet, faces the issue of getting revenge from his father's assassination committed by his uncle Claudius. The aim of this character is to gain access to the throne by getting married to Queen Gertrude. Meanwhile, Hamlet is disturbed by feelings of anger, frustration and instances of madness, since he has to decide between doing the right action (getting revenge from his father's death) or remaining passive in order to save himself from Claudius' fury. This situation explains the presence of his famous quote "To be or not to be, that is the question, whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing, end them" (Shakespeare, W. (1603) *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Pp. 60).

***The Dead Father's Club:*** Novel written by the British author Matt Haig in 2006. The plot is told by a British teenager, Philip, who has lost his father in a car accident. While struggling with post-traumatic feelings due to this event, he meets his father's ghost, who reveals to him that his uncle, Alan, assassinated him by cutting the car's brakes. For this reason, Philip must get revenge from his death before his father remains in a ghostly state forever.

***Ophelia:*** Novel written by the American writer Lisa Klein in 2019. Following the same plot as Shakespeare's original play, the author provides to Ophelia, the main character of the novel, with a voice to retell the story written by Shakespeare from her perspective. In this sense, the novel portrays a feminine viewpoint, focusing on Gertrude and Ophelia, the latter evolving as character through her experience in courtly life and learning about love and emotions. In contrast with Shakespeare's play, her story finishes with a happy ending for her, since she does not die by drowning herself and madness does not corrupt her.

***Nutshell:*** Novella written by the British writer Ian McEwan in 2016. The plot is narrated by a foetus in his mother's womb, explaining to the reader that his mother Trudy is having an affair with his uncle Claude, and that both plan to assassinate his

father, John. The foetus faces the same problem as Hamlet in Shakespeare's play: being born and acting against his mother and uncle's plans or remaining passive since he is an unborn entity who has no power of decision towards the outside world.

## 2. An Analysis of Emotions Reflected in Ophelia and Hamlet

Throughout literature and history, love has been a recurrent topic that has led to infinite studies of analysis. An aspect under study in relation to love can be the portrayal of emotions and the conventions tied to them. In the case of Shakespeare, the essence of the Elizabethan period impregnates all his plays, and he makes reference to love and royal manners. While analysing emotional ties, paying attention to the presence of love helps comprehending its dimensions and its remodelling in Young Adult adaptations. In *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* female characters are portrayed as pure entities that need to be secured. This does not exactly mean that the one who secures her is herself. Instead, the duty of a male character like her father, brother or husband over her well-being is predominant. Such is the case of Ophelia, as portrayed in *Hamlet* as possession of her father: "[...] I have a daughter, have while she is mine, who in her duty and obedience, mark, hath given me this [Hamlet's letter to Ophelia], now gather and surmise" (Shakespeare, W. (1603) *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Cambridge University Press, (1971), p. 41). Despite the idealisation of the woman, terms related to delicacy and frailty disturb the positive image of the female character. Such is the case of Ophelia's father in *Hamlet*: Polonius. "[...] I would not in plain terms from this time forth have you so slander any moment leisure as to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet [...]" (Shakespeare, 1971:23).

It is important to remark that before, during and after the Elizabethan period, women occupied in social terms an inferior position in comparison to men. The female character was represented as an object under possession, first of her father and, later on, of her husband. Apart from social consequences, the conception of love extended towards economic and political interests, mainly agreed by the family members to achieve status. Such is Ophelia's case, subrogated to her father and brother's will over her happiness. As stated by Wagner, "Ophelia was created as an extremely sympathetic portrait from the first scene- a dutiful daughter sweetly counselled by Laertes [...]"

(Wagner, L. W. (1963). Ophelia: Shakespeare's Pathetic Plot Device. *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 14(1), 94–97, p.96). An instance is reflected when Laertes warns her about the lack of reliability of Hamlet's words: Polonius. "[...] Be something scater of your maiden presence, set your entreatments at higher level than a command to parle [...]" (Shakespeare, 1971:20).

In the case of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the focus of attention can be set upon Ophelia and Hamlet. It is true that Ophelia follows the convention of being an undermined woman under the influence of her father and brother. It is true as well that Hamlet idealises her in order to compliment her through an elaborated and poetic language. However, as regards her attachment to Hamlet, their love story does not involve the presence of this concept at all, but rather a real attempt to start an emotional involvement. Hamlet and Ophelia's relationship is much influenced by both characters' past experiences and traumas.

In terms of Ophelia's childhood and the influence of Laertes and Polonius, brother and father, in her life, the character of Ophelia is reduced to passivity and inferiority from the start. These characters treat her as "a child who lacks self-knowledge and apprehension about the ways of the world." (FISCHER, S. K. (1990). Hearing Ophelia: Gender and Tragic Discourse in "Hamlet". *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 14(1), p. 4) Her condition of inferiority is reflected in multiple occasions in the play, such as when she reveals to Polonius and Laertes that Hamlet has importuned her with signs of love: Polonius. "[...] give every man thy ear, but few thy voice, take each man's censure, but reserve thy judgement" (Shakespeare, 1971:20); "[...] you speak like a green girl unsifted in such perilous circumstance" (Shakespeare, 1971:22). These characters do not follow the idea of symbolising the maiden as a goddess-like figure, i.e., they do not glorify her. However, they set the basis upon which social conventions of the period laid regarding females, i.e. the woman being reduced in personality and will in order to find a man who completes her. This aspect of a maiden seeking a man and always remaining tied to him is reflected in the play when Ophelia sings a poem to Claudius in madness: Ophelia. "[...] Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's Day, all in the morning betime, and I a maid at your window to be your Valentine. Then up he rose, and donned with clothes, and duffed the chamber door, let in the maid, that out a maid never departed more" (Shakespeare, 1971:99).

