

# ■ Maternity and Mourning with Queenship in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*

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## Abstract

In Shakespeare's trilogy *Henry VI*, the kingdom is gendered as feminine in order to mourn, or rather, to warn of, the loss of "this England" as a strong and unified authority. This paper explores the rationale in Shakespeare's reworking of historical and cultural texts. The study focuses on how Margaret's queenship in Shakespeare's *Henry VI* disrupts the development of English kingship and endangers the existing Lancastrian rule. My research investigates female authority as represented in the maternal nature ascribed to Margaret in the playwright's historiographical plot. This paper states that Margaret, with her foreignness and manliness, manifests non-English authority. It argues that this clashes with Henry V's masculine glory. My discussion further examines the significance of Margaret's maternal experience, to which Shakespeare harnesses political relevance, in relation to the play's task of honoring her son, Prince Edward, in sustaining the name of Henry V in the patrilineal power heritage. The capacity found in Shakespeare's plays is not limited to celebrating the order and legitimacy of the history nor in imposing the fear of subversion and dissent, but moves beyond to value the female voice of the "anti-historians." The art of Margaret's queenship thus bridges the tastes of the commercial theatre with the playwright's contextualization of the gender politics in English history.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare, *Henry VI*, mourning, maternity, queenship

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When the death march of Henry V's funeral opens *1 Henry VI* (1H6), the Duke of Bedford's lamentation is telling: "Instead of gold, we'll offer up our arms— / Since arms avail not now that Henry's dead" (1.1.46-47).<sup>1</sup> With Henry VI still an infant and his uncles craving power, the immediate worry resulting from the loss of a powerful king is a prolonged period of political vacuum in which the land will suffer division and civil war. Shakespeare's trilogy *Henry VI* "represent[s] England in defeat"; Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Carol Chillington Rutter observe, "these are plays that put England at the edge of chaos and contemplate questions of national identity from the marginal position of imminent disaster" (1). In Shakespeare's historiographical plot, the historical chronicles are reinvented as rhetorical and political games, and the dramatic energy which conducts the sweeping political environment of his plays portrays an alternative power perspective. As the sovereignty of the realm, arms, and prosperity are categorised as products of an exclusively masculine rule, the kingdom is gendered as feminine in order to mourn, or rather, to warn of, the loss of "this England" (*Jn.* 5.7.112) as a strong and unified authority. Heroic glory is now replaced by feminine tears, with "None but women left to wail the dead" (1H6. 1.1.51): female mourning is associated with a crisis of masculine rule and Henry VI's now emasculated authority.

In the *Henry VI* trilogy, Shakespeare introduces his preeminent female role, that of Queen Margaret, who survives throughout his first tetralogy of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*. In part 1 of *Henry VI*, the maidenly Margaret, having been introduced into England's history, grows into an image for re-examining Henry V's masculine glory. The bleak future predicted through Bedford's lamentation and mourning is representative of Shakespeare's threatening fantasy of an evil queen who invalidates the legitimacy of her own son and Henry V's heir in favour of the ascending Tudors.

Shakespeare politicizes historical drama by contextualizing the cultural concept of gender. As distinct from the historical details of his source, Shakespeare reworks and comments upon the cultural perceptions of female authority with his depiction of Margaret's queenship. Critics have for decades acknowledged the subversion of female power which leads to a dichotomised study of

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Shakespeare's plays have been standardized to *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition, 2nd ed.*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: Norton, 2008). The widely known titles, *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI* (2H6, 3H6) appear in the First Folio (1623). The Norton edition also include the titles used for the 1594 Quarto version of 2H6: *The First Part of the Contention of the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster*, and the 1595 Octavo version of 3H6: *Richard Duke of York*, as these were the titles "by which the plays [were] probably known during Shakespeare's lifetime" (Shakespeare, "Textual Note" 324); see 237-38; 323-24.

women's social role. Phyllis Rackin's recognition of female power sees a different approach for informing women's political identity when she argues: "Some of the women have power, but authority—the right to exercise power—is always defined in patriarchal terms, so whatever power the women exercise is defined in terms of menace to the patriarchy that contains them and opposition to its historical project" ("Genealogical Anxiety and Female Authority" 325). The real energy of female power asserts a different authority. Rackin suggests a critical perspective from which to speculate upon the textual recognition of female authority, which she termed "anti-historian": "We can say that Shakespeare's gift for imaginative sympathy or the logic of his structure forced him to cast his women as anti-historians, necessarily opposed to a masculine script designed to suppress their roles and silence their voices" ("Anti-Historians" 343-44). Shakespeare dramatizes the strictures of Margaret's queenship and motherhood, yet also confirms her female counter-power as a different authority beyond a simple refashioning of masculine authority. The perspective of the "anti-historians" foments a reassessment of Shakespeare's creative construction of Margaret's political identity, as well as offering a means for assessing the centrality of its position for recoding the female experience as a whole.

Though Henry VI's reign is historically functioning badly, Shakespeare depicts him as a favourable and saintly figure in his plays, and captures the real political problem and sense of mourning, if not its fact: the king's rightful authority is now challenged and criticized. The theatrical attention falls on Margaret's political energy and interference which underpin the issue of whether she can be seen as a good queen. There are two major conflicts detected in Shakespeare's contextualization of Margaret's role that I shall discuss first: whereby she is represented as both a female ruler and a "manly woman"; both terms suggest her unnatural (or non-English) authority.

### **The Early Modern Perceptions of a Wrong Queen: Knox and Hall**

Shakespeare's approach to constructing the queen's free will and her sexual (and hence political) appetite makes her a dangerous female ruler, whose characterisation at times strongly invites comparison with the examples outlined by Knox. The most sustained example of polemic which reinforces the constraints of women's exercise of authority is John Knox's *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, written in 1558 to oppose the three contemporary Catholic queens, Catherine de Medici of France, Marie de Lorraine of Scotland, and Mary Tudor of England.

