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In Defense of Shakespeare's Queen Margaret of Anjou

Sarah E. Pagliaccio

A Thesis in the Field of English Literature

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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Abstract

Margaret of Anjou, who appears in the four history plays known as the first tetralogy (*1-3 Henry VI* and *Richard III)*, is unique among William Shakespeare's characters. Almost the entirety of her life is played out on stage, from her real-life engagement to King Henry VI of England at the age of fourteen to her fictionalized self-banishment to France around age forty-five. Within this singular character, Margaret fulfills the roles of daughter, bride, wife, mother, lover, queen, avenging warrior, and grieving widow—a greater range than any other character in Shakespeare's work, man or woman.

This thesis will argue that Shakespeare intended Margaret to be a central character in the first tetralogy. She is pivotal to the action, and powerful in her own right. She has influence over nearly every other character within this history cycle. In Margaret, Shakespeare creates a woman who is the strongest female counterpoint to the destructive men of the *Henry VI* plays. She is direct and decisive in both words and deeds while engaging in political intrigues; waging wars; and protecting her husband, son, and the crown from traitors. She pays a price for her actions equal to that of the men, ultimately losing the war, the crown, her husband, and her only child, while battling stereotypes of a woman's role. This sexism saves her life in *3 Henry VI*; because she is a woman, she is not executed by her enemies. Instead Shakespeare's Margaret challenges all notions of gender, defies the banishment imposed by her enemies, and brings to an end Richard III's reign of terror. Shakespeare rescues her from exile and anachronistically places her in *Richard III* so she can serve as the only character—man or woman—who is a match for

Richard. In a gesture that might be seen as one of respect, at the end of the tetralogy, Shakespeare allows Margaret to choose her own anachronistic and unhistorical end.

Acknowledgements

Without the mentorship and support of Joyce Van Dyke, this thesis would not have been possible. Her devotion to me and to Margaret helped me to focus and persevere through a challenging chapter of my personal and academic life. I cannot thank her enough for the patience and encouragement she provided throughout this process.

A Note on the Texts, the Plays, and Their Author

The four plays that are referred to as the first tetralogy include the histories *1 Henry VI*, *2 Henry VI*, *3 Henry VI*, and the historical-tragedy of *Richard III*. Line and page references to these four plays are from the following Oxford World's Classics editions of the plays.

1. Shakespeare, William. *Henry VI, Part One*. Ed. Michael Taylor. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003. Print.

2. Shakespeare, William. *Henry VI. Part Two*. Ed. Roger Warren. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. Print.

3. Shakespeare, William. *Henry VI, Part Three*. Ed. Randall Martin. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. Print.

4. Shakespeare, William. *The Tragedy of King Richard III*. Ed. John Jowett. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. Print.

All parenthetical references below will use the following shorthand for these Oxford editions of the plays: *1H6*, *2H6*, *3H6*, *R3*.

All other line references to Shakespeare's plays are taken from Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor's *William Shakespeare, The Complete Works*, Second Edition by Oxford University Press (2005).

1 Henry VI first appeared in the 1623 Folio edition of Shakespeare's works. As the earliest copy of the play, the Folio text was the basis for editor Michael Taylor's Oxford edition of *1 Henry VI* (*1H6* 79). Part 2 was originally titled *The First Part of the Contention betwixt the two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster* in the Quarto of 1594.

Editor Roger Warren has based his Oxford edition on the First Folio text of the play, using the Quarto "for stage directions, and to correct obvious errors" (*2H6* 101). The third part of *Henry VI* was titled *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York* in the Octavo of 1595. However, editor Randall Martin chose the Folio text for his Oxford edition "in all but a few cases of error, omission, or indispensable clarification" which he rectifies with the Octavo text (*3H6* 133). The Oxford critical edition of the *Tragedy of King Richard III*, edited by John Jowett, is based on the Quarto of 1597 with minor corrections taken from the Folio.

For more information, please refer to the Editorial Procedures chapters of these Oxford Shakespeare editions.

It is important to note that John Heminges and Henry Condell, editors of the First Folio, reprinted these four plays in their logical sequence, rather than the order in which they were written. Shakespeare wrote *1 Henry VI* after Parts 2 and 3 as a sort of prequel. Contemporary audiences would have been familiar with the history acted in Parts 2 and 3 because they were performed before Part 1. This thesis also will discuss the plays in their historical chronology rather than the order in which they were written. This becomes relevant in later discussions of the introduction of Margaret in *1 Henry VI*.

This thesis will avoid any debate regarding the authorship controversy surrounding the first tetralogy and instead will assume that because Shakespeare undoubtedly had a hand in each of the *Henry VI* plays, he is an author and possibly the exclusive author of each play discussed, including the controversial *1 Henry VI*.[1]

[1] Geoffrey Bullough discusses alternative authors and concludes Shakespeare was, at worst, the primary author of *1 Henry VI* in his 1960 work *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (see pages 31-36). Edward Burns provides neutral details of the scholarship on the authorship controversy in his introduction to the Arden edition of *1 Henry VI* (see pages 73-90). Marjorie Garber summarizes the authorship debate

Geoffrey Bullough simply states, "We cannot be sure that Shakespeare did not write all of *1 Henry VI*" (34). Bullough offers several scenes, including the wooing of Margaret by Suffolk, as proof of Shakespeare's authorship of the play because of "their general resemblance to other scenes in his later work" (35). Furthermore, Bullough believed Heminges and Condell would not have included *1 Henry VI* in the First Folio had Shakespeare not authored it (34). Bullough and others cite Shakespeare's contemporaries, Thomas Nashe and Robert Greene, because they left works of their own attributing authorship of the *Henry VI* plays to Shakespeare.[2] In Robert Greene's case, he left a harsh criticism titled *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit* dated September 20, 1592. Greene's essay dates the plays and gives Shakespeare authorial credit in his paraphrase of York's censure of Margaret in *3 Henry VI*, "for there is an vpstart Crow...that with his Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you: and...is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a country."[3]

This thesis acknowledges that there is a controversy surrounding authorship of *1 Henry VI*, and nonetheless refers to Shakespeare as the author of all four plays in the tetralogy.

Finally, all line references from the sixteenth and seventeenth-century sources that Shakespeare relied upon for his histories will be reproduced with spelling and punctuation that reflects twenty-first century usages for ease of reading. These references will appear in quotations and will be cited appropriately. For instance, Edward Hall's *The*

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and concludes that Shakespeare was only a collaborator in *1 Henry VI*; and she provides an analysis of *1 Henry VI* for general readers in her volume titled *Shakespeare After All* (see pages 89-99).

[2] Most scholars do not discuss *I Henry VI* without at least a passing reference to Nashe and Greene, including Geoffrey Bullough, Roger Warren (editor of The Oxford Shakespeare edition of *2 Henry VI*), and Edward Burns (editor of the Arden Shakespeare edition of *1 Henry VI*) among others.

[3] York calls Margaret, "O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide" (*3H6* 1.4.137).

Union of Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke will be reproduced from Geoffrey Bullough's *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* and therefore attributed to Bullough. Many references to Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* will be attributed to Allardyce and Josephine Nicoll's *Holinshed's Chronicle As Used In Shakespeare's Plays.* Some references will be reproduced from the original Holinshed accessed in digital format from the Google Books library. These references will be attributed to Holinshed.

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Chapter I

Introduction

When Margaret of Anjou is considered against the canon of Shakespeare's female characters, she is occasionally admired, but more often reduced to a *femme fatale* figure or dismissed as an example of a cruel woman who is one-dimensional and dramatically insignificant to the action of the plays in which she appears. Several influential critics and scholars have rejected the notion that Margaret is consequential to the first tetralogy. Examples include Stephen Greenblatt who makes much of her "sadistic pleasure" and "savage cruelty" as she triumphs over her enemy, Richard of York in *3 Henry VI*, and then never mentions her again in *Will in the World* (196). According to Phyllis Rackin, "Margaret curses, and she is a powerful dramatic presence, but she has no real part in the plot" of *Richard III* (*Stages* 56). Martha Kurtz calls her "the half-mad harridan who haunts the halls of power in *Richard III*" (270). Marilyn French lumps Margaret in the same category as Joan of Arc and claims both women are more "shrewish, coarse, unpolished" and less dignified than their malicious descendants Regan, Goneril, and Lady Macbeth (62). Katherine Eggert also compares Margaret to Joan, claiming Margaret's "effect never becomes quite as incantatory as Joan La Pucelle's" thereby deeming her less worthy of discussion than Richard III in her chapter "Feminine Authority in Shakespeare's History Plays" (69). Thomas McNeal calls her "cruel" and a "hussy" in the scene from *1 Henry VI* in which the Earl of Suffolk takes her prisoner (3).