In addition to being a character undermined by her father, her status of weak woman guarantees his father the ability to use her as a puppet. In this sense, she finds herself “explained, faulted, and struggled over by rival authorities outside herself” (Fischer, 1990: 4). An instance of her uncertainty is reflected in the scene when she confesses to Polonius Hamlet’s approach to her with signs of love: Ophelia. “[...] I do not know, my lord, what I should think [...]” (Shakespeare, 1971:22). Polonius aims to convince the monarchs Hamlet’s mental instability being caused by Ophelia’s rejection: Polonius. “[...] This is the very ecstasy of love, whose violent property fordoes itself, and leads the will to desperate undertakings, as often as any passion under heaven that does afflict our natures. [...] come, go we to the king. This must be known, which, being kept close, might move more grief to hide, than hate to utter love [...]” (Shakespeare, 1971:37). Through this lie, Polonius aims to establish stronger ties to the monarchy. As he makes the King and Queen believe that Ophelia is the cause of Hamlet’s madness, his service is acknowledged and appreciated by them and he expects they reward him in some manner. Polonius expects this reward will be a granted access to a better social status in court. As stated by Wagner in Shakespeare’s Pathetic Plot Device, “[...] the play is the thing” and “Ophelia as an excuse for Hamlet’s madness is essential to the plot: there is no question that he [Laertes] has used her calculatingly” (Wagner, 1963:96). Polonius aims to demonstrate the link between these two characters is enough reason to comprehend Hamlet’s strange behaviour, especially when Ophelia is not near him any longer. The results of Polonius’ aim are reflected in scene 3.1, when Claudius and Polonius aim to spy Ophelia while she converses with Hamlet: King to Gertrude. “[...] we have [...] sent for Hamlet hither, that he, as ‘twere by accident, may here affront Ophelia; her father and myself [...], that seeing unseen, we may of their encounter frankly judge [...] if ‘t be th’ affliction of his love or no that thus he suffers for” (Shakespeare, 1971:59). The same effect is caused in the Queen as well: Queen. “And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish that your good beauties be the happy cause of Hamlet’s wildness, so shall I hope your virtues will bring him to his wonted way again [...]” (Shakespeare, 1971:59).

It is clear that, after all, Ophelia is objectified by her father, leading to “losing her [...] to probe the depths of Hamlet’s self” (Fischer, 1990:5): Ophelia. “[...] I of ladies most deject and wretched, that sucked the honey of his music vows [...] now see that noble and most sovereign reason [...] blasted with ecstasy! O, woe is me!”



(Shakespeare, 1971:63) According to Fischer, Ophelia “[...] expresses acquiescence, uncertainty and obeisance; she utters half-lines; she mirrors her male interlocutors by naming their qualities” (Fischer, 1990:2). Multiple examples in the play support this statement, such as when Ophelia tells her father about Hamlet’s proposal or when Gertrude expresses to her the wish of Ophelia being the reason for Hamlet’s madness: Ophelia. “I do not know, my lord, what I should think” (Shakespeare, 1971:22); “Madam, I wish it may” (Shakespeare, 1971:59). Such stagnation of personality does not occur to Hamlet, because although he feels isolated, “yet he is constantly allowed confrontations that permit him to shape his changing sense of identity” (Fisher, 1990:5). What this statement implies is that all characters are focused on him and aim to reach the conclusion of why he is feeling this way. Meanwhile, Ophelia is just a mere character with no relevance in court other than serving to Queen Gertrude.

Regarding Ophelia’s relationship with Hamlet, a clear difference is set upon the social status of man and woman. While Ophelia is a servant under the command of Hamlet’s mother, Gertrude, Hamlet is the prince of Denmark and his way of living is much influenced by prestige. Apart from her condition of maiden, her status is determined by her gender, which grants, according to Linda Bamber, “a principle of otherness, unlike and external to the self...who is male” (Fischer, 1990:1). Ophelia’s vision of herself is then “completely vulnerable to her own femaleness [...], a soft yielding creature, with no power of resistance” (O. Oteiwiy, G. *Woman Frailty in Shakespeare’s “Hamlet”* Kufa University. Hawlyat Al-Montada, 2012, Volume 1, Issue 11, p.12).