The image of a female ruler who possesses masculine power is strange, or “monstrous” as Knox presents it, and hence her authority is to be distrusted (381). In Knox’s imagination, the deformity of the female body politic is extreme:

To promote a woman to beare rule, superioritie, dominion or empire above any Realme, Nation, or Citie, is repugnant to Nature, contumelie to God, a thing most contrarious to his reveled will and approved ordinance; and finallie, it is the subversion of good Order, of all equitie and justice. (Knox 376)

The difficulty of accepting a woman in the role of a monarchical ruler forms the fundamental issue here. It is provocative to see a female ruler take the lead in political actions, which violates the social order, “that the woman geve any thing to her husband, because it is against the nature of her kinde, being the inferiour member, to presume to geve any thing to her head” (Knox 376). Knox evaluates his political concern at the family level: as a queen is a woman, her natural role as woman is therefore inferior, requiring her to be obedient to the monarchical/masculine system. When the queen becomes the master of the family, it signals that the state is in disorder.

Knox’s assessment of female power reflects a strong desire to restore the superiority of a masculine governor. Although Knox was not writing against Elizabeth I when his *The First Blast* was published a few months before the inauguration of her reign, the tone of his “apology” to Elizabeth addresses a similar stance: “I can not deny the wrieting of a booke aganis the usurped Authoritie and injust Regement of Women; neither [yit] am I myndit to retract or call back any principall point, or proposition ofthesame, till treuth and verritie do farder appear” (353). This same perspective is shared as well by apologists for a queen’s rule, who suggest that the queen should cooperate with godly power or with male counsel. In her discussion on gender and imperial identity, A. N. McLaren points out that the question of the “supreme headship” draws intensive discussion in the context of the female authority (60). John Aylmer’s 1559 tract, *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjects*, was written to counter Knox’s arguments. Although Aylmer defends Elizabeth’s right of inheritance, he reveals more common ground with Knox. For instance, when Aylmer maintains the queen’s proper “headship,”<sup>2</sup> he notes her lack of masculine discipline rather than the rule of her self-sufficiency: “We must pray for the Queen’s estate and not dispute of hir right,” and he asks the Queen’s counsellors to take up the duty “to guide hir herte in the choice of hir husband . . . to make hir frutefull, and

<sup>2</sup> Another apologist, Sir Thomas Smith, shows the common trait of concern that the headship is under the female ruler: “the counsel of such able and discreet men as be able to supply all other defaults” (qtd. in Fletcher 79).

the mother of manye children.”<sup>3</sup> The constraint upon the female rule is shown in Aylmer's defence, which could correspond to Knox's statement, as McLaren adds: “Aylmer proposes loyalty to queen and council, to the queen insofar as she has been counseled—and counseled by men who are themselves godly” (68-69).

The following statement by Knox reveals that the woman's identities as mother and wife reinforce the necessity for restricting her body: “For two punishmentes are laid upon her, to witte, a dolor, anguishe, and payn, as oft as ever she shal be mother; and a subjection of her selfe, her appetites, and will, to her husband, and to his will” (378). The role of the female ruler is to be a public figure, as to rule means to demonstrate the ruler's will to use power, and hence she is dislodged from the image of a good queen. A good queen is supposed to remain the wife of the king and the mother of future kings. The incompatibility of these female identities presents the problem of recognizing the authority of Margaret's queenship. Her queenship is like the “borrowed majesty” (*Jn.* 1.1.4), which is seen to usurp Henry's rightful authority. “Many evils come from women's gadding,” the 17th century preacher Matthew Griffith writes in his advice book *Bethel* (qtd. in Fletcher 121). The clerical warning on the misbehaviour of “gadding” shows the fear present among men that women could become active in the public political arena.

Knox's distrust of female rule also includes his fear of women's reproductive power, which refers to the loyalty of the queen and the legitimacy of her issue. In his essay, Knox proceeds to describe the deformity of the female body politic:

For who wolde not iudge that bodie to be a monstre, where there was no head eminent above the rest, but that the eyes were in the handes, the tonge and mouth beneth in the bellie, and the eares in the feet? . . . And no lesse monstrous is the bodie of that Common welth, where a Woman beareth empire. (391)

In this passage, a body led by the debased, senseless body parts represents the female's “misrule” and the collapse of the body politic. Nina Levine points out that the queen's belly in Knox's passage “suggests both stomach and womb” (19). The image of the belly found in Knox initially signals the female's excessive verbal power which was considered transgressive in Shakespeare's England. It moreover suggests an unnatural womb which could give birth to grief, pain,

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<sup>3</sup> John Aylmer, *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjects, anaynst the late blowne Blaste, concerninge the Governement of Wemen, wherein be confuted all such reasons as a stranger of late made in that behalfe, with a breife exhortation to OBEDIENCE* (Strasborowe [Strasbourg], 1559) fol. I2.

bastardy, and monstrous rebellion.<sup>4</sup> The kingdom's internal breach is associated with the imagery of the prodigious birth of death and sorrow in Shakespeare's histories: "In *Henry VI*, *Richard III*, and *Richard II*, queen consorts also assume an especial emblematic potency, as images of a chaotic and fissured body politics" (Berry 139).

