

AN INTERVIEW WITH KATEŘINA FÜRBACHOVÁ
ON ILLUSTRATING *HAMLET* (AND OPHELIA), FASHION
AND ECOLOGICAL ACTIVISM THROUGH ART

Anna Mikyšková

FILIP Krajník's translation of *Hamlet* (see Eva Kyselová's review in this issue) has been published in two variants: as the first volume of the "William" series, which will in upcoming years publish Shakespeare's dramatic works in new Czech translations, and as a stand-alone volume, aimed primarily at students and accompanied by unique illustrations made by a young art-school student, Kateřina Fürbachová. We met with Kateřina to ask her about what it was like to illustrate Shakespeare's greatest play, about her interests, plans and ambitions, as well as her favourite music...

AM: Could you tell our readers something about yourself and how you became the illustrator of the new Czech edition of *Hamlet*?

KF: Of course! My name is Kateřina Fürbachová, I'm sixteen years old and I'm a first year student of fashion design at secondary school. I love vintage and retro stuff, especially fashion from the 50s, 60s and 70s. Fashion is my biggest love which I want to be really good at and which I want to pursue. Another passion of mine is environmental activism and eco-life. That's why I also work as a volunteer for Greenpeace. I got to *Hamlet* by a sheer accident and an unbelievable stroke of luck. Filip Krajník, the translator of the play, approached me via Instagram at someone's suggestion, asking me whether



I'd be interested in making a cover design for his book. He believed in me even though I hadn't given him any portfolio of my previous work. He just wanted a young artist from South Bohemia since his translation was going to premiere in South Bohemian Theatre. So this gift fell into my lap, so to speak. And I'm extremely grateful for it.

The cover is the first thing that the future readers see and on the basis of which they usually decide whether they'll purchase the book or not. Can you tell us how you worked on yours and where you drew inspiration for it from?

First of all, I got thoroughly acquainted with the play and came to understand the story and its atmosphere. Then I started working on various designs in which I tried to determine for myself who or what I wish to depict – and how. Then I selected the painting technique and kinds of paints. I mostly drew inspiration from various film adaptations of *Hamlet*, but I also found it in Mucha's posters and the 1970s' psychedelic style.

Why did you pick Ophelia as the main motif? Is there anything about this character that particularly caught your attention?

I think Ophelia's quite an overlooked character. I find that sad because, to my mind, she's much more than just a beautiful girl whom Hamlet loved. I also liked the idea that the title of the work is *Hamlet* – after a male character – but the book cover would tell the story of a tender and beautiful girl.

Could you also tell us something about the illustration that appears on the play's title page inside the book? Where did it come from and what does it depict?

I don't like explaining my works since I don't believe everything we create needs to have a background story or an explanation. I believe that if the work looks nice or evokes certain feelings, it should be enough. Anyway, the cover design sprang up very spontaneously. I was just kissed by a muse when I'd already finished a version that we ultimately didn't use. But we utilised the central element of that unused design and you can see it inside the book on the title page. It's of – as I see it – a genderless character, conveying the story and atmosphere of the play. The second version, the one that actually made it on the cover, came to me quite unexpectedly. All of a sudden, I had a vision of how to express Ophelia's suffering. So the cover depicts Ophelia in a colourful dress that expresses her purity, fragility and also her life before her father's death. Then there's the willow, the skeleton and the river that symbolise death and hopelessness luring Ophelia. And the ravens? Or are they chickens? Those you'll have to interpret for yourselves. They are precisely the part of the work that is there for aesthetic reasons, sparking the viewers' creativity and imagination.



You created the illustrations with special eco-friendly paint supplies. How important is the issue of ecology for you and how does it, in your opinion, relate to art in any form?

I've already mentioned that ecology is very important to me. For ecological and ethical reasons I'm a vegetarian and am planning to turn full vegan. I also try to lead a zero-waste life. A form of art that is definitely related to ecology is fashion. Fashion – “fast fashion” in particular – has a monstrous impact not only on the planet as a whole, but also on poor

countries and people who make these clothes. That's why I buy my favourite 70s and 60s items responsibly, either in second-hand shops or from sustainable brands.

In one of the previous issues of *THEPES*, the painter and illustrator Olivia Lomenech Gill mentioned that, as an artist, she'd like to be socially involved in a positive way. Do you think that, through their work, artists can positively influence other people's behaviour? Is this your future goal as well? Is there any message that you'd like to pass to people?