Hamlet addresses Ophelia in the most sophisticated manner, kindly and lovingly. Such manners are reflected in the letter he writes to her and that Polonius reads to the royals: Hamlet. “Doubt thou the stars are fire, doubt that the sun doth move, doubt truth to be a liar, but never doubt I love” (Shakespeare, 1971:42). However, once Hamlet’s father assassination and the need of revenge come to fill Hamlet’s head, he forgets about her: “[...] I with wings as swift as meditation or the thoughts of love, may sweep to my revenge” (Shakespeare, 1971:27). Influenced by a frustrated feeling due to his father’s death and his mother’s “overhasty marriage” (Sen, T. (1940). Hamlet’s Treatment of Ophelia in the Nunnery Scene. *The Modern Language Review*, 35(2), p. 146), Hamlet’s vision about women is disturbed. He experiences a tendency of “characterizing them by wantonness, lack of honour, primitive emotions” (Sen,

1940:147). This way of thinking affects his vision of Ophelia as well. An instance of his views towards women is reflected in page 14, when he expresses his indignity towards her mother's new marriage: Hamlet. "[...] frailty thy name is woman! A little month or ere those shoes were old with which she followed my poor father's body, [...] why she, even, [...] married with my uncle. [...] O most wicked speed... to post with such dexterity to incestuous sheets!" (Shakespeare, 1971:14) After his father's death, feeling alone, he seeks to understand the value of support and companionship.

Ophelia is undermined in Shakespeare's play. However, this is reconsidered in Lisa Klein's adaptation *Ophelia*. Klein rather insists on creating a version of Shakespeare's masterpiece in which Ophelia's voice is the most trustworthy tool to understand what happens in Elsinore: "I, Ophelia, played a part in this tragedy. [...] I cannot rest while this history remains untold. There is no peace for me while this pain presses upon my soul. [...] like the sun, I will dispel the darkness about me and cast a light upon the truth. [...] Here is my story" (Klein, L. (2006) *Ophelia*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC., p. 6). To provide a mature and determinant voice to this character, the author must start from the importance of love and how maidens are raised up and instructed around the topic. In this sense, Ophelia demonstrates she stands out among the other women in court in moral and ethical views.

The character's views around the topic of love are an instance of her mature mindset. An example is reflected in page 20, when Hamlet aims to protect Ophelia from a boy that was prosecuting her: "What threat monster of the deep do you strive against, little Ophelia? [...] I cannot be always at hand to rescue you from harm. [...]" "I do not need to be rescued [...] I can swim like the trout that live in this brook" [...] (Klein, 2006:20). Other proof of her advanced and matured attitude is present in her unconventional views towards religion, bearing in mind this topic was of the utmost importance in the historical period the original play sets in. As Safaei and Hashim state, "Ophelia has no tolerance for books on Christian morals [and] she has to read such books as a part of her education [...]. [...] she describes, with a caustic tone, the attitude of these books which encourage women to remain silent, chaste and obedient" (Safaei, M. & Hashim, R. (2014) *Ophelia Revised: The Paradox of Femme Fragile in Modern Revisionings of Hamlet*, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Volume 118, p.312). Instead, she prefers those books which are "condemned by moralists" and "dangerous" (Safaei, M. & Hashim, R., 2014:312).

Since the novel follows the same plot as Shakespeare's play, the same characters are present in this novel as well. However, there is a clear difference in the way Ophelia evolves, moving from being a flat character in *Hamlet* to becoming a round one. In terms of *Hamlet*, this character remains flat.

Regarding Ophelia's attachment to her brother and father, the author brings more emphasis to Ophelia's feelings of being subrogated as a person "completely vulnerable to her own femaleness [...], a soft yielding figure, with no power of resistance" (Oteiwu, 2012: 12). After all, in Shakespeare's play, the importance of this character feeling and being perceived in this way is barely touched upon. In Klein's adaptation, Ophelia's condition of feeling manipulated and inferior is still latent. The difference with the original play is that the character is given a voice to express such feelings, while in *Hamlet* her contribution and opinion are reduced. As she moves from her home to Elsinore and becomes immersed in court life, her father and brother's perception of her is not important for a period of time, due to their mistreatment of her: "I was careless of my words, wanting to wound him [Laertes], if he had any tender places left. [...] I decided that from this moment on, I would no more be my father's daughter. Yet I would let him think that he still ruled me [...]" (Klein, 2006:85). However, this does not mean that she does not care at all about them. In fact, she still feels bound to them, and this tie is immensely difficult for her to break. An instance of this is reflected when she finds herself alone and lost: "Overlooked by my family, forgotten by Hamlet, and ignored by the queen, I felt as lonely as a leper" (Klein, 2006: 74). This does not mean she is an immature character, but rather a human being who does not deny her emotions.

There are many instances during the novel where Ophelia's father and brother play the role of protector over the female entity, aiming to impose a set of ideas upon her. The main one is the way they attempt to protect her from Hamlet's influence, portraying her as a valuable treasure: "Dear sister, before I take my leave I have advice you must heed. [...] It regards Prince Hamlet. I have learned that you often meet him in secret [...]. I doubt your silly games are merely innocent" (Klein, 2006:82). However, such warnings are linked to Polonius and Laertes' necessity to maintain a good reputation, which is tied Ophelia's virginity. This situation leads them to portray her as a fragile and immature character who needs protection: "Dear Ophelia, my reputation is also at stake in this matter. Consider the loss to your honour- and to our family's name-

if you believe Hamlet's songs of love and open your chaste treasure to him" (Klein, 2006:83).