Shakespeare's treatment of Margaret's queenship intensifies the anxiety caused by these "evil" outcomes by demonstrating her capability of ruling in court. In the paternalistic realm of the trilogy, Margaret's exercising of a distinctively masculine mode of power is seen as a violation of natural order, despite her success in motivating the Lancastrian cause. Her access to power is viewed more as paralyzing to the King's authority than as an effort to regain the Lancastrian regal right from the Yorkists. War, while reflecting the queen's military prowess, also foreshadows the chaos resulting from her female courage. The "unnaturalness" of Margaret's power, the deficiency of her queenship, legitimizes the patriarchal manipulation. Her treatment by the male protagonists corresponds to the play's treatment of another energetic heroine, Joan of Pucelle. Rutter's analysis aptly states the underlying social control: "she [Joan] offers a culturally sanctioned space to play out the complicated manoeuvres that first celebrate then punish the 'uppity' woman" ("Of Tygers' Hearts" 197).

Shakespeare constantly departs from his sources to develop his interests in the people who potentially may give history another shape. In his first tetralogy, the playwright finds his example of a strong female ruler in Edward Hall's chronicle, *The Union of Famelies of Lancastre and York* (1548),<sup>5</sup> where Margaret's political ambition illustrates not merely her villainy but more about Henry VI's disastrous reign:

. . . the Quene his wife, was a woman of a greate witte, and yet of no greater witte, then of haute stomacke, desirous of glory, and covetous of honor, and of reason, pollicye, counsaill, and other giftes and talentes of nature belonging to a man, full and flowing. . . . This woman perceiving that her husbände did not frankely rule as he would, but did all thing by thadvise and counsaill of Humfrey duke of Gloucester, and that he passed not muche on the authoritie and governaunce of the realme,

<sup>4</sup> Philippa Berry demonstrates that, in *Richard II*, the maternal image of the queen is borrowed to illustrate the situation of Bullingbrook's return to England. The pain and sorrow of hearing the news is compared to her giving birth to a rebellious offspring: "So, Greene, thou art the midwife to my woe, / And Bolingbroke my sorrow's dismal heir" (*R2*. 2.2.62-63); see Berry, *Shakespeare's Feminine Endings* 139.

<sup>5</sup> Among the main source texts, Shakespeare keeps closely to Hall's accounts in his portrait of Margaret. In a broader range of allusions in literary culture, other literary sources of the plays which have been recognized by critics include Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (Vol. III, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1587), John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1583), Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* (1580s), and *A Mirror for Magistrates* (1559, ed. by William Baldwin).

determined with her self, to take upon her the rule and regiment, bothe of the kyng and his kyngdome. (Bullough 105-06)<sup>6</sup>

Hall also uses Henry VI's unworldliness to comment on Margaret's aggression and ambition. In Hall's accounts, Margaret rises to seek a solution to Henry VI's weak rule, almost acting as a mother to lead him. By making political decisions, Margaret is wielding kingship for Henry and treating him as her protégé. The marriage relegates King Henry VI to a secondary political role.

Shakespeare develops his "unnatural" queen, which can be recognized by her confused gender role. Hall repeatedly asserts the masculine nature of Margaret's character: a "manly woman, using to rule and not to be ruled" (Bullough 176); she "excelled all other, as well in beauty and favor, as in wit and pollicie, and was of stomack and corage, more like to a man, then a woman" (102). Hall's terms reflect the Elizabethan anxiety over the dominant "man-woman" female rule which Shakespeare engages to stage Margaret.<sup>7</sup>

Being a "manly woman" does not, however, make Margaret a manly ruler. Her masculine qualities mainly drive her to compete with her husband in order to win power. In Hall's *The Union*, Queen Margaret's political activity leads to the disintegration of monarchical authority:

This marriage semed to many, bothe infortunate, and unprofitable to the realme of England, and that for many causes . . . after this spousage the kynges frendes fell from hym, bothe in Englande and in Fraunce, the Lordes of his realme, fell in division emongest themselves, the commons rebelled against their sovereigne Lorde, and naturall Prince, wer foughten, many thousands slain, and finally, the kyng deposed, and his sonne slain, and this Quene sent home again, with as muche misery and sorowe, as she was received with pompe and triumphe. (103)

Margaret's rising queenship registers the misrule of England.<sup>8</sup> Even worse for the king's authority, Margaret is capable of mediating in "no women's matters"

<sup>6</sup> Further references to Hall's *Chronicle* selected in Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* vol. III, will be indicated parenthetically within my text. Quotations of Hall will also be cited from the electronic database, *EEBO*, when the texts are not selected in Bullough. The title of *The Union of Famelies of Lancastre and York* has been abbreviated to *The Union*.

<sup>7</sup> For the anxiety over the gender confusion of the women governors, especially Margaret's and Joan's correspondence to Elizabeth I, see Barbara Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All* 47-59; Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents* 63-69; Winfried Schleiner, "Divina Virago: Queen Elizabeth as an Amazon" 163-80. For Elizabeth I's utility and extension of the gender definitions, see Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King* 128-31; 142-47.

<sup>8</sup> In 2006, at the RSC's Complete Works Festival, Michael Boyd reworked his 2000 RSC's millennial *Henry VI*. The second part of *Henry VI* is subtitled: "England's Fall"; it is the play in which Margaret is seen to be expanding her queenship. The subtitles of the trilogy are listed as: Part I: The War against France; Part II: England's Fall; Part III: The Chaos. *Henry VI*, Dir. Michael Boyd. Perf. Chuk Iwuji. RSC, The Courtyard Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 2006. Film.

(2*H6*. 1.3.121). Her haughty position which grants her the right to speak at court recalls England's failure. Rutter's observation of Ashcroft's performance in the 1963 *The Wars of the Roses* reflects Margaret's position in England: "Every time she opened her mouth they heard an echo of their loss of empire" ("Of Tygers' Hearts" 187).<sup>9</sup>

Hall and Shakespeare adopt different attitudes for interpreting Margaret's strong character in this sexually indefinable image of a "manly woman" and her relationship to power. Shakespeare focuses on Margaret's femininity in order to reinforce the fundamentally unnatural character of her rule. He converts Hall's more neutral term, "manly woman," into abusive polemic. Male characters address Margaret as the "she-wolf of France," the "Amazonian trull," "tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide" (3*H6*. 1.4.112; 115; 138), having "stolen the breech from Lancaster" (3*H6*. 5.5.24). These descriptive phrases are bitterly written against Margaret's gender and convey a disgust for the female body politic, corresponding to Knox's argument.