Gwyn Williams reduces her to a cautionary tale: Shakespeare's first tragic romantic figure and pawn of her lover, the Duke of Suffolk. Angela Pitt calls her "the most relentlessly sustained symbol in Shakespeare of all that is unnatural"; to Pitt she is vile, ruthless, and "totally evil" (151, 153). Dympna Callaghan's *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare* is meant to show "how the plays may reflect real women... [and how they] help produce and reproduce ideas about women that then shape, perpetuate, or even disturb prevailing conditions of femininity" (xii). However, none of Callaghan's feminist contributors considers Margaret from this perspective. Janet Adelman leaves Margaret (and the other women of the histories) out of her book-length discussion of mothers in Shakespeare. Warren Cherniak calls her "an amoral, destructive force throughout Parts 2 and 3" of *Henry VI* but does grant her the title of "principal force in opposition to Richard" *in Richard III* (33, 61). Few scholars see the positive side of her power, and those who do, like Madonne M. Miner and Irene Dash, view Margaret's power through Richard III's patriarchal lens of male property and possession.

Even actors, directors, and playwrights who might be expected to take a more compassionate and dramatically complex view of Margaret frequently minimize her part or excise her completely from these plays, a common practice in productions of *Richard III*. Bill Alexander, former resident director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, declares, "There would perhaps be an argument for cutting large chunks, or indeed all, of the Queen Margaret scenes," but her removal changes the "psychological conflict" inherent in the play (RSC *R3* 197). And yet it was Bill Alexander's critically acclaimed production of *Richard III* that called for large cuts in Margaret's part.

The criticisms above fly in the face of the Margaret a reader discovers within the text of the plays. Shakespeare created a woman stronger than the men around her. Margaret perseveres through political wrangling, military battles, and extreme personal losses. Shakespeare's Margaret defies an order of banishment to fulfill her role as avenger of wrongs against her family and adopted country.

However, she is dismissed, overlooked, and underestimated by her male peers in the plays. That notable critics seem to follow suit indicates that these characters and the academics who study them either consciously or unconsciously absorb Richard's and his male peers' entirely negative views of Margaret. That her part is reduced and excised by producers and directors seems to indicate a lack of understanding of Shakespeare's intentions for Margaret. Shakespeare gave Margaret a part as large and sometimes larger than the men around her. If one counts her lines and speeches, her character clearly is not filling an insignificant role.[4] Kurtz explains, "In the *Henry VI* plays Margaret can be seen as a different kind of critique of the values of the masculine world of war: what is horrifying in men is more vividly horrifying in her because it is unexpected" (271). Her

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[4] Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, editors of the Royal Shakespeare Company editions of Shakespeare's plays, provide us with handy references to line numbers, speeches, and percentages of the plays spoken by each of the major characters in their "Key Facts" chapters at the beginnings of each text. A scan of these facts demonstrates that few of the women in the histories can compete with Margaret for number of lines spoken. She speaks 10% of the lines in *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI.* In *2 Henry VI,* she speaks the same percentage of lines as King Henry VI, the Duke of Gloucester, and the Duke of Suffolk. Only the Duke of York speaks a higher percentage at 12% but Margaret has more speeches and appears in the same number of scenes. In comparison to the other women of the histories only Joan from *1 Henry VI* (9%), Constance from *King John* (10%), and Katherine from *Henry VIII* (12%) come close to Margaret in number of lines spoken in a single play. If the Open Source Shakespeare website is to be trusted, Margaret ranks number seventeen of 1,224 characters based on number of speeches (169) for a single character across the plays. Only Cleopatra and Rosalind rank higher at nine and ten out of 1,224 with 204 and 201 speeches, respectively. The Open Source Shakespeare website's line numbering is based on the 1867 American printing of the *Globe Shakespeare* and so likely varies from the Bate and Rasmussen RSC editions, however, these numbers should provide a good relative sense of the scope of Margaret's role within and across the plays. *As You Like It* appeared in Shakespeare's middle years of writing, and *Antony and Cleopatra* was written near the end of his career in 1606-07, making Margaret Shakespeare's first large-scale female part until Rosalind walked onto the stage in 1599.

presence and cruelty are intentional to demonstrate the horrors of war on an intentionally shocking scale. Shakespeare intended Margaret to challenge our notions of gender in positions of power, at times of war abroad and at home, and what it means to be a strong woman ruler.

In this thesis, actors' notes are included to provide a well-rounded perspective from those who have walked in Margaret's shoes, embraced her faults, and sympathized with the difficult choices she faced. Their reflections will be contrasted with a brief history of productions of *Richard III* demonstrating when and how Margaret is erased from the play. A close reading of the plays, supported by comments from empathetic actors and directors will show that Shakespeare created Margaret as an exemplar of strength.

Chapter II

A Brief History of Margaret of Anjou

Margaret of Anjou was born Marguerite in 1430 to René of Anjou and Isabelle of Lorraine. Although never truly wealthy, her father was rich in titles over his lifetime, including Count of Piedmont, Duke of Bar, Duke of Lorraine, Duke of Anjou, Count of Provence, King of Naples, titular King of Jerusalem and Aragon including Sicily, Majorca, and Corsica. Through Margaret's noble blood and family connections (her father's sister Marie became wife to Charles VII and Queen of France) the fourteen-year old princess was given in marriage on April 23, 1445 to twenty-two-year old King Henry VI of England in an attempt to forge a peace between England and France, bitterly engaged in the Hundred Years War. King Henry and Queen Margaret ruled England from 1445 to 1461 and again from 1470 to 1471 during the most contentious years of the English Wars of the Roses. Eight years into their marriage, Margaret and Henry finally welcomed into the world their only son, Prince Edward, who later died at Tewkesbury, the battle in which the Yorkist faction took over rule of England. During her time in England, Margaret became the *de facto* head of the family and head of the Lancastrian army in Henry's name, until her son was lost in battle and her husband died under questionable circumstances in the Tower of London. With "nowhere to go, and no one left to fight for" Margaret was taken prisoner and later banished to France where she died in poverty in 1482 (Castor 409).

So little is known of Margaret of Anjou's early childhood that Helen E. Maurer's biography of Margaret begins with her marriage to King Henry VI of England in 1445.

Helen Castor fills the gaps prior to her arrival in England with details of Margaret's family life and the lessons learned under the supervision of her mother, Isabelle of Lorraine, and her "formidable grandmother," Yolanda of Aragon (330). Margaret's mother and grandmother managed the provinces under her father's control while René attempted to claim Lorraine in the name of his wife. Castor tells us, "By the time René eventually returned home [from captivity] in 1442, twelve-year-old Margaret had learned an extended lesson in how capable a woman could be when called upon to wield authority for an absent husband or son. She also discovered that neither power nor wealth could be taken for granted. Rights, it seemed, had to be fought for, possession asserted rather than assured" (330). Salic Law expressly forbade French noblewomen from inheriting their fathers' or husbands' lands or "from either taking or transmitting rights to the crown" to their sons (Castor 331). However, French tradition allowed them to act on behalf of their men in times of need such as those described above. Similarly, across the English Channel, Dan Jones cites England's examples: "Queen Isabella had ruled as regent for Edward III between 1327 and 1330, and before her Eleanor of Aquitaine had been granted extensive powers of governance during the reigns of her husband Henry II and her son Richard the Lionheart" (135).