In terms of her attachment to Hamlet, her views towards their affair are remodelled as she matures and changes her perceptions. At the beginning of the plot, Ophelia grows interested in Hamlet: "For a moment I was envious of Hamlet. But I, too, felt my eyes drawn to him, and after that night, I watched for the prince everywhere at Elsinore [...]" (Klein, 2006:13). Such interest is joined to her familiarisation with a period of growth from a teenager to a grown-up woman: "Though I had joined the world of women, I still felt like a child, ignored and lost in this new realm" (Klein, 2006: 25). During this time, she seeks counsel from other women that surround her, sometimes receiving rejection and other times embracement. On the one hand, Cristiana, one of Gertrude's maids, aims to turn Ophelia down: "[...] I was reminded daily that my favour at the court of Elsinore was unlikely and precarious. Cristiana "Your father is a nobody, and you are nothing [...] I cannot fathom what the queen sees in you" (Shakespeare, 2006:34).

On the other hand, Queen Gertrude or Elnora, the maidens' coordinator, become crucial pillars for her, in order to adopt their ideas about certain topics and later construct her own ones. They provide their visions about how a woman should behave in court, about love and its consequences, and how women are supposed to react to love encounters with men. Both this support and the influence of books mean a huge change in Ophelia's mindset and maturity. With Elnora's books, she learns about conduct: "They all said that I must be silent, chaste and obedient, or else the world would be turned topsy-turvy from my wickedness [...] that I might cultivate the art of witty but modest conversation that was the mark of courtly love" (Klein, 2006:32). Meanwhile, with Gertrude's books, she aims to comprehend the delights of love and the means to find it. An instance is reflected when Ophelia is asked to read a story out loud to Gertrude from a book, from which Gertrude brings a lesson: "Men and women alike sought ample delights with fewest sorrows. But while ladies desired to satisfy themselves in love, it was the lure of power that most tempted men" (Klein, 2006:37).

The period of self-discovery in Ophelia leads her to decide which aspects of her life she accepts and which ones she wishes to change. Her blind attachment to both her brother and father is an instance of the latter. Since her progressively neutral feelings towards her father and brother lead her to focus more on herself, her perception of love

changes. She does not only learn more about loving herself, but also realises through time which values are worth it in terms of love affairs. In Klein's adaptation instead, Ophelia grows acquainted with the principles of love and its consequences, she realises Hamlet's madness and focus on revenge does not guarantee a secure relationship with him: "A foolish beast I was, to think that madness would shelter me. I was only making myself easier prey for the wolf" (Klein, 2006:146). Additionally, bearing in mind the tense situation at Court created by Hamlet's hostility towards Claudius, she realises that remaining near him would only grant her problems with Claudius and therefore her life could be at risk. These statements are supported by the character herself in the novel: "I had wanted to be the author of my tale, not merely a player in Hamlet's drama or a pawn in Claudius' deadly game [...]" (Klein, 2006:190). After all, considering she allied with Hamlet in order to confuse Claudius through dramatic scenes about their love, the situation would only bring suspicion to the king about her importance in court and how much she knows about his dark secrets.

### **3. Gertrude, the female canon and the concept of emotional intelligence**

A character who matches quite well with Ophelia and her circumstances is Hamlet's mother, Queen Gertrude, in Hamlet and Klein's plays, both being trapped in an environment dominated by patriarchal influence. A clear instance where the influence of patriarchy is latent is in the limited speech from these women, substituted by men's voices and becoming "male dominated characters" (Muro, A. (2022) "Ian McEwan's *Nutshell* as a Contemporary Hamlet: Gender and the Hero". Transilvania, no. 6-7, p. 102). Despite the fact that she is a grown-up woman with a reputable position, Gertrude's importance and power of decision is generally undermined, being represented as a character easily manipulated by Claudius.

As regards Gertrude's description as mother and wife in Shakespeare's play, the queen is conceived "[...] mainly in terms of how men see and use her" (Montgomery, A. L. (2009). Enter QUEEN GERTRUDE Stage Center: Re-Viewing Gertrude as Full Participant and Active Interpreter in Hamlet. *South Atlantic Review*, 74(3), p. 102). Many instances in the play reflect that the view of Gertrude is portrayed predominantly

negatively by Hamlet. A scene where this is portrayed is found when Hamlet reproaches his mother for having married Claudius: Hamlet. “Mother, you have my father much offended. [...] you live in the rank sweat of an enseamed bed stewed in corruption, honeying and making love over the nasty sty” (Shakespeare, 1971: 83). As mother, Hamlet conveys an idea of her as a careless and heartless character towards him. Since she has remarried, he considers that, as her son, he is assigned the duty of opening up her eyes and making her regret and reconsider her acts: Hamlet. “[...] Mother, for love of grace, [...] confess yourself to heaven, repent what’s past, avoid what is to come [...]” (Shakespeare, 1971: 88). Hamlet defends the idea of women being undetermined entities unaware of the ways of the world. At the same time, he considers that her selfish condition is motivated by a sensuality that seems to be satiated by another man now that King Hamlet is no longer present. The prince believes this situation reduces his mother’s status as a respectable woman. In other words, “Hamlet is convinced that Gertrude has reached a certain age when a woman’s desires have to be restrained by self-reserve” (Hussein, A.T. (2015) *The Condemned and Condoned Mona Lisa: The Unique Characterization of Shakespeare’s Gertrude*. Linguistics and Literature Studies 3(3), p. 92). This statement can be supported with Hamlet’s comments about her new marriage: Hamlet. “[...] You cannot call it love, for at your age, the hey-day in the blood is tame, it’s humble [...]. What devil was’t that thus hath cozened you at hoodman-blind?” (Shakespeare, 1971: 85)