Shakespeare develops Margaret's queenship mainly by increasing the monstrosity of her rule; she is made more evil than Hall's historical figure. Margaret's aggression is expanded to such a degree that not only does she plot assassinations, but is also capable of killing with her own hands, as described most notoriously in her stabbing of York in part 3. In the trilogy, two key figures are essential to Margaret's subversive queenship: her lover, the Duke of Suffolk, and her son, Prince Edward. Their presence as the queen's political partners identifies where Margaret's power can be threatened, and their deaths intensify her challenge to authority: in part 2, her frustration at Suffolk's death leads her to expand her queenship and, in part 3, upon her son's death, her curses expose the Yorkists' cruelty and crimes. However, the image of a powerful woman showing her strong feelings and spitting out bitter words befits neither a moderate political ruler nor a powerful mother.

### **"Anti-Historian" Woman: Margaret's Foreignness**

Margaret's identity is fundamentally affected by her nationality, which interacts with the plays' primary concern with Englishness. Written about England during its chaotic devolution, the trilogy is nonetheless penned to define the essential and unique identity of the English kingdom. One strategy

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<sup>9</sup> John Barton and Peter Hall, *The Wars of the Roses* (London: BBC, 1970).



exploited to confirm England's national identity is to put this identity on trial alongside its contenders for power. Hampton-Reeves and Rutter point out how the plays' exclusive Englishness is formulated by identifying it "in sharp contrast to the French, who are outrageously depicted as waspish, corrupted, devil-worshipping, self-serving fornicators" (Hampton-Reeves and Rutter 11). Throughout the plays, the audience is reminded of Margaret's strong foreign identity as the "false Frenchwoman" (3H6. 1.4.150) or the "proud Frenchwoman" (2H6. 1.3.144).

Shakespeare elicits the threat of French foreignness from the very beginning of his plays. The death of Henry V is thus bound up with the English fear of foreign subversion, embodied by the French practice of witchcraft—a power symbolising demonic darkness, the unfamiliar, and the feminine. Whereas Henry V's power represents divinity and the spiritual power of order, "A far more glorious star thy soul will make" (1H6. 1.1.55), the French are defined as contrarily fixed to the "planets of mishap" (1H6. 1.1.23).

When Margaret is introduced, her foreignness is shaped as sinister, as exemplified in 1H6, where the timing of her first appearance renders her as an overlapping image of the witch-warrior, Joan.<sup>10</sup> Shortly before Margaret's entrance, Joan is captured and her military venture is judged a mere practice of witchcraft: "Damsel of France, I think I have you fast. / Unchain your spirits now with spelling charms" (1H6. 5.4.1-2). Rutter points out that both Margaret and Joan's capability to act can only be understood as sexual transgression and their power thus justifiably branded as monstrous: "Thus, power in a woman has one single source, darkness, with two names, sexuality and witchcraft" ("Of Tygers' Hearts" 191). With this statement, destruction and death are introduced into the plays.

The fear of foreignness is also rooted in the anxiety about the foreigner's ability to survive, and potentially consume the indigenous. Margaret's power is even more threatening than the power exercised by Joan; as a legitimized queen, she can destroy the monarchical order from within the system, as inaugurating a queen over the kingdom aims to set up throughout the land a maternal figure as an heir, and thus an equivalent prosperity should be expected for England. Hodgdon points out that the introducing of Margaret signals the sinister beginning of a sequence of tragic events: ". . . [Margaret], Suffolk argues, will 'beget more conquerors' [1H6. 5.5.74]. This vision of the future not only promises to

<sup>10</sup> In Hall's description, Joan is "this wytych or manly woman". The term "manly woman" underlines Margaret's queenship as demonic; see Edward Hall, *The union of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre [and] Yorke, . . . EEBO* (1548), n. pag.; *Internet Archive* (London 1809) 157.

carry forward the transgressive gender contract initiated with Joan but to displace the 'misrule' played out in France within England" (59). The close association between Margaret and Joan foreshadows the negative transformation of Margaret's queenly qualities promoted in Suffolk's praise and, moreover, the maternal image which Margaret represents signals the return of Joan's unnatural power and the unwanted audacity of a foreign queen. Margaret's maternal role and her son Edward's legitimacy are both denied, foreshadowing the mourning of the mother figure.

Rackin points out that Margaret's role is the "destructive French interloper whose marriage to the English king threatens to 'cancel' English fame and 'blot' English names from books of memory" ("Anti-Historians" 337). It is Gloucester's political concern that sees Margaret's role as appearing to challenge the masculine tradition as the "anti-historian". In the plays, Duke Humphrey of Gloucester painfully reproaches Henry for choosing the wrong queen for England, an action which will sabotage the land's unity and peace:

Shall Henry's conquest, Bedford's vigilance,  
Your deeds of war, and all our counsel die?  
O peers of England, shameful is this league,  
Fatal this marriage, cancelling your fame,  
Blotting your names from books of memory,  
Razing the characters of your renown,  
Defacing monuments of conquered France,  
Undoing all, as all had never been! (*2H6*. 1.1.92-99)

Henry's marriage to Margaret nullifies Henry V's victory, and Gloucester associates Margaret with the dissolution of Henry V's central authority.

Margaret's foreignness fixes her into an ever-resistant position to authority. "Undoing all" signifies that possessing power no longer equates to achieving fame, glory and honour, but instead equates to challenging and questioning the hero's immortality and glorious records. Margaret's rule will further result in the power of the English court suffering endless reconstruction.