Margaret had ample opportunity to act as a helpmeet to her new English husband, but unfortunately her help was unwelcome. King Henry's uncles and cousins were accustomed to exercising power from the early days of Henry's reign when he ascended the throne as an infant. Although Henry was much in need of earthly wisdom and guidance, the peers of the realm kept the King under tight control—a fact that rankled Margaret and created factional rifts between her and her husband's counselors. Her

inability to be seen as a rightful administrator is a fact which Shakespeare's Margaret decries in *2 Henry VI* when she says,

> My lord of Suffolk, say, is this the guise,
> 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* 1.3.43-6)

Had they granted her even a semblance of control as queen, the wars between her and Henry's cousins might have been avoided. Ultimately the rifts between Margaret and the Dukes of Gloucester and York were unbridgeable and led to the deaths of thousands, including her own husband and son.

Those not versed in medieval English history yet familiar with Shakespeare's Margaret often see the Bard's rendering of her as fact rather than the mixture of fact and fiction that it is. In Maurer's words, Shakespeare's "portrayal of Margaret, in the rough dimensions of her character, has proven to be remarkably resilient" (1). Maurer claims that "no one nowadays reads Shakespeare for history" and yet a surprising number of historians and non-historians alike are influenced by Shakespeare (1). Maurer herself is not immune, claiming that "Margaret's queenship lends itself to such an assessment"; Shakespeare's depiction of Margaret is that of "a vengeful and a violent woman" and a "bitch" (1). Antonia Fraser too is guilty of relying on Shakespeare's Margaret. In her *Warrior Women*, Fraser's two comments about Margaret concern the theatrical Margaret, not the historical Margaret. Fraser mentions how "Shakespeare could create in *Henry VI* the savage character of Margaret of Anjou" in her discussion of Queen Elizabeth I (215). And later, in her discussion of Spenser's fictitious heroine Britomart, she notes "The

Amazons are cruel (like Queen Margaret of Anjou)" because they do not "obey the orders and laws of men" (219).

Neither of these mentions is a well-rounded account of a warrior queen equal to the others cataloged in Fraser's work, including Mathilda, Eleanor, Isabella, Cleopatra, and so many others. This is disappointing because Fraser describes how "many women leaders have found in the crucible of war – if successfully survived – the fiery process which has guaranteed them passage into the realms of honorary men" (10). Fraser deliberately overlooks the references to Margaret in the chronicles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that refer to her "manly" attributes. Margaret's absence from Fraser's discussion is even more poignant when we read Fraser's defense of Cleopatra, another of Shakespeare's warrior women. Fraser says, "a close inspection of Cleopatra's career reveals far more concentration on power politics and far less self-indulgent dalliance than wistful popular imagination cares to admit" (36). This statement could be applied equally to Margaret.

Twentieth and twenty-first century accountings of Margaret vary based on the perspectives of the historians. However, many are remarkably close to the sixteenth and seventeenth century chronicles, the same chronicles upon which Shakespeare relied as sources for his plays. Dan Jones recounts everything from "the complete failure of Margaret's arrival in England to bring about the glorious peace that the marriage had seemed to promise" to the way Margaret moved "against her enemies with indignation and spite" in her battles to save the crown for her husband and son (93, 165). In Eric R. Delderfield's slim volume *Kings and Queens of England and Great Britain*, Margaret is summed up thus: "In 1459 a Lancastrian revival, directed by the Queen, Margaret of

Anjou, who was as vigorous as her husband was weak, saw the flight of York" (57). In *The Plantagenets*, John Harvey provides a rich description of Margaret.

> "Unfortunately Margaret did not resemble her father, but was fiery and tempestuous, in every respect unlike her husband, and unsuited to his meek and forgiving temperament…There is some rather grim comedy in the fact that while Henry's presence at a battle almost invariably spelt defeat, his wife was usually successful, until her last and fatal overthrow at Tewkesbury. Had it not been for his marriage to Margaret…the disaster of the Wars of the Roses could have been averted. But where Henry would go to meet his adversary, Margaret sprang to arms and never admitted a thought of compromise. To her fierce determination to dominate she sacrificed the lives of her husband and her beloved son and her own chances of success. Seldom has a woman shown such undaunted courage under repeated misfortunes, seldom has there been a clearer demonstration that courage by itself can be so misplaced as to be a dreadful liability" (Harvey 123).

Harvey continues, "Poor Margaret, though a good general, was no woman of affairs" (124). Castor agrees with this assessment of Margaret's political skills. Ultimately, she believes that all of Margaret's attempts to gain control of the English throne—a throne her husband had no interest in protecting—were her undoing. She says, "Margaret's political leadership was predicated on her role as wife to the king and mother to his heir—but loyal wives did not customarily supplant their husbands at the head of government" (376). "The harder she fought—and fight hard she did, with an implacable and partisan tenacity—the more obvious were the tensions created by a French queen acting in the place of an incompetent English king" (Castor 411). These historians believe that all of Margaret's strength, valor, and persistence and all of her attempts to do right by her son did nothing but draw attention to the inadequacies of her husband. Loyal and courageous, Margaret inadvertently built the case for Henry's removal from the throne.

Despite recent historians' condemnation of Margaret for fighting to save the throne for her husband and son, in 1640 Thomas Heywood, the English author and playwright, included Margaret in his essay *"The exemplary lives and memorable acts of nine the most worthy women in the world"* (1640). Heywood included three Jews, three Gentiles (*i.e.*, pagans), and three Christian women in his list of Worthy women. The concept of the Nine Worthies, both men and women, had existed since the thirteenth century. Celeste Turner Wright explains that a sixteenth-century female Worthy must "embody the sixteenth-century ideal of the woman ruler, the standards by which the English evaluated their own 'prince.' A female Worthy is a queen or leader manifesting the same kind of excellence as a Hector, a David, or an Arthur" (629). "Above all, each of them was warlike" (Wright 629). At the 1554 marriage of Mary Tudor, the list of Worthies included "Boadicea, Ethelfleda, Margaret, Matilda, and, ex officio, the bride, with her sister Elizabeth" (Wright 628). "An unrestricted list of the women oftenest cited by the Elizabethans for manlike ability and courage would certainly include Artemisia, Deborah, Elizabeth, Esther, Judith, Penthesilea, Semiramis, Tomyris, and Zenobia. But it could not well omit Amalasuntha, Boadicea, Camilla, Ethelfleda, Hypsicratea, Isabella, Jael, Joan of Arc, Joanna, Margaret, Matilda, and Minerva. It should at least footnote Berenice II of Cyrene, Candace of Ethiopia, Dido of Carthage, Martia of England, and Valasca of Bohemia" (Wright 629). According to Wright's research, a "typical" Worthy was an exception to her gender. She was undeterred by her sex; she led men into battle for a noble cause; was compared favorably to men; was fair to look upon; dressed magnificently; lived a moral life; and was commonly "the mother who stands at bay to defend her offspring" (638). The Worthies had detractors as well as admirers. Wright

says, “One inevitable accusation is cruelty…She who makes war is traditionally a lioness, a tigress, or a she-wolf” (639). Evidence of this “inevitable accusation” is demonstrated in abundance later in this thesis. Even Heywood refers to Margaret as the "instigator of all combustions" (Wright 641). And yet it is remarkable that Heywood, writing twenty-four years after Shakespeare’s death with nothing to draw upon but Shakespeare’s plays and perhaps the same sources used by Shakespeare, thought to include Queen Margaret, the “She-wolf of France” among his Worthies.