Despite being portrayed as a careless mother, there are some instances where she “expresses concern for his healing from grief, tells him the difficult truths of life” (Montgomery, 2009:107). An instance is reflected when Gertrude and Claudius ask Hamlet about his state and he behaves unkindly: Gertrude. “Good Hamlet, [...] do not for ever with thy veiled lids seek for thy novel father in the dust, [...] all that lives must die, passing through nature to eternity” (Shakespeare, 1971: 12). However, she cannot guess that Hamlet is struggling with a moral issue. In fact, she is unaware of Claudius having killed King Hamlet. Therefore, if she is ignorant about this fact, Hamlet cannot expect her to act in the way he would wish her to do. She cannot stop his suffering unless he opens up about his struggle. She reflects this saying: Gertrude. “What have I done, that thou dar’st wag thy tongue in noise so rude against me?” (Shakespeare, 1971: 84). As Gertrude is unable to comfort her son, she requires the help of secondary characters such as Ophelia: Gertrude. “[...] for your part, Ophelia, I do wish that your

good beauties be the happy cause of Hamlet's wildness, so shall I hope your virtues will bring him to his wonted way again [...]" (Shakespeare, 1971:59).

In terms of her description from the ghost, King Hamlet, Gertrude is undermined as well. While Hamlet expresses his shame about her with anger, the ghost is more ironic. Although he does not state it directly, he implies through his words she does not deserve respect: Ghost. "[...] Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive against thy mother aught- leave her to heaven and to those thorns that in her bosom lodge to prick and sting her" (Shakespeare, 1971: 29).

As a character, Gertrude does not follow the idea of being "a *dramatis persona*, a character who develops herself and helps to shape the play throughout" (Montgomery, 2009:101). The queen does not express her thoughts as much as she would wish to, and if she had the chance to do so more clearly, she would change readers' views about her for the better. According to Marvin Rosenberg on *The Condemned and the Condoned Mona Lisa*, "Gertrude's critics have traditionally judged her in two ways: by her silence and by what others say of her" (2015:92). She is trapped in social conventions of the period, particularly in terms of the importance of getting married. As stated in Alicia Muro's article, "In the society *Hamlet* is set in, a widowed woman would be worthless, penniless and without any purpose in life- unless she married again" (2022:102). Regarding her attachment to Ophelia, Gertrude's closeness to her is not as latent as in other adaptations such as Lisa Klein's. Friendship between women in Shakespeare's play is not a matter of discussion since, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, female characters are left to second ground in the play. Therefore, there is no use in emphasising a strong bond between Ophelia and Gertrude.

As a character herself in the original play, stating that she is a woman acquainted with emotional intelligence is not credible. It is true she demonstrates care for her son and tries to support him. However, due to her strong tie to social conventions of the period such statement cannot be supported.

Ian McEwan's novel is another instance where female characters are not taken seriously. Being immersed in a story where the narrative is driven by her unborn child, baby Hamlet, Trudy can be considered a woman with reduced voice and personality: "[...] whatever power she was supposed to have was only what men conferred in their fantasies" (McEwan, I. (2016) *Nutshell*. Doubleday, p.17). However, it is stated that

“employing an unborn baby as a narrator is technically an attempt to question the reliability of the narrator” (Şahin, H. (2021) *Hamlet in a Nutshell: McEwan's novel Nutshell as a postmodern rewriting*, p. 53). In this sense, the aim of this novel’s author is an attempt at challenging readers’ conceptions, from a postmodern point of view. The difference with *Hamlet’s* Gertrude lies in the contemporary society the novel is set in.

In terms of being described as mother, the only narrator that dominates the story and filters all the information towards the reader is Trudy’s son. As he narrates “the expressions the baby uses [...] are quite assertive, giving a sense of certainty” (Şahin, 2021: 53). In terms of women being sensitive entities, Trudy is portrayed as a cruel and selfish character instead, with no sense of empathy towards her baby and ex-husband or regret for her loving affair with Claude. Such statement is supported by the narrator in multiple occasions: “I am uncertain of her love. [...] My mother has preferred my father’s brother, cheated her husband, ruined her son” (McEwan, 2016: 35). She seems to be careless about the well-being of the baby, when for instance she gets drunk without control or when she maintains sexual encounters with Claude: “[...] my mother and uncle are talking up a winter storm. The cork is drawn from one more bottle, then, too soon, another. I’m washed far downstream of drunkenness, my senses blur their words but I hear in them the form of my ruin” (McEwan, 2016: 63).

Trudy’s sense of motherhood is not expressed, but she rather remains passive towards her unborn child. As the plot moves forward, she starts to speak more often about her pregnancy, considering with Claude plausible actions to take towards the baby once he is born, to rid of him: “To her schemes of abandonment I deny consent. I won’t be exiled, but she will be” (McEwan, 2016: 43). In this way, she demonstrates she is a disinterested mother-to-be. Throughout the novel, Baby Hamlet presents mixed feelings towards Trudy, as being bound to her but at the same time rejecting her as mother: “How diminishing, to accept at second hand my mother’s every rush of feeling and be bound tighter to her crime. But it is hard to be separate from her when I need her [...]” (McEwan, 2016: 90). However, his position inside her tummy grants him a way of analysing actions surrounding him. Her state of pregnancy is utilised by the baby as a tool, as “a compulsory situation in which she is doomed to share her private life with her narrator baby and let him go through her mind” (Şahin, 2021: 55).