### **Margaret's Queenship and Her Counter-Power: Political Queen vs. Lords**

Margaret's contentious queenship is intensified through confrontation with the paternal figures in the plays; Kings Henry V and VI, and the Dukes of Gloucester and York are the most significant figures whom Margaret's maternal position opposes. Margaret's killings of the Duke of Gloucester in part 2 and

the Duke of York in part 3 are crucial to understanding the development of her destructive queenship. In the first part of *2H6*, Duke Humphrey, a mutual enemy, keeps the lords and queen united. In the process of removing Gloucester, who is the representative of the paternal right, Margaret's queenship becomes the other centre around which the lords can develop and anchor their power network.

Both Hall and Shakespeare attribute the failure of Henry VI's kingship to his mistake in choosing his queen. The advent of discord amongst the English nobles found in Hall's accounts is dramatized in Shakespeare as a manifestation of Margaret's problematic political queenship:

Although this marriage pleased well the kyng, and diverse of his counsaill, and especially suche as were adherents, and fautors to the erle of Suffolke, yet Humfrey duke of Gloucester, Protector of the realme, repugned and resisted as muche as in him laie, this new alliaunce and contrived matrimonie. . . . The duke was not heard, but the Erles doynge, were condescended unto and allowed. Whiche facte engendered suche a flame, that it never wente oute, till bothe the parties with many other were consumed and slain, to the great unquietnes of the kyng and his realme. (Bullough 72)

For a successful king, the bond of marriage with a foreign princess embodies and proclaims his military victory. In *Henry V*, the king's glory gained from defeating France is consummated with his marriage to the French princess Katherine, the union of king and feminine foreignness signifying for all his realm's subjects the hero's masculine power of conquest. Following the unifying matrimonial path established by Henry V, Henry VI's marriage is likewise expected to portend truce and peace for the people to recover from the damages of war; nevertheless, this marriage proves unprofitable, causing civil division at home and a loss of domination in France.

Hodgdon points out that the power relations characterised in the plays focus "not on the real power of the King, but on that of his surrogates" (58). The plays' dramatic energy comes from the ceaseless elimination of the lords in the process of finding a replacement for surrogating Henry's ruling power. In presenting the development of the "dark" image of Margaret's queenship, Shakespeare also works to locate the power detached from the king. Margaret serves as a political mother through whom the males verify their political connections and thus their right to the throne. For instance, Suffolk announces Margaret's political importance even before her entrance: "Margaret shall now be Queen and rule the King; / But I will rule both her, the King, and realm" (*1H6*. 5.7.107-08). By thus justifying his association with Margaret, Suffolk believes he is enabled to re-define his own power position. His desire to dominate Margaret is motivated by the need to prove his rightful position within the political order. This need

corresponds to the broader masculine desire which craves maternal confirmation for legitimacy of inheritance of both name and paternal right.

Despite the inconstancy of the political climate, Margaret's queenship survives, relying on her cooperation with the nobles throughout the trilogy. In *2H6*, Shakespeare shows a queen who possesses great political sensitivity and is capable of recognising the importance of her decisive and divisive position within the kingdom:

Is this the fashions in the court of England?  
Is this the government of Britain's isle,  
And this the royalty of Albion's king? (*2H6*. 1.3.47-49)

Margaret recognises the real power of the realm lies in the hands of Henry's influential uncles. She will need to reinvent and shape her role into something resembling their own to participate in the game of power they play:

Beside the haught Protector have we Beaufort  
The imperious churchman, Somerset, Buckingham,  
And grumbling York; and not the least of these  
But can do more in England than the king. (*2H6*. 1.3. 72-75)

In the wake of her keen observations, Margaret notes the king's dispersed authority and her opportunity for "doing" more than the king.

Margaret's first tangible political move is her killing of the Duke of Gloucester, Lord Protector, who represents Henry's "surrogate father." The killing of Henry's father figure allows Margaret to "mother" the king. Margaret's ambition, as Gloucester's wife Eleanor warns Henry, will "pamper thee and dandle thee like a baby" (*2H6*. 1.3.149). The death of Gloucester signals not so much a return to the rule of Henry but more Margaret's strategy for grasping power. Hodgdon observes the significance of the killing of Gloucester: "Margaret assumes an autonomous role as England's 'most master'" (62). This is Margaret's first triumph on the political battlefield. However, the murder turns Margaret into the epitome of an evil queen and manifests her problematic "headship," warning of the series of killings to come and the disintegration of the body politic. The monstrosity of Margaret's queenship, described at the end of part 2 as "England's bloody scourge" (*2H6*. 5.1.116), has cost the loyal Duke his life, and the people their loyalty to their king.

Gloucester's death dissolves Margaret's collaboration with Suffolk; he does not enjoy for long his triumph and power before the citizens, instigated by Warwick and other lords, rebel against him. The play's solution for calming the people's revolt and healing the kingdom's loss is to make the queen mourn. It is the beginning of the end to Margaret's rightful queenship.

## Mourning and Queenship

Suffolk plays a crucial role in securing Margaret's queenship in the English court. Hall refers to Suffolk in *The Union*<sup>11</sup> as "the Quenes dearlynge William Duke of Suffolke" who is "entierly loued" by the Queen. Shakespeare expands this hint of affection into a love affair between Margaret and Suffolk in parts 1 and 2. Suffolk persuades Henry VI to accept the dowerless foreign maid as his queen, and then cooperates with Margaret in her conspiracy to murder the Duke of Gloucester which facilitates gaining for the queen her power.