Shakespeare’s source material was drawn from a body of works collectively referred to as the chronicles. Writing in the early twentieth century, Allardyce and Josephine Nicoll believed that Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* was the primary source for Shakespeare’s history plays. They produced a heavily-amended volume of Holinshed’s *Chronicles* titled *Holinshed’s Chronicle As Used In Shakespeare’s Plays* that reproduces only the parts and pieces Shakespeare borrowed from Holinshed—according to the Nicolls’ reading. A scan of Holinshed’s *Chronicle* indicates that Shakespeare created his dynamic Queen Margaret from approximately five pages among 140 concerning King Henry VI and an additional three pages among the 48 concerning King Edward IV before the death of King Henry (at which point both Margaret and Henry disappear from the chronicle). Bullough, writing mid-century, gave Shakespeare a wider range. He produced his own *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* in which he reproduces and comments on sources including Holinshed as well as Edward Hall’s *The Union of Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancaster and Yorke*, the *Three Books of Polydore Vergil's English History, Comprising the Reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV, and Richard III,* and less-familiar works

by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Sir Thomas Coningsby, John Foxe, and Richard Grafton. Bullough gives credit to each of these men and several other anonymous writers for Shakespeare's histories. As each of these chroniclers borrowed from the others, it is impossible to know which was the true source of Shakespeare's inspiration. If we rely on Holinshed, Bullough, and the Nicolls, we can gain a reliable understanding of the chroniclers' opinions of Margaret, what Shakespeare borrowed, what he left out, and what he invented.

These chronicles were more hearsay than history: "the growth of many legends, the accretion of anecdotes, the ascription of motives, which Shakespeare used probably without caring whence they came" according to scholar Geoffrey Bullough (1). Bullough explains how these chroniclers "popularized many other stories and interpretations" (11). One such writer, Polydore Vergil, examined "the causes of things" and believed "Queen Margaret's part in the death of Duke Humphrey ultimately worked her downfall" (9). Edward Hall "hammered home the theme of moral Nemesis" and conveyed "the idea that most of the evils of Henry VI's reign were due to his marriage with Margaret of Anjou, and her hostility to Duke Humphrey, and her [platonic] love for Suffolk" (Bullough 11, 12).

Shakespeare appears to have drawn largely from Edward Hall's 1550 chronicle, written nearly seventy years after Margaret's death, for his general characterizations of Margaret. Writing about her engagement to Henry at Tours, Hall claims, "This woman excelled all other, as well in beauty and favor, as in wit and policy, and was of stomach and courage, more like to a man, than a woman" (Bullough 102). In Hall's description of King Henry's goodness of spirit and malleability of rule, he says of Margaret, "But on the

other part, the Queen his wife, was a woman of great wit, and yet of no greater wit, than of hot stomach, desirous of glory, and covetous of honor, and of reason, policy, council, and other gifts and talents of nature belonging to a man" (Bullough 105-6). Hall goes on to explain that this manly woman was unhappy with the Duke of Gloucester's influence over King Henry and contrived to remove him from his Protectorship. When England was "vexed and unquiet with the business of Normandy," Hall describes Queen Margaret as King Henry's "wife in whom the whole rule of the realm consisted, being a woman of too much credence-giving to evil and flattering councilors" (Bullough 110). In regards to Somerset's release from prison against York's wishes, Margaret is called "the Queen, which then ruled the roost and bore the whole rule" (Bullough 123). In handling York's uprising in *2 Henry VI*, Shakespeare borrowed Hall's description of "Queen Margaret, whose breath ruled, and whose word was obeyed above the king and his council, within this Realm of England, intending the destruction of the Duke of York and his friends" (Bullough 125). These words and phrases were drawn upon by Shakespeare to create a manly, warlike Margaret engaged in political intrigues and military maneuvers.

Despite the comments above, the chroniclers' characterization of her was not necessarily critical. They express admiration for her abilities and sympathy for her losses. Hall provides a rich psychological portrait of Margaret's state of mind when her husband is captured by their enemies. In a lengthy passage Hall describes: "her heart was pierced with sorrow…all her spirits were tormented with melancholy…her senses were so vexed and she so afflicted and cast into such an agony that she preferred death before life, rather desiring sooner to die than longer to live" (Bullough 203). Shakespeare echoes the chronicles' depiction of Margaret as endlessly devoted to Henry's cause—if not to Henry

himself. Apparently the chroniclers were never in doubt of Margaret's devotion to Henry. If anything they consider her devotions to be ill conceived.

Hall balances his sympathy for the Queen with judgement. He says, "This Queen Margaret might well consider and think that these evil adventures chanced to her for the most part for the unworthy death of Humphrey Duke of Gloucester, uncle to her husband. Of the which mischance, although she was not the very occasion and provoker, yet she greatly offended in that she consented thereto, and did not save his life, when she ruling all other, might conveniently have stayed" his execution (203). Hall is careful not to blame Margaret directly for Humphrey's death, but believes that she could have put a stop to the conspiracy against him—whether through her influence on the conspirators or on Henry is not clear. Holinshed says, "The Queen...excluded the Duke of Gloucester from all rule and governance, not prohibiting such as she knew to be his mortal foes to invent and imagine causes and griefs against him and his, insomuch that by her procurement, diverse noblemen conspired against him. Of the which diverse writers affirm the Marquis of Suffolk, and the Duke of Buckingham to be the chiefs, not unprocured by the Cardinal of Winchester, and the archbishop of York" (Holinshed 210). Shakespeare may have taken these passages and translated them into his own measured and ambiguous approach to Gloucester's downfall in *2 Henry VI.* Shakespeare's Margaret influences and is influenced by the men plotting against the Duke in a way that begs us to question how much or little a role Margaret really played.

Hall's description of Margaret is sensitive and compassionate after her son Prince Edward is struck down by King Edward IV. He tells us "The Queen was found in her chariot almost dead for sorrow" (Bullough 205). She was brought to London and

ransomed back to her father in France. "She was conveyed to France with small honor, which with so great triumph and honorable entertainment [and] with pomp above all pride received into this realm eighteen years before. And where in the beginning of her time she lived like a queen, in the middle she ruled like an empress, toward the end she was vexed with trouble never quiet nor in peace and in her very extreme age she passed her days in France more like a death than a life, languishing and mourning in continual sorrow, not so much for herself and her husband whose ages were almost consumed and worn, but for the loss of Prince Edward her son" (Bullough 206-7). This sad portrait is not echoed in Shakespeare's play. He chooses instead to depict Margaret as a ferocious fighter and a witness to the murder of her son, cursing her enemies for their failure to grant her the courtesy of killing her.

Shakespeare picked carefully through the chronicles, both taking and leaving much in his descriptions of Margaret, often creating a larger role for Margaret than appears in his source material. What we miss from the chronicles is the happy and well-attended scene of Margaret's real-life engagement to Henry—with Suffolk standing in for the King—as well as its "feast, triumph, banquets and jousts" (Nicolls 107). A joyous wedding scene contrasted against Duke Humphrey's (and the other nobles') opposition to Margaret and Henry's marriage would have provided Shakespeare's audiences with a richer context for Margaret's and Humphrey's animosity toward one another. What we get instead is Shakespeare's invented scenes between Margaret and the Earl (later Duke) of Suffolk, including Suffolk's wooing of Margaret in Act 5 Scene 4 of *1 Henry VI* and their supposedly adulterous affair and parting scene in Act 3 Scene 2 of *2 Henry VI*.

The only passage of Holinshed's that may have inspired the wooing scene follows: "In treating of this truce the Earl of Suffolk, adventuring somewhat upon his commission without the assent of his associates, imagined that the next way to come to a perfect peace was to contrive a marriage between the French king's kinswoman, the lady Margaret daughter to Rene Duke of Anjou, and his sovereign lord King Henry" (Holinshed 206). And in regards to their affectionate parting, Bullough believes Margaret's seeming reciprocation of Suffolk's love for her "was probably suggested by two phrases in Hall's Chronicle ('The Queen, which entirely loved the Duke', and 'the Queen's dearling, William Duke of Suffolk') also by her later attempts to save him" (31). Bullough clarifies, "The Chronicles do not make him in love with her, nor ascribe to her anything more than a deep affection and loyalty" (94). The erotic parting scene in *2 Henry VI* Act 3 Scene 2 and any other suggestions of an affair between Margaret and Suffolk were pure inventions by Shakespeare.