Through art, people definitely can convey their attitudes and opinions to influence others. So yes, it's totally possible to have a positive influence on other people through art. In the future, I want to be chiefly involved in fashion. And, of course, I want to spread happiness through my work rather than doing harm with it. Which is why I already know that my own brand will be sustainable. And it would be ideal if this future brand of mine collaborated with some non-governmental organisation and became a symbol of activism in the fashion domain. The message I'd like to pass on is definitely one of sustainability. And that our planet is beautiful, but it's also the only one we have.

You repeatedly mentioned your studies and your liking for retro fashion. Why did you pick this branch in particular and what makes retro fashion so appealing to you? Would you like to draw from it in the future as a designer or is it just your personal taste?



I first encountered fashion design when my friend and I made cosplay costumes for a Melanie Martinez concert. Sewing totally grabbed me. All I did during Covid was to create stuff and so I really explored the depths of my creativity. I realised how much I love creating when I started studying to be a nurse. I quickly found out then that I couldn't live without art so I started looking for an art school – where I ultimately ended up. So I picked fashion design because I love looking good and creating beautiful things. What I enjoy about retro fashion is the colours, patterns and designs. Nothing's ever kitschy in vintage and there's never too much of anything in it. That's precisely what I enjoy. But what I like most is that vintage, and the 1960s style

in particular, is the direct opposite of our current times. That gives me an opportunity to stand out and be different. My clothes will definitely be influenced by the fashion of the 60s and 70s, as well as by the psychedelic style. But I hope that, later on, I'll be able to grasp these in a unique way and absorb them into my own distinctive style.

What are your professional plans for the future? Any dreams or goals that you'd like to share with our readers?

I think I've already outlined them. To be an eco-symbol of the fashion world. And fill the world with my love. (*Laughs.*) So there you go.

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But let's go back to Shakespeare. Was illustrating *Hamlet* your first encounter with the Bard? Have you got a favourite Shakespeare play or story?

I first met Shakespeare at basic school, where we read *Romeo and Juliet*. So I knew Shakespeare before. But I wasn't that familiar with *Hamlet*. However, since then it has become my favourite Shakespearean play. Let's not go into this too much – otherwise it'll transpire that I'm a literary ignoramus. (*Laughs.*)

What is your relationship to the theatre in general? Is there any play that you like most?

I enjoy theatre very much. One of my roommates from the halls of residence is a conservatoire student and she sometimes manages to get cheap tickets for beautiful productions. I always look forward to seeing them. I like ballet, opera, musicals, as well as spoken drama. But my absolutely favourite production so far is *The Man in the Iron Mask* – it was the first musical that I ever saw. I can still feel the epic atmosphere and my being enchanted by the great acting. I also enjoyed the historical costumes, of course. I'd like to design some Baroque costumes for a theatre production one day myself. I'd love that!

Wow! Hope we'll be able to see your work on the stage one day! The cover for the new edition of *Hamlet* was your first commission for a book illustration. What kind of experience was it for you? Would you be interested in repeating this role in the future or are you planning to focus solely on fashion and fashion design?

It was a wonderful experience and I'm extremely grateful for it. It was so pleasant chiefly because of Filip Krajník, who offered me the job. I'm glad I could collaborate with such a fair and considerate person. I'm happy that I could try what it takes



to be an illustrator so I'll never need to wonder what it takes or what it is like. If I were asked to do something like that again – I would probably say yes. But since I want to focus on fashion design and establish myself in this field, I don't really want to be a professional illustrator. So yes, if I were approached again with a commission, I'd be happy to do it, but I don't see it as my future profession.

Is there anything you'd like to tell our readers or is there any question that we haven't asked and you'd like to answer?

Go and visit my Instagram account, [f.kacik.u](https://www.instagram.com/f.kacik.u), and my TikTok profile, [kacka560](https://www.tiktok.com/@kacka560). And have a beautiful day! Hope it's one full of sunshine, happiness and love!

And now for the most important thing: As a proud Queen fan, what is your favourite song or album by Queen and why?

The album is easy – *Sheer Heart Attack*. But as far as my favourite Queen song is concerned, I still don't know. I like them all in a way. Of course, I like some better than others but I can't really say I have a "Number 1." It'd be a shame to pick just one out of so many good songs and say it is "the best."

Many thanks for your time and we wish you all the best in all your future endeavours!

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