Her portrayal as wife is more idealised in contrast with that of her son’s. However, it is as well filtered through baby Hamlet’s perspective and influenced by the



fact that his ex-husband is still in love with her: “He really believes that to write a poem in praise of my mother (her eyes, her hair, her lips) and come by to read it aloud will soften her” (McEwan, 2016: 20). Despite the fact that he still aims to recover her affection towards him, both characters behave in infantile and cruel manners. An instance is reflected when he presents a girl to Trudy as his girlfriend to make her jealous: “Trudy, Claude, Elodie. [...] I want to say this. [...] Trudy and I tumbled into love [...] Our love was so fine and grand, it seemed to us a universal principle. Now [...] that love has run its course. [...] Elodie and I have found that love and we are bound by it for the rest of our lives” (McEwan, 2016: 61). In exchange, Trudy plays the role of being deceived by her ex-husband’s affair with another woman, aiming to play tricks and confuse him. Although she feels no affection towards him any longer, she expects him to always be devoted to her, no matter her distance from him and signals of rejection. In this sense, the misconception of women requiring to be tied to a man to feel fulfilled as individuals is reflected in the story. Meanwhile, she plans to assassinate him, with Claude as her partner in crime.

Until she reaches the moment to commit her crime, she lies to her ex-husband assuring she needs time to consider her affection towards him: “Look, we really must talk” [...] “John, not now. [...] I need more time. [...] I’m bearing your child, remember? This isn’t the time to be thinking of yourself” (McEwan, 2016: 25). Meanwhile, she resides in his house utilising her pregnancy as an excuse and she carries a sexual affair with her brother-in-law, Claude. Such circumstances demonstrate she is not accounted with the meaning of emotional intelligence and the consequences of her actions.

As a lover, her toxic attraction towards Claude reflects her lack of maturity towards love. Especially when events turn against her will, her anger becomes latent through time and it is thrown against Claude. She aims to find support in him when she feels insecure: “Where’s your risk [...] when you are wanting a share of the money? If something goes wrong and I go down, where will you be once I’ve scrubbed you out of my bedroom?” (McEwan, 2016: 52). In this sense, it can be stated that, as undetermined with herself, she aims to find comfort in a man who remonstrates no feelings, compassion or care towards her. An instance is shown when Claude forces her to have sex, not bearing in mind her mood: “Don’t get me excited all over again.” “Please. No. Claude. [...]” “He has pulled her towards the bed [...]. He pushes her onto her back. Consent has rough edges” (McEwan, 2016: 97).

At the same time, and since she is aware of Claude's lack of commitment to her, she aims to threaten him by reminding him of their partnership in their assassination plan. As she scares Claude about the possibility of being caught by police, she aims to manipulate him and tie his lover to her: "What I want [...] is you tied into this, and I mean totally. If I fail, you fail" (McEwan, 2016: 53). Consequently, provided events turn against them, she will not be alone and hopeless, since law's punishment will lay among both of them.

As a character, her version about the events that happen to her is not conveyed. It is crucial to bear in mind that her son explains which are her feelings and thoughts according to what he perceives. However, she is not limited in voice. Trudy takes part in most of the dialogues which are present in the story. Instead, what is limited is the veracity of what baby Hamlet assures she is feeling or wondering: "I guessed, from the sympathetic wave motion which briefly lifted my ear from the wall, that my mother has emphatically shrugged, as if to say, So men are different" (McEwan, 2016: 17).

The idea of a woman in need of a male entity to reshape her knowledge of the world, reviewed at the beginning of the section, is then latent. As stated in the article, "[...] despite being the owner of the body, not a single process is portrayed through Trudy's perspective even though pregnancy affects her physical and psychological state enormously" (Şahin, 2021: 55). Leaving aside the fact that her thoughts and feelings are mediated by her son, it is true that her actions demonstrate she encounters herself in a deal between playing the role of a cruel and careless villain, led by sexual impulse and passion, or follow the principles of a sensible human being. An instance can be noticed when, in the apogee of having achieved her ex-husband's assassination, she notices she was once in love with him. Consequently, she tortures herself and regrets having let herself be driven by disdain, although later on she returns to her hatred towards her husband: "You know, Claude, I loved him once. [...] We were too young when we met [...] On an athletic track. [...] It made my knees go weak to watch him. [...]" A minute later she blows her nose and says in a croaky voice, "Anyway, I hate him now" (McEwan, 2016: 51).

As noticed in the novel, Trudy presents various faults as character. Firstly, she immerses herself in a threatening playing with her ex-husband. Secondly, she experiences a toxic attachment to Claude as regards passion and love. Thirdly, although she aims to care about the baby, she ends up behaving in a careless manner towards

him. All these aspects support the idea that she may be a woman with little sense of moral values or principles. Thus, unlike Gertrude in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, she is not acquainted with terms of emotional intelligence and affective responsibility. Another figure worth reviewing is the Gertrude represented in Lisa Klein's adaptation, *Ophelia*. In this case, the narration is carried out by Ophelia, so male domination is not present as in *Nutshell*. In fact, no reference to her is provided from the point of view of her son, as in the case of Shakespeare's play. Instead of being regarded as wife or mother, she is analysed from the perspective of friendship and herself as character.