In *2H6*. 4.2, Suffolk is murdered, and then beheaded at sea by the ship's captain and crew.<sup>12</sup> His death does not elicit peace from the commoners who have earlier demanded his death in revenge. In 4.4, Margaret is seen holding and lamenting over Suffolk's severed head, while Henry VI is presented discussing the ongoing Jack Cade rebellion with other lords. If Suffolk's death is not tragic, Margaret's mourning reveals not merely her emotional disturbance, but serves as indication of her changing political position in which she demonstrates her strength in sustaining her queenship. The presence of Suffolk's head serves as a visual reminder of the violated and dissected body politic. The stage tableau of Margaret's mourning at the head also places the queen as an object inviting spectators to contemplate the future of rebellion and chaos in the land.

Grief prompts Margaret not only to speak, but also to take action in order to avenge her loss. In this scene, Margaret's entrance as she gazes upon Suffolk's severed head is paralleled by Henry's reading of the rebels' petition. While Henry retreats into words, Margaret favours military action.

KING HENRY. How now, madam?

Still lamenting and mourning for Suffolk's death?

I fear me, love, if that I had been dead,

Thou wouldest not have mourned so much for me.

QUEEN MARGARET.

No, my love, I should not mourn, but die for thee. (*2H6*. 4.4.19-24)

<sup>11</sup> Hall, *The union*, EEBO, n. pag.; *Internet Archive* 218.

<sup>12</sup> Hall explains Suffolk's death as a divine punishment. His death signals that the war in court between the lords has stirred up civil tumult and disorder: "This ende had William de la pole, first duke of Suffolk, as men judge by Gods punyishment: for above all things he was noted to be the very organ, engine, and diviser of the destruccion of Humfrey the good duke of Gloucester, and so the bloude of the Innocente man was with his dolorous death, recompensed and punished. But the death of this froward person, and ungracious patron, brought not the Realme quyete, nor delivered it from all inward grudge, and intestine division, which to all Realmes is more pestiferous and noisome, then outward warre" (Bullough 112-13).

Throughout the trilogy, Margaret's role is in continuous transformation. To interpret Hall's description that Margaret is a "manly woman," Shakespeare first places Margaret in the woman's position: a supporter of her husband the king and a mistress of her lover. At the death of her lover, Shakespeare initially presents Margaret in the conventional feminine image of a weeping and grieving woman; however, with the death of Suffolk, Margaret becomes vengeful and domineering in order to survive the power-lusting lords.

Deprived of her feminine sorrow and love affair, Margaret is thus prepared to develop her "manly" traits, adopting the masculine militarist cruelty and violence her king failed to embody during his time of war. As Margaret says, "I should not mourn, but die for thee" (*2H6*. 4.4.23); she is not afraid of death and is prepared to take on the kingly role of action: the ability to provoke and strike in war. This ability is esteemed a manly achievement; however, for a woman to "stomach" military conquest reverses the masculine glory of Henry V and undermines the Lancastrian order. The power Margaret may effectively command does not extend to her taking the war abroad, as it would for a king. The foreign war once fought between the kingdoms of England and France has internalized and become a war among the English nobility within their own country and under the bewildered gaze of England's citizenry.

### Maternity and Queenship

Margaret's political activity justifies itself in the context of a domestic environment in which a female head of the body politic is traditionally impossible. When King Henry disinherits their son by consenting to pass his throne to the Yorkists after his death, Margaret is metamorphosed into a warrior queen by the urgency of delivering her son from an unnatural father and the house of York:

But thou prefer'st thy life before thine honour.  
 And seeing thou dost, I here divorce myself  
 Both from thy table, Henry, and thy bed,  
 Until that act of parliament be repealed  
 Whereby my son is disinherited. (*3H6*. 1.1.247-51)

Penny Downie, writing on her experience of playing Margaret, marks the significance of this passage:

It is a decisive moment, for whatever has been the nature of this marriage, it has somehow survived to this point, and here she ends it. I chose to take the word "divorce" in its fullest and most absolute sense, severing the ties between two people. She stands up and says, in open court, that I, the Queen of England, here divorce

you, the King of England. She begins a second career, in a sense she reinvents herself. She becomes a warrior. (Downie 129)

Lacking a reliable and responsible husband, Margaret now places herself in the role of the widow queen who is empowered to practice her own political ambition out of necessity to secure for both her son and herself their imperilled political rights.

Margaret becomes the only queen in Shakespeare's history to occupy the central ruling position. Her motherhood represents a natural authority to safeguard the perpetuation of the Lancastrian family bloodline. However, engaging in warfare to protect her son's birthright, though presented as an act of "self-defense," perversely renders her action as queen a destructive act of personal revenge rather than an act heroically undertaken for the preservation and protection of the peace and unity of the kingdom.<sup>13</sup> This becomes evident when Shakespeare deals with York's death scene, increasing the horror of Margaret's actions by portraying York as a pitiful and suffering father. Shakespeare's critique of Margaret's dual role as manly queen and mother associates her motherhood with death-generating war.

Killing the enemy on the field of battle is considered a heroic triumph within the masculine sphere of military service; Margaret's revenge killing of York, however, is viewed as an atrocity. In Hall's accounts, York cannot break through the enemy encirclement during the battle of Wakefield, and he dies on the battlefield a heroic warrior: "he was environed on every side, like a fische in a net, or a deere in a buckestall: so that he manfully fightyng, was within halfe an houre slain and ded, and his whole army discomfited" (Bullough 177). Shakespeare here departs from his source by making Margaret herself participate in the action of killing York. In the play, Margaret's merciless mocking of her victims is also preparation for her later role as court prophetess to wicked king Richard III. Her cruelty is most notoriously shown when she taunts York with a handkerchief stained with the blood of his dead son.<sup>14</sup> Margaret celebrates the father's misery when she commands York to "Stamp, rave, and fret," which will cheer her up, "that I may sing and dance" (3H6. 1.4.92). Rutter argues that the theatrical force of the scene creates such an impact that when Robert Greene

<sup>13</sup> Henry's destruction of his son's claim to the throne turns Margaret's maternal concern from the patriarchal succession to conducting the violent "vendetta"; see Coppélia Kahn, *Man's Estate* 56-62; Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All* 69-73; C.L. Barber and Richard P. Wheeler, *The Whole Journey: Shakespeare's Power of Development* 105-06.