Other inventions of Shakespeare's include Margaret's involvement in the death of the Duke of York. As York, "pretending (as ye have heard) a right to the crown" openly attempts to claim the throne and usurps her son's right to inherit, Hall, Holinshed, and Shakespeare all depict a Margaret moving from battle to battle (Holinshed 229). When York is proclaimed heir apparent to the throne and Protector of the realm, disinheriting Margaret's son Prince Edward, Hall says, "The Duke of York well knowing that the Queen would spurn and impugn the conclusions agreed and taken in this parliament, caused her and her son to be sent for by the king: but she being a manly woman used to rule and not to be ruled, and thereto counseled by the Dukes of Exeter and Somerset, not only denied to come but also assembled together a great army" (Bullough 176). While the

Margaret of history and the chronicles sat on the sidelines of this battle, awaiting word of the outcome, Shakespeare's Margaret steps in and stabs York with her own hand after tormenting him with the death of his young son Rutland.

Shakespeare takes great creative license with the following accounting by Hall. The chronicler tells us, Clifford, "not content with this homicide, or child-killing [of York's son Rutland], came to the place where the dead corpse of the Duke of York lay, and caused his head to be stricken off, and set on it a crown of paper, and so fixed it on a pole and presented it to the Queen, not lying far from the field" (Bullough 178). There is no mention of taunting by the Queen—no direct involvement from her at all—much less a scene of her literally rubbing York's wounds with the blood of his dead son as Shakespeare's Margaret does. Shakespeare's Margaret is far crueler in the invented scene of York's death in Act 2 Scene 2 of *3 Henry VI*.

Shakespeare also invents a great a great speech for Margaret on the eve of her (final, historical) showdown at Tewkesbury against the Yorkist faction. Holinshed describes Queen Margaret's concern for her son's safety: "she doubted sore the end of all these proceedings…that some evil should chance to her son" (315). Hall recounts her rallying of the troops: "the Queen and her son Prince Edward rode about the field, encouraging their soldiers, promising to them…great rewards and high promotions, innumerable gain of the spoil and booty of their adversaries, and above all other fame and renown through the whole realm" (Bullough 205). Shakespeare combines these passages into a rousing, foreboding speech that recalls Queen Elizabeth I's great speech to her troops at Tilbury in July 1588. Queen Elizabeth's speech inspired her troops in the face of imminent invasion from the Spanish Armada. Shakespeare's version is a bleak passage

full of dark warnings and images of drowned sailors foreshadowing what was to come. Queen Margaret refers to the ship of state, holding fast against a gale, and rescuing the ship from a "ruthless sea", "quicksand", and "a ragged fatal rock" which were meant to represent York's three sons, Edward, Clarence, and Richard (*3H6* 5.4.25-27).

At the end of the battle of Tewkesbury in Shakespeare's play, Margaret is forced to watch as her son Prince Edward is murdered. Shakespeare based this scene on the following accounts related by Hall and Holinshed in nearly identical wording: "King Edward said nothing, but with his hand thrust him from him, or (as some said) stroke him with his gauntlet" (Holinshed 320). And both Hall and Holinshed attribute divine judgment to the lives and deaths of the standers-by. According to the chronicles, George Duke of Clarence, Richard Duke of Gloucester, Thomas Marquis of Dorset, and William Lord Hastings all stood by as King Edward murdered this young Prince: "The bitterness of which murder, some of the actors, and after in their latter days tasted and assayed by the very rod of Justice and punishment of God" (Bullough 206). The chroniclers' versions strike a balance between relating this act as one deemed necessary by an embattled King Edward, fighting to hold on to his hard-won crown, and a terrible murder that brings down the wrath of God on all those standing by. Shakespeare again takes and leaves much from these short passages. In his *3 Henry VI* Act 5 Scene 5, only Edward, Clarence, and Richard are present; none of the other nobles mentioned above stand witness. Each son of York has a direct hand in Prince Edward's murder, stabbing him in his turn. Shakespeare's scene is an intimate family-feud and gang-murder. And yet, the nobles present in the chronicles' accounting all meet an untimely end prophesied by a raging, cursing Margaret in Shakespeare's *Richard III*.

Both Hall and Holinshed go on to describe the death of King Henry VI in the Tower at the hand of Richard Duke of Gloucester. Both chroniclers note that, in attributing Henry's death to Richard's handiwork, they were relating the common knowledge of the day "as the constant fame ran" (Nicolls 137). We know from history and from Shakespeare that Richard Duke of Gloucester went on to become King Richard III of England, seizing the throne from his nephews when his brother King Edward IV died unexpectedly twenty years into his rule. The chronicles have nothing more to say about the unlucky pair after Margaret's exile to France and the death of King Henry VI.

Shakespeare's Margaret, however, had a final role to play in the undoing of Richard III. Geoffrey Bullough briefly speculates about Margaret's purpose in *Richard III*. He says, "The return of Queen Margaret…is another means of recalling the past. So the first Act [in which she first appears] is at once a link clasping the new play to the previous trilogy, a Prologue to the main action, and an indication of Richard's special villainy" (240). He goes on to explain that "her memories and curses enforce the moral lessons of the tetralogy, especially later when one by one her prophesies come true. Ethically this scene [Act 1 Scene 3] is extremely important" (241). This thesis will argue Margaret has a far more crucial role to play in *Richard III*.

The critics who followed Bullough cling to his attribution of Margaret's part as moral Nemesis. Unfortunately, many reject his belief that her inclusion in Act 1 Scene 3—or anywhere in *Richard III*—is important. This belief seems to contradict Shakespeare's intentions. If one compares the histories and the chronicles to Shakespeare's fictionalized version of Margaret, it becomes clear that Shakespeare's Margaret was a stronger, more effective ruler than she was in real life. At no point do we

witness a Margaret “languishing and mourning in continual sorrow.” Shakespeare amplifies Margaret’s influence on the action of history and the characters around her, adds her to *Richard III* anachronistically, and forces audiences to question how much of the outcome was her fault versus the fault of the men against whom she fought courageously. Shakespeare’s Margaret has an impact on the action of the entire tetralogy and *Richard III* in particular that reverberates throughout the plot, affecting every other character in the plays.

Chapter III

Shakespeare's Maid Margaret and Princely Power in *1 Henry VI*

1 Henry VI opens at the funeral of King Henry V and catalogs a series of crushing English losses that ultimately led to England's defeat in the Hundred Years War against the French. Many battles, much territory, and great men at arms are all lost in the scenes that precede Margaret's entrance. These losses are laid at the feet of Joan la Pucelle. Margaret enters late in Act 5 of *1 Henry VI,* her one and only scene in the play. Her entrance is juxtaposed against Joan's ignominious capture and exit in the previous scene—England's one triumph in the play. This entrance positions Margaret as another disruptive French woman like Joan la Pucelle and the Countess of Auvergne. However, the young woman we meet is far more complex than either Joan or the Countess.

Prior to Margaret's entrance, Joan's character was assassinated by both French and English alike. Trading loaded sexual innuendos with Reignier (Rene of Anjou, Margaret's father), the French Duke of Alençon asserts "these women are shrewd tempters with their tongues," suggesting that Joan's words are untrustworthy and that she may be trying to seduce the Dauphin (*1H6* 1.2.123). On the English side, Talbot calls Joan the "devil," the "devil's dam," a "witch," and a "strumpet" (*1H6* 1.5). Margaret enters in the wake of this commentary, and we are predisposed to believe she is another French demon the moment she sets foot on the stage. Shakespeare's stage directions further suggest a relationship between the women: "Joan is taken by York," and forty-

four lines later, "Enter the Earl of Suffolk with Margaret in his hand" (see stage directions at lines *1H6* 5.3.29, 5.4.1).[5]

Michael Boyd carried this pairing one step further in his 2000 staging of the play. He cast Fiona Bell as both Joan and Margaret. As Margaret, Bell emerged like a phoenix from the ashes of Joan's burning. Rising newly innocent from this purification, one could hope that Margaret was burned clean of Joan's indiscretions. She could have been seen as the chaste and hopeful bride of young Henry and her marriage as a promise of peace with France. In reality, doubling the roles implies that Joan's dangerous sexuality was embodied in the same actor who played the young, captive Margaret (Arden *1H6* 30). "Margaret appears after Joan's death as if her spirit has been resurrected to plague the English throne. She possesses many of Joan's qualities: as an object of desire, an instrument for ambitious lords, as the warrior queen, the 'she-wolf of France" (RSC *H6* 351).