As a companion from the point of view of Ophelia, the queen is described as a generous, warm-hearted and sensible woman. She establishes a progressive attachment to Ophelia starting through a professional environment, that of the relationship between queen and maiden. This first contact between them is distant, even though Gertrude chooses her to be part of her household: "[...] Gertrude rarely spoke to me, but I gazed on her, my eyes drinking in her beauty" [...] (Klein, 2006: 33). However, as time moves forward, she is bound to Ophelia as her instructor in matters of love and as a friendly companion: "'By the time I was fifteen, my shape was that of a woman. [...]" "Nature produced you, but nurture has perfected you", Gertrude often said with pride, as though I were her creation [...]" (Klein, 2006:39). She notices the young lady is inexperienced in the topic although she exhibits an inclination towards the topic that she needs to shape: "'You have the spirit of a lady, Ophelia. Though you were not born to high state, you will rise to greatness", said Gertrude, kissing my forehead lightly" (Klein, 2006: 36). Such is the attachment that grows stronger between them that Gertrude feels disappointed when Ophelia commences to pursue other distractions away from her service: "I am told that you spend your days in the country with a common boy, that you dress like some farmer's daughter. [...] Do you thus repay my kindness by disgracing yourself?" (Klein, 2006:59)

Emphasis is set upon Gertrude as a round character with "a rich dramatic personhood" (Montgomery, 2009:101). It is especially palpable in terms of her empathy towards other females, mainly with Ophelia. Her approachability contributes to Ophelia's development as woman. She is granted the opportunity of sharing her views and emotions and to learn from others, since she is aware that they are in the same position she was once: "[...] I found it to be true that life at Elsinore was much like the stones Gertrude and I shared. Men and women alike sought ample delights with fewest

sorrows” (Klein, 2006: 37). Through this awareness, Gertrude demonstrates being “[...] [a] strong-minded, intelligent, succinct and [...] sensible woman [...]” (Montgomery, 2009 on Heilbrun 202, p. 101). Additionally, Gertrude challenges the idea of females being guided and supported by men. She rather focuses on sharing and learning from other members of her same gender.

As regards her role in guiding and counselling Ophelia, she reflects her awareness around the term of emotional intelligence: “You, Ophelia, are sensible, but unschooled in matters of love and passion. It is necessary to learn the ways of the world and the wiles of men, so that you may resist them” (Klein, 2006: 37). Nevertheless, the novel still reflects the social conventions Gertrude is still tied to, which set a burden in achieving the path of full realisation as woman. In the same way as in *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, the queen needs to get married to Claudius, so that she preserves her rights to govern. In this sense, the idea of Gertrude being “an independent moral self operating under her own agency” cannot be sustained (Montgomery, 2009:102). The topic is not touched upon until the end of the novel, when Gertrude opens up to Ophelia and expresses her fear towards Claudius. She is suspicious about his intentions as regards the throne and the actions he carried to reach his position: “As I came night to the cottage door, I heard your accusations of the king. [...] I admit that I am frail in my flesh. I, too, fear Claudius. [...] I do not have your courage, Ophelia, though I am a queen” (Klein, 2006: 177).

As regards emotional intelligence and affective responsibility, Gertrude’s awareness around the importance of empathy and support is latent. This fact demonstrates she is a mature woman with clear ideas that she aims to spread and renovate with new ones she acquires. However, she is forced to adapt to social conventions as well as Gertrude in the original play. Despite this inconvenience, her acknowledgement of the terms mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph is reflected in her actions and her moral lessons towards Ophelia.

The last novel to comment on is set in contemporary society and reflects the female character as a totally mature entity. Among the role of the other female characters discussed upon before, Carol in *Dead Father’s Club* seems to be the most mature character, surrounded by a conventional society where problems exist and require her to solve them on her own. As mother, she could be considered a rewriting of

Gertrude, and as regards her new embracement to love, she could be seemed as a representation of Ophelia.

As a mother, Carol takes action in supporting her son, reflecting her worry, since she is aware of the traumatic effect that her husband's death may have caused on him. An example is provided when she speaks to her mother about her past suffering: "Do you think it's been easy for me? [...] Philip getting into all sorts of trouble at school. Worrying me to death the way he's been going on" (Haig, M. (2006) *The Dead Fathers Club*. Canongate, p. 164). However, she is aware of her limits, and although she aims to do her best she is also experiencing moments of struggle which she needs to deal with as well. In the same way as Gertrude from Shakespeare's play, she cannot guess that Philip has met his father's ghost, and she cannot grasp what is happening in his mind much further. Her astonishment towards Philip's behaviour is reflected when he accidentally tells her that Alan has killed his father, a fact she does not believe: "[...] Mum just looked at me and I had made tears in her eyes for the 200<sup>th</sup> time and she said [...] "Philip why are you being like this? Why are you doing this to me? Why are you saying these horrible things? [...]" (Haig, 2006: 170)