<sup>14</sup> Downie suggests that the killing of Rutland symbolises Margaret's killing of her husband, Henry, as Rutland corresponds to Henry's character by being "the scholar, the innocent, the good, the junior version of Henry VI, and that's now reduced to the bloody handkerchief" (Downie 131).

attacks Shakespeare's career, he recalls this scene and "makes Margaret Shakespeare in his embittered citation, 'Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hide'" ("Of Tygers' Hearts" 183-85). As Rutter conceives it, the monstrosity of femininity humiliates the rising new playwright through his usurped position within the intellectual world: "Greene's metaphors simultaneously degrade Shakespeare to a woman and cast him as an aspiring 'upstart,' a 'wannabe' university man" ("Of Tygers' Hearts" 185); in light of Rutter's argument, Margaret is the "wannabe king." Margaret's killing of York, which seemingly completes Joan's unfinished battle with him, condemns her to Joan's station as an evil mother whose child should be burnt within her womb.

Upon his capture, York is allowed to curse at length without interruption as Margaret falls silent to listen to the bereaved father's accusation. York's loquacious lament conventionally belongs to the persona of the lamenting woman:

That face of his the hungry cannibals  
 Would not have touched, would not have stained with blood:  
 But you are more inhuman, more inexorable,  
 O, ten times more than tigers of Hyrcania.  
 See, ruthless Queen, a hapless father's tears (*3H6*. 1.4.153-57).

By fixing Margaret as inhuman and debased queen and York as weeping and dying domestic father, Shakespeare moves his off-stage audience to an empathetic position to feel the words of the scene. For the scene's on-stage audience, Northumberland's reaction further commands their sympathy: "Had he been slaughter-man to all my kin, / I should not, for my life, but weep with him, / To see how inly sorrow gripes his soul" (*3H6*. 1.4.170-72). Both Margaret and York vie to take over Henry's authority; Shakespeare, however, ensures that York's paternal voice is emotional and persuasive enough to guide his audience to recognise the true nature of Margaret's queenship.

### The Mourning Mother

In the plays, theatrical attention is focused on Margaret's forceful queenship in order to examine how her powerful motherhood ultimately violates the legitimacy of her son. But Shakespeare does not go so far as to advance the assumption found in Hall's *The Union* that Prince Edward may be the bastard son of Margaret's adultery:

. . . ye quene deliuered at Westmynster of a fayre sonne, which was Christened & named Edward, and after grew to a goodely & perfight man, as after you shall heare: whose mother susteyned not a litle slaunder and obloquye of the commō people,



saiyng that the kyng was not able to get a chyld, and that this was not his sonne,  
with many slaunderous woordes, to the quenes dishonor.<sup>15</sup>

Although Hall does not definitively assert Edward's illegitimacy, "which here nede not to be rehersed," he does show that the queen's adultery leads to broad speculation regarding legitimacy, the destabilizing consequence of which worsens the perceived discontinuity of King Henry VI's authority. Shakespeare adopts a different approach in his portrayal of Margaret's motherhood, wherein she is possessed of an unquestionable maternal right to fight against York's paternalistic authority on behalf of her son. Even though she is adulterous and usurping, her legitimate son provides hope for preserving Henry V's masculine tradition, bridging the political breach and repairing the discord induced by the actions of his own parents.

The manifestation of Margaret's counter-authority within the setting of public theater purposes to provide assurance that the reign of the "anti-historians" is only temporary, the tragic pleasure of the play catalyzing psychological stability and cure within the audience through the plays' restoration of proper order to the realm. Doomed by his maternal origin, Richard taunts Edward: "Whoever got thee, there thy mother stands; / For, well I wot, thou hast thy mother's tongue" (3H6. 2.2.133-34). The only path to preserving Henry V's glorious tradition is to sacrifice the prince of England to a hero's death as worthy and fearless warrior. Before entering the battlefield at Tewkesbury, young prince Edward is praised for his courage in the evocation of Henry V's name:

OXFORD. Women and children of so high a courage,  
And warriors faint! Why, 'twere perpetual shame!  
O brave young Prince, thy famous grandfather  
Doth live again in thee! Long mayst thou live  
To bear his image and renew his glories! (3H6. 5.4.50-54)

The premature death of Edward heightens Henry V's fame, his legendary and memorable reign endowed with ever greater glory: indeed, Edward is also "too famous to live long" (1H6. 1.1.6), yet such status confers and confirms his very immortality. In Hall's accounts, Edward is given final words which secure for posterity the nature of his death in guarding the paternal system and his family name: "To recouer my fathers kingdome & enheritage, from his father and grandfather to him, and from him after him to me lineally diuoluted [descended]" (Bullough 206).

For the son to prove himself rightful prince he must offer his life on the altar of paternal tradition. Edward wins his war over the sons of York and sets

<sup>15</sup> Hall, *The unyon, EEBO*, n. pag.; *Internet Archive* 230.

aright his own family's masculine history; his death frees him and his lineage from enslavement to his mother's notorious betrayal: "I know my duty; you are all undutiful. . . / I am your better, traitors as ye are, / And thou usurp'st my father's right and mine" (3H6. 5.5.33; 36-37). Moreover, the death of Edward incriminates as traitorous murderers York's three sons, guilty of the same crime of patricide as Margaret. York's eldest son, suddenly aware of the heinousness of their action, prevents Richard from killing Margaret: "Hold, Richard, hold; for we have done too much" (3H6. 5.5.42).