On stage and on paper, however, an audience's impressions of Margaret are nuanced. We watch as a forty-something, battled-hardened Earl of Suffolk drags fourteen-year-old Princess Margaret onto the stage. With no previous mention of her in the play, this is the audience's first introduction to Princess Margaret. In fact, we do not know who she is until she introduces herself to Suffolk. Then we discover that the daughter of Duke Reignier has found herself in the hands of the enemy.

Much of the play is devoted to the notion of noble Englishmen fighting dishonorable French women. However, with the English taking Joan into custody and

[5] The stage direction regarding Joan has been amended by editor Michael Taylor. However, the stage direction regarding Margaret can be found in the First Folio, "Alarum. Enter Suffolke with Margaret in his hand" (Digital facsimile of the Bodleian First Folio of Shakespeare's plays, Arch. G c.7).

winning the latest battle against the French, Margaret, in Suffolk's hands, is in a precarious position. Although our sympathies are with the English, the audience is forced to question what is in store for young Princess Margaret in the grasp of her father's enemy.

Suffolk opens this scene by declaring Margaret his prisoner. The word prisoner is repeated three more times and supplemented by the words "imprisonment," "ransom," "enthralled" (*i.e.*, enslaved), "captivate" (*i.e.*, made prisoner), and "bondage" in the following hundred lines (*1H6* 5.4.95, 29, 33, 36, 57, 63, 67, 68). Suffolk attempts to soothe Margaret's fears at being captured, referring to himself as "reverent" and "tender" (*1H6* 5.4.3-4). But as he does so, he is touching her and kissing her (*1H6* 5.4.3, 5). We assume he does so without her permission because she attempts to walk away as soon as he lets go (*1H6* 5.4.15).

Suffolk seizes her again. As Margaret fails to escape she, in her direct way, challenges him thrice to demand a ransom. Penny Downie reminds us, "given her family's financial status, there must be the suggestion that her sexuality is all she has to trade for her freedom" (120-1). As Suffolk rambles to himself in asides about the advantages her beauty will procure him, Margaret alternately becomes convinced "the man is mad" and assures herself that "he seems a knight, / And will not in any way dishonour me" (*1H6* 5.4.41, 57-8). She reverses herself again and wishes, "Perhaps I shall be rescued by the French, / And then I need not crave his courtesy" (*1H6* 5.4.60-1).

These lines paint a picture of an anxious young woman, actively working to maintain her poise while a strange man decides her fate. She even manages to make a joke when she overhears Suffolk refer to his king as "a wooden thing" (*i.e.*, dull), she

says, “He talks of wood. It is some carpenter” (*1H6* 5.4.45-6). Downie calls this Margaret’s “verbal bluff” and describes the complexity of acting a part where “Simultaneously one has to suggest [Margaret’s] fear of being assaulted, her puzzlement that the man seems to be talking to himself, and her absolute delight, even exhilaration, in the battle of wits, the word game—a mixture of naïve and knowing” (121). This is most evident in her reaction to Suffolk’s rambling. Margaret says, “He talks at random; sure the man is mad” (*1H6* 5.4.41). Yet as he continues, she wishes, “And yet I would that you would answer me” (*1H6* 5.4.43).

For all her composure, Margaret experiences obvious anxiety when Suffolk explains that he will make her queen of England, “If thou wilt condescend to be my—” (*1H6* 5.4.75). She interrupts before he can complete this line and demands to know, “What?” (*1H6* 5.4.76). The audience can hardly be expected to believe that this wily soldier and political operator simply misspoke. Margaret cannot believe it is an accident that Suffolk says, “my.”

The audience has become aware of Suffolk’s true intentions, spoken in an earlier aside. He declares in aggressive and patronizing language (language that will become familiar when the audience is later introduced to Richard III and his repeated disparagement of women), that:

> She’s beautiful, and therefore to be wooed;
> She is a woman, therefore to be won. (*1H6* 5.4.34-5)

But now Margaret, rightly sensing she is about to receive an indecent proposal, fearfully or haughtily (perhaps both) cancels this move with a single word. She forces Suffolk to correct himself. He says, “His [Henry’s] love” (*1H6* 5.4.77).

Irene Dash takes note of the critics who "believe that she acts the seducer because her position shifts from one of weakness to one of strength, from being a captive to the promise of being a queen." Dash dismisses this idea. Although Margaret "understands Suffolk's meaning [neither her words nor deeds] indicate compliance" (Dash 161).

Casting decisions may further complicate our understanding of Margaret in this scene. The range of impressions created by actors in performance support the argument that Shakespeare created in Margaret a complex character, not a stereotypical femme fatale. In 1963, reviewers described Fiona Bell as "a Margaret beneath whose pale, demure looks lie arrogance, fierce ambition and sadistic delight in her enemies' setbacks" (RSC *H6* 351). Katy Stephens was "beautiful" as Joan and "fiercely Amazonian" as Margaret (RSC *H6* 351). And an irrepressible thirty-two-year-old Helen Mirren, playing Queen Margaret in Terry Hands' 1977 RSC production of the *Henry VI* series, was described as a "deviant sexpot" by one reviewer and as a woman who "remains loyal to and fights desperately for the cause of her spouse to the very end" by another (RSC *H6* 354, Signet *H6* 220).

Peggy Ashcroft played Margaret at age fifty-six in an adaptation of the *Henry VI* tetralogy by John Barton. In an exception to the cuts in Margaret's part in many productions, Barton's *Wars of the Roses* "cut the plays to emphasize the strength of [Margaret's] individuality" (RSC *H6* 352). Ashcroft's "skill as an actor and maturity made her the more dominant partner" over the actor who played Henry, according to Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen's account of the production (RSC H6 352). Michael Billington, writing for *The Guardian*, agreed that Ashcroft carried the trilogy and lovingly describes her "revelatory audacity" in scenes of interpersonal conflict like the

scene with York described above. Billington praises Ashcroft for possessing an "imaginative capacity that allowed a woman who, in private, was graciously modest to enter into the soul and spirit of a foreign queen embroiled in internecine war… [and her] realisation of the wild madness that overtakes people in extreme situations."

Despite all the power a mature actress can conjure in this part, Penny Downie describes the "unformed" nature of this teenage princess when she is first introduced to the audience; she is a very young woman, "a person yet to be shaped by the experiences that await her" (120). Downie expresses Margaret's youthful "directness, her way of saying what first comes into her head and only afterwards (even if, often immediately afterwards) realizing the effect it has had" (120). And, most importantly, she articulates the danger inherent in the so-called wooing scene between Suffolk and Margaret. Downie says, "there must be the threat of rape…behind all the questions, asides, jokes, there must be the possibility that all this could go horribly wrong" (Downie 120).

Treatment of medieval women as prisoners of war indicates this was a possibility. Gwen Seabourne explains that, "armies of English and other kings did not always spare [women] harm or confinement" (17). "In contrast to the position of fighting men [to which the rules of war applied], that of women was left ambiguous, to be governed by the views and preferences of individual commanders and soldiers" (Seabourne 19). Seabourne demonstrates that the Church's position was unclear; some sources "appear to approve or allow violence against women" seized as spoils of war (17). Others of Seabourne's sources indicate that non-combatant women, particularly high-status women, were to be left unharmed, but this view was inconsistently applied. History has left us "accounts of women who were abused or killed by rampaging warriors in the Hundred

Years War French theatre…and the rape of women by the English during the Crécy campaign" in 1346 (Seabourne 22). Henry V banned the molestation of pregnant women, wives, widows, and maidens, but this order was "not an absolute ban on the taking of female prisoners (Seabourne 19). Seabourne does not conclusively prove that women were taken captive during the Hundred Years War, yet her research indicates that rape "must have been very common at this period" in history (Seabourne 23). Henry V's ban seems to imply the practice was common or else there would be no need to ban it.

With this threat lingering in her mind, Margaret openly questions the balance of power between herself and Suffolk and between herself and a potential husband. As she does so, she raises one of the tetralogy's underlying themes: What does it mean to be a prince in an English play in which the reigning English monarch does not appear until Act 3? What does it mean to have "princely" power when the reigning prince does not rule his own country?

