Cross-gender casting (i.e. the casting of female performers for male parts and vice versa) of plays by William Shakespeare is not a scarce phenomenon and is getting more and more popular in the recent years. In spite of the frequent claim of the theatre-makers and critics that it is in fact a gender blind casting, where the gender of the performer does not matter, the thesis attempts to prove that, in fact, it is not the case. This is exemplified on three most frequently staged and also most commonly cross-gender cast plays: Hamlet, King Lear and Romeo and Juliet. Via these examples the thesis shows the variability of approaches to cross-gender casting and the differences in realization.

In the first chapter, the key terminology is defined, in order to avoid confusion, discussing the differences between cross-dressing, travesty and cross-gender casting. That is followed by subchapters in which the basic frame of thought is suggested, building on Judith Butler’s deconstruction of gender and the concept of gender performativity. The last subchapter of this section deals with the history of cross-gender casting, including the Elizabethan all-male staging tradition.

The next three chapters are then devoted to each of the plays, analyzing the possible interpretive keys and motivations for a cross-gender cast performance, the cross-gendered staging tradition on both Anglophone and Czech stages, concluding with a more detailed analysis of a particularly interesting performance: in case of Hamlet it is Royal Exchange Theatre’s production from Manchester with Maxine Peake as Hamlet, for King Lear it is Kateřina Winterová’s performance as the Fool and Cordelia in The National Theatre in Prague and for Romeo and Juliet an all-male performance from Činoherní studio Ústí nad Labem was chosen.

The differences of the approaches are then summarized in the conclusion. That is followed by a brief questioning of the reasons behind the tendency to discuss these castings as gender-blind, suggesting a possible answer to that in trying to avoid labelling of a feminist, or LGBT production. The analyses above nevertheless attempt to prove that that is not necessarily the case with every cross-gendered production. The main goal of the thesis is thus to show cross-gender casting not only matters, but can bring much more fresh and innovative interpretations than may be initially presupposed and in more spheres then just gender.