Although the prince is dead, the continuity of the kingship is retained unharmed. Earlier, and before the death of Edward, Shakespeare reveals the consolation for loss of the heir to King Henry's throne. Prior to Edward's death scene, the future King Henry VII is introduced into the plays, receiving the king's blessing:

SOMERSET. My liege, it is young Henry, Earl of Richmond.  
 KING HENRY. Come hither, England's hope.  
           [King Henry] *lays his hand on [Richmond's] head*  
                                                           If secret powers  
           Suggest but truth to my divining thoughts,  
           This pretty lad will prove our country's bliss.  
                                                           (3H6. 4.7.67-70)

Henry's election of an heir to the kingdom provides a satisfactory solution to the issue of succession. Adopted by King Henry as heir, Richmond is freed from his association with the "accursed womb"; the absence of maternal interference promises that Henry VII's realm will remain safe both from political disorder and war.

On her final appearance, Margaret does not constrain her grief; her mourning motivates her need to cry out: "And I will speak that so my heart may burst" (3H6. 5.5.60). By the end of the trilogy, Margaret now speaks exclusively of her maternal feelings instead of her political ambition. This change in tone shows that her political life has come full circle. She is again a captive, as she was at her first appearance in part 1. Having manipulated the power at court, Margaret has secured her queenship through her birth of a son: conversely, the loss of her son is crucial to her loss of political position in England. As part 3 we clearly see the different stances. Henry VI can only lament war from a molehill (3H6. 2.5). The Duke of York shames Margaret with his curses (3H6. 1.4). Margaret's words are judged to serve only as "weapon of the powerless"<sup>16</sup> in her

<sup>16</sup> A variation derives from James C Scott's book, entitled: *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*.

attacks upon her enemies (3H6. 5.5). Margaret defends her rightful political position by condemning the Yorkists' crime of the murder of the innocents, "untimely cropped" (3H6. 5.5.62). Her mourning turns into vengeful prophecy when she predicts that her tragedy, the tale of a defeated political leader whose heir is murdered, will reoccur in the endless power game that is English history.

Shakespeare does not retire Margaret from the stage after her son's death, but instead allows her to carry forward in *Richard III* to explore further Margaret's relationship to established authority. The unanswered question raised by Gloucester (later Richard III) when he is prevented by Edward from killing Margaret is: "Why should she live to fill the world with words?" (3H6. 5.5.43). Margaret's tragic experience communicates with repeating historical experience: the ambitious pitfalls of seeking rulers whose authority is sustained only by power legitimizing a questionable authoritative legitimacy. Whichever dynasty attempts the glorification of their paternal historical bloodline of familial continuity, Margaret's existence is a living curse, recalling for each of them the imperfect legitimacy of the House of York, and the shame of the House of Lancaster for having produced a weak and incapable heir.

When Shakespeare writes of the demise of the Lancastrian dynasty, he issues a literary writ against Margaret's motherhood. Shakespeare's King Henry VI, representative of English patriarchal authority, twice denies his own son in the plays. Shakespeare first has him disinherit his son from his birthright, and then pass his authority to the Yorkists, only to introduce Henry VII as England's rightful heir. Both paternity and history establish legitimacy and continuity. When the maternal roles are positioned to be anti-historians, the ascendancy of motherhood allows for only death and discontinuity; matrilineal ambitions lead inevitably to the abyss, illegitimacy, and a condemned kingdom. Margaret's curse of her successor, Queen Elizabeth, in *Richard III* is terrifyingly memorable: "Die neither mother, wife, nor England's queen" (*R3*. 1.3.207); thus she forever remains the living embodiment and object of self-condemnation.

Margaret's maternal mourning of the present links past with future. The mothers portrayed in Shakespeare's histories always receive the corpses of their once living sons, and they will always remain forever in mourning. Shakespeare's plays are not limited to celebrating the order and legitimacy of the history of England, nor in imposing fear of subversion and dissent. Shakespeare values the voices of the "anti-historians." This is the resolute energy of Shakespearean political theatre.

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## 論莎劇《亨利六世》 瑪格萊特后權彰顯之母職與哀悼

### 摘要

在《亨利六世》(Henry VI trilogy) 三部劇中，莎翁描繪亨利五世英年早逝後，英國淪於哀悼之國境，以警示君權統治危機與國家主權變動更迭之問題。本文探討莎劇重塑歷史之改編觀點及其劇中對女性權力之評斷，主要論證闡述劇中架構女性權威(female authority)，成為重新檢視英國光榮歷史之對等權力。亨利六世之后瑪格萊特(Queen Margaret)為橫跨《亨利六世》至《理查三世》等四部莎劇之重要角色，莎翁融合異國身分與男子氣概，突顯其身分認同之複雜性。在權力關係上，更是結合母職與后權，來探討女性權威之運作與限制。在長篇劇情推演中，莎翁同時演現瑪格萊特后權發展與歷史政治結構轉變之關聯。

本文首先由典據文本記載觀點，爬梳莎翁形塑瑪格萊特后權之文化脈絡，並比對莎劇之沿襲與評判。論述接續探討后權與男性權力結構之聯結，並從而觀察母職與后權結合所造成其子繼承權之變異。文章最後剖析，此劇對父系君權正統來源想像之架構，與其導致瑪格萊特於執行后權與保有母職美德之間，所造成雙重角色落失之現象。無論是演繹國家權力正統性，或是書寫歷史政治中之顛覆力量，莎劇在重建歷史情節之過程中，重新打造女性反歷史之發聲與定位。而劇作家在其商業劇場中，演現對當代性別政治之反思，成就了瑪格萊特后權之獨特藝術性。

**關鍵字：**莎士比亞，《亨利六世》，哀悼，母職，后權