Historically, King Henry VI was in his minority throughout most of the action of *1 Henry VI*. England was ruled by Henry's uncles, cousins, and other well-placed lords. These noblemen, including Lord Talbot, the Earl of Suffolk, and the Dukes of Gloucester and York are frequently referred to as princes and described as "princely" throughout *1 Henry VI*. Margaret is the only woman referred to as "princely." The Old English Dictionary defines the word "princely" as "Of, belonging to, or relating to a prince or princes; held, exercised, or governed by a prince; befitting a prince." The OED definitions of prince and princess seem to indicate that the word princess typically was used to refer to queen consorts.[6] Suffolk's insistence on labeling Margaret as princely

[6] The OED definition of 'prince" notes the now obsolete definition of prince that formerly applied to a female sovereign. This form was in usage from 1560-1734, beginning two years after Queen Elizabeth I's

elevates her to a position of equality with the men in this play and the next—an elevation of which she proves herself worthy.

Suffolk refers to Margaret as a vision of "beauty's princely majesty" and a "princely bride" for Henry in his proposal to make her queen of England (*1H6* 5.4.26, 108). By bargaining her away to Suffolk, Reignier has "gained [his] daughter princely liberty" (*1H6* 5.4.96). Notions of majesty and liberty stand in stark contrast to Suffolk's proposal:

> Say, gentle princess, would you not suppose
> Your bondage happy, to be made a queen? (*1H6* 5.4.66-7)

Margaret demonstrates a quick-witted intelligence in her assessment of princely freedom and a marriage proposed to a young woman held hostage. Her view seems more accurate than Suffolk's as she rejects his suggestion and its slavish sexual overtones. She tells the Earl:

> To be a queen in bondage is more vile
> Than is a slave in base servility,
> For princes should be free. (*1H6* 5.4.68-70)

Margaret's appraisal could refer to her immediate situation as Suffolk's prisoner and a woman whose physical person is under threat of sexual assault. She could also be

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ascension to the throne until twenty years after the death of Queen Anne. The word as applied to a female monarch may have fallen into disuse in the 123 years between the death of Queen Anne and the ascension of Queen Victoria. The first reference in the OED is attributed to Edmund Geste (1518–1577) bishop of Salisbury. However, Cristy Beemer notes that Elizabeth's sister and predecessor on the throne, Queen Mary, referred to herself as "prince and governor" in 1554, six years before this OED first mention (264). "So, while the term can be gender-neutral, according to the *OED*, Elizabeth is the first woman referenced by the term. This usage of the term *prince* to include a woman marks a gender shift for the term under the Tudor queens" (Beemer 264). Shakespeare's use of the term "prince" and "princely" to describe Queen Margaret in his history series likely was a reflection of how Queen Elizabeth referred to herself during her reign. This must have been a deliberate choice, however, because Queen Elizabeth was a queen regnant, queen in her own right, whereas Queen Margaret was a queen consort.

making a statement about her future as a French queen in an English court. She might feel like a ransom rather than a respected queen-consort. She will be trapped forever between her father's desires and the wishes of her new husband and his courtiers, wealthy noblemen, rich in titles and lands, who have been ruling England in Henry's name for twenty years. Margaret smartly questions what it means to be the queen of a king who is not ruling his own country independently.

In raising these questions, Margaret exhibits the maturity and discernment of a woman far more sophisticated than a teenager. That Suffolk underestimates her is certain. She demonstrates more wisdom than he in response to his demand for "princely commendations to my king" (*1H6* 5.5.132). She first offers him

> Such commendations as becomes a maid,
> A virgin, and his servant, say to him. (*1H6* 5.5.133-4)

And when he persists, she says,

> Yes, my good lord, a pure unspotted heart,
> Never yet taint with love, I send the king. (*1H6* 5.5.138-9)

Undaunted by her modesty, he oversteps and steals a kiss from her. She lashes out at him, and rightly so.

> That for thyself; I will not so presume
> To send such peevish tokens to a king. (*1H6* 5.5.141-2)

In some stagings of this scene, Margaret pulls away and in others the pair engage in a lingering kiss. Whether or not she yields to Suffolk's advance on stage, Margaret shows superior acumen when she labels the stolen kiss an unworthy gift for a king. She demonstrates a perceptiveness and good sense lacking in Suffolk throughout this scene.

In answer to Suffolk's proposal to make her queen, Margaret accurately and directly states, "I am unworthy to be Henry's wife" (*1H6* 5.4.78). This statement is not mere modesty. Margaret is the poor daughter of a poor king. Reignier is rich in titles and poor in dowry for the kind of match Suffolk is proposing. However, Margaret is smart enough to know she will get no better marriage proposal than this. Under the right circumstances (*e.g.*, an agreement to waive her dowry) her father will consent. Given the relationship between fathers and daughters in medieval times in which princesses were treated as property to be bargained away, she has no choice. Margaret is bright enough to understand that she will be expected to do her duty. She acquiesces immediately after acknowledging that she is unworthy by claiming, "An if my father please, I am content" (*1H6* 5.4.83). However, that she is first consulted and wooed by Suffolk indicates that she is an important player—important to him personally and politically. That she consents to the marriage before Suffolk approaches her father indicates she has a will of her own and is unafraid to exert it. She exhibits an insight and intelligence that are simultaneously cautious, forward, curious, modest, and dutiful.

In consenting to this marriage, Margaret is being used as a pawn by both her father and Suffolk. She reacts as a modest and dutiful daughter would. And she shows the audience a maturity, wisdom, and insight that neither of these men acknowledges. She defies Suffolk's attempts to manipulate and proposition her, while simultaneously she is intrigued by him. Her reactions to him could be seen as flirtatious at the point where she returns his rambling asides with asides of her own. Once she has his attention, she speaks only to herself until he demands, "Lady, wherefore talk you so?" (*1H6* 5.4.64). She proves she is a match for him in her teasing response, "I cry you mercy, 'tis but *quid* for

quo,” rhymed to match his line so the audience understands their equal standing (*1H6* 5.5.65). But she maintains her integrity by scolding him when he oversteps the boundaries of decency, as noted above.

Despite clear indications of her strength of will, Suffolk reverts to his own patronizing attitude in his closing lines of the play. After her exit, he exclaims,

> Margaret shall now be queen, and rule the King;
> But I will rule both her, the King, and realm. (*1H6* 5.6.107-8)

Suffolk believes Margaret will rule the King because “Henry is youthful” and Margaret is full of “Natural graces that extinguish art” (*1H6* 5.4.55, 5.5.148). Henry is young and Margaret is beautiful—beautiful enough to “bereave [Henry] of his wits with wonder” (*1H6* 5.5.150). Suffolk does not acknowledge her wit, intelligence, or perceptiveness, only Margaret’s beauty. The audience is left wondering whether Suffolk himself has been bereaved of his wits. Margaret already has had more influence on Suffolk than he has had on her. He has underestimated the complexity of this young woman and made assumptions about her influence or lack thereof that will prove to be inaccurate in the following plays.

Chapter IV

Queen Margaret Exercising Princely Power in *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*

In *2 Henry VI* Queen Margaret is invested formally with her princely powers. As a close reading of the text will show, Margaret is forced by circumstances, her own character, and Henry's weakness into a position of power that leads to terrible losses for her and the nation. She spends the first half of this play filling the roles of pupil to Suffolk and co-conspirator in the plot against Duke Humphrey. Under the instruction of Suffolk, she learns how to wield her princely powers. Upon Suffolk's death, she begins to understand the consequences of wielding that power. She wields this power in a manner similar to the men around her—the men who have instructed her—and acts as their equal. In response she is treated unjustly by her foes. At the close of *3 Henry VI* she is excoriated by her enemies for behaving as they have behaved and cast aside by those who consistently underestimate her.

Learning about Princely Power

In the first half of *2 Henry VI* there are indications that the Duke of Suffolk[7] wields an unnatural sway over Queen Margaret. Margaret is still young and new to English court politics. Henry is little older and used to being ruled by his uncle, the Lord Protector, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester (1391-1447). Humphrey was the sole surviving brother of Henry V and presumptive heir to the throne upon King Henry VI's death.