As regards her wishes, Carol takes into account Philip's feelings, concretely regarding Uncle Alan. She aims to hide her progressive affection towards him from her son, since she is conscious of the suffering this will inflict upon him. An instance is reflected when Alan shares in a public karaoke his wish to marry her and Philip reacts smashing the PlayStation: "[...] Mum [...] screamed "Philip!" [...] And I said "Where's your ring?" [...] Uncle Alan said "She's not wearing it because she didn't know how to tell you." Mum said "You didn't have to tell the whole Pub"" (Haig 2006: 103). However, once Philip becomes acquainted with their affair, his aim is to convince his mother not to get engaged with him: "'Don't marry Uncle Alan" Mum [...] pushed me off her shoulder and said [...] "Philip stop this" I said "Mum don't go to bed with him. Please Mum don't"' (Haig, 2006: 170). In the same way as queen Gertrude, her agency is "to continue her sexual relation with Claudius (here Uncle Alan) despite Hamlet's (in this case, Philip's) ethical teachings" (Safaei, M. & Hashim, R.S. (2012) *Gertrude's Transformation: Against Patriarchal Authority*. English Language and Literature Studies; Vol. 2, No. 4; 2012, p. 87).

As a wife, the ghost is the one that conveys the portrayal of Carol. His way of referring to her is covered by disappointment and anger for her actions, in the same way

as the ghost from *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* does. The moment that illustrates it is the one when Alan and Carol are caught by Philip having sex and the ghost comes into the scene: “Don’t hate your Mum Philip. She can’t see the rotten cancer she is letting into this place. It’s unnatural but she is too weak” (Haig, 2006: 73). Once more, the portrayal of the female character being tied to a man to fulfil herself is conveyed. The description of Carol being an incestuous and heartless character is granted, supporting the conventional idea of the female entity requiring a man besides her to assure her joyfulness.

As character, she does not deny her desire towards Uncle Alan, while at the same time she is aware of the importance of her and her son’s well-being: “If I’m going to look after you I’m going to need someone to look after me. He’s [Alan] a kind man. [...] He wants to help Philip. Look what he’s done for us with the Pub. He doesn’t have to do all that does he?” (Haig, 2006: 127) Her son dominates the narration and her voice is only present in dialogues. As Carol is aware of the importance of her actions in the story, she does not clearly state her intentions. This does not necessarily mean that she is denied to freely express herself, but rather that she is acquainted with which aspects are worth sharing and which ones are not at all. Following this idea, Carol is “persistent in her objectives, [...] [she] is vociferous in defending her right to remarriage”(Safaei & Hashim, 2012: 88). An instance of her determinant position is reflected when she visits her mother, with whom she argues due to her lack of support towards the matter: “Mum said Alan’s asked me to marry him and I’ve said Yes. [...] You think it’s too soon. [...] Do you think it’s been easy for me? It’s been terrible. [...] And Alan’s been so nice and he’s been so kind and helped us out with money [...]” (Haig, 2006: 164). Carol reflects as a character the conventional woman from our current society, who is “not exempt from the harsh realities of life, [...] [being] entrapped in worlds which are darker than [she] [...] can imagine or control” (Safaei & Hashim, 2012:88).

In terms of her attachment to her son and the awareness over her acts, it can be stated that Carol follows the principle of a woman aware of emotional intelligence and affective responsibility. Even though she has an affair with her brother-in-law, this does not necessarily mean she is a cruel woman, since she makes it clear to Philip that his father will never be replaced: “I know you want it just to be me and you Philip.[...] But one day you will be all grown up and leave home and I will be on my own [...]. Uncle Alan isn’t going to replace Dad. No one’s going to replace him” (Haig, 2006: 127).



## Conclusion

As seen in the novels under analysis, the concept of love is a recurrent topic that cannot be undermined or taken aside. Its approach fosters a great understanding of characters as regards their behaviour and moral maturity, especially regarding women.

Since female characters' voices are silenced in *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, new adaptations of the play adapt it to new contexts, conveying a nearer focus on these restrained characters. As regards the concept of love, Ophelia is a perfect instance of the importance of recognising the term and becoming aware of its consequences and burdens. As the reader dives into the new adaptations, it is clear that this character is granted more opportunity to speak about the matter and to grow as character. This does not mean that Shakespeare rejected females' participation in the matter of love, but he may have led the ground for discussion about the inferiority of women throughout history and, in his case, in the Elizabethan period. Ophelia is the perfect characterisation of a person who enters the world of love and encounters inexperience, deception, uncertainty and suffering. She works as a way of showing to the reader that maturity requires time and secondary aid from other mature and advanced people.

Emotional intelligence and affective responsibility involve not only learning to establish limits with those we love, but also to become aware of the consequences of our actions with regard to the matter. Gertrude is the exemplary character in this sense. While presenting a limited personality and voice in the original play, the contemporary adaptations portray her in more mature and open-minded ways. In these last ones, Gertrude is the best example of the guiding person Ophelia seeks for in order to achieve self-improvement and maturity.

The idea of love and the maturity it brings within is a topic that needs to be taken into account in society, and not only be reflected in literature. Playwrights and authors aim to reach readers and to inspire them, and if they are able to set these values in the reader, success is granted. Here comes the explanation why getting familiarised with reading practices and great books is worth the time implemented on them.



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