[7] Suffolk is "creat[ed] the first Duke of Suffolk" at the start of *2 Henry VI* as a reward for procuring Margaret's hand in marriage (*2H6* 1.1.63).

Humphrey's privileged position, his sway over the King, and his disapproval of Henry's marriage to Margaret contributed to a natural enmity between the Queen and the Duke.

Suffolk, seeking influence of his own, positions himself in opposition to Humphrey. Shakespeare's Duke Humphrey bitterly claims Suffolk is "the new-made duke that rules the roost" (*2H6* 1.1.108). This reference to a roost or bird coop reflects Humphrey's belief that Suffolk and the Queen are making a cuckold of Henry.

Margaret allies herself with Suffolk, and we assume they are united in this plot against Humphrey because Suffolk has stated his objective openly to her. Suffolk intends to remove Humphrey from influence. We do not get to hear her reaction because they are interrupted. We know for certain that it is Suffolk's plan. He instigated it, and he is putting it into action by tutoring her in court politics and intrigue. And we have heard an echo of this sentiment previously. At the end of *1 Henry VI*, Suffolk makes clear his intentions to rule the King through Margaret: "Margaret shall now be queen, and rule the King; / But I will rule both her, the King, and realm" (*1H6* 5.6.107-8). It is unclear if Margaret is an active participant in the plot or a pawn of Suffolk or both.

Suffolk claims he is working against Humphrey on Margaret's behalf. He will "work [her] grace's full content" in response to her complaints about the Lord Protector (*2H6* 1.3.68). As Margaret adds Beaufort, Somerset, Buckingham, and York to the list of lords who "vex" her, Suffolk advises her to "be patient" (*2H6* 1.3.76, 66). He appeals to Margaret to "list to me, / For I am bold to counsel you in this" (*2H6* 1.3.93-4). Suffolk next lays out his plan to land "Duke Humphrey in disgrace" (*2H6* 1.3.97). Then in an echo of his sentiments at the close of *1 Henry VI*, he insists that Margaret "shall steer the happy helm" (*2H6* 1.3.101).

Margaret proves herself a quick study and a natural opportunist. She first asserts herself in Henry's name during a dispute between Somerset and York over which one should be given regency of France. Henry refuses to make a decision, stating, "I care not which" should be chosen (*2H6* 1.3.102). Margaret agrees with Somerset's claim that he "should be preferred in this" (*2H6* 1.3.102). She says, "Because the King, forsooth, will have it so" (*2H6* 1.3.116). Duke Humphrey sees through this deception, but she is undeterred. This is the first of many examples of Margaret utilizing princely power in Henry's name when he is indecisive or relinquishing his power to others.

As Suffolk and his allies continue to build their case against Duke Humphrey, Margaret appears to take the lead. She often speaks first in these rhetorical battles. She is the first to suggest to Duke Humphrey that his services as Protector are no longer needed: "if [Henry] be old enough, what needs your grace / To be Protector of his excellence?" (*2H6* 1.3.119-20). And she is the first to suggest to the King "how insolent of late [Humphrey] is become" (*2H6* 3.1.7).

However, there are indications that Suffolk may be pulling the young Queen's strings. He consistently speaks immediately after Margaret, reinforcing her sentiments. Following Margaret's assertion that the King is old enough to govern without his Protector, Suffolk responds to Humphrey, "Resign it then [Humphrey's post as Protector], and leave thine insolence" (*2H6* 1.3.123). Margaret opportunistically reinforces Humphrey's own sentiment that the King is old enough. Suffolk launches an attack on Humphrey and his supposedly corrupt Protectorship, claiming that under his leadership, "The commonwealth hath daily run to wrack" (*2H6* 1.3.125).

Margaret explains to Henry that she believes Humphrey wishes the King ill so that he can inherit the throne. Margaret is quick to point out to Henry, "what a rancorous mind he bears / And his advantage following your decease" (*2H6* 3.1.24-5). Suffolk again bolsters her views:

> Well hath your highness [the Queen] seen into this Duke,
> And had I first been put to speak my mind,
> I think I should have told your grace's tale. (*2H6* 3.1.42-4)

The action of the play indicates Margaret is merely an active co-conspirator; and the source chronicles claim Suffolk, York, and Beaufort were the "chiefs" of this plot. However modern critics and scholars often are too ready to blame Margaret exclusively for Humphrey's demise. For instance, editor Roger Warren is quick to call Margaret the leader of the plot. Warren says, "Once again, Margaret acts as a catalyst for an outbreak of violence (see note to 1.3.138); led by her, the rest of the pack turn on Duke Humphrey" (see note to *2H6* 3.1.42-65). In Warren's note at line 1.3.138, he first makes the claim that: "Margaret is characteristically the catalyst of a moment of crisis." In Act 1 Scene 3, it is true that Margaret is the first to suggest the consequences of Humphrey's failures as Protector could lead to his death. However, she is the last to speak after Suffolk, Beaufort, Somerset, and Buckingham. She may be escalating the situation, but she clearly is not leading this pack.

In the passage starting at 3.1.42 where Warren accuses Margaret of being the instigator of violence against Humphrey, neither Margaret nor Suffolk suggests that violent action should be taken. Nearly two hundred lines later, Margaret suggests that "This Gloucester should be quickly rid of the world" (*2H6* 3.1.233). Beaufort, Suffolk,

and York debate the wisdom of this advice. When the men are in accord, Suffolk reveals *his* plan to murder Humphrey.

One can almost imagine Suffolk gesturing to Margaret, cuing her to speak, and signaling when to be silent. In fact, Barbara Jefford's 1957-58 performance of Margaret at the Old Vic demonstrated a complex Margaret, speaking while, "One eye was on Suffolk, ready to prompt and guide her" (Clarke). Suffolk says, "Ah York, no man alive so fain as I" to see Humphrey deceased (*2H6* 3.1.244). To the audience, York replies, "'Tis York that hath more reason for his death" (*2H6* 3.1.245). Although Margaret appears to be in control, it is really Suffolk and York who start and support this conspiracy against Humphrey and contrive the plan to murder him.

Humphrey himself places little blame on Margaret. He first names Suffolk, Buckingham, and York for the conspiracy against him. He names Margaret last, and accuses her of having "stirred up / My liefest liege to be mine enemy" (*2H6* 3.1.164).[8] Although this could represent Humphrey's own sexist notions about Margaret's abilities or lack thereof, if the Duke is unwilling to label her the instigator, critics and audiences should refrain as well. The Duke of York shows no interest in granting Margaret any credit for her actions in this scheme. As a final affirmation that Margaret is a supporter rather than leader in this scheme, Humphrey's fate is sealed with a handshake between Cardinal Beaufort, Suffolk, and York to "consent and censure well" the Lord Protector's death (*2H6* 3.1.275). York says, "And now **we three** have spoke it" after the three men and Margaret speak against Humphrey (*2H6* 3.1.280, emphasis added). It is impossible to

[8] This usage of "liefest," meaning "dearest," by Humphrey to refer to Henry is the only example of this word in Shakespeare according to the line note at *2H6* 3.1.164. However, as the note also mentions, Margaret uses the word "alderliefest" at 1.1.28. Margaret too refers to Henry as her "dearest of all," setting Humphrey and Margaret in direct competition for Henry's affections.

know which three York is referring to; however, it seems safe to assume he means the three men engaged in this pact, deliberately neglecting the one woman among them.

This wording is not an editorial or typographical error. The Oxford edition used in this thesis was based on the First Folio text of 1623. The First Folio includes the line "and now we three haue spoke it" (Act 3 line 1582). The *Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* explains that it was not common practice for women to engage in direct contracts or binding deals.[9] They would not have given their word or shaken hands, in particular with a man. Additionally, York may be snubbing Margaret in his characteristically sexist manner. At least one notable performance overlooks these facts and placed Margaret's hand atop the other three in this binding handshake. Mary Clark's volume documenting the fifth season (1957-8) of the Old Vic Five-Year First Folio Plan, includes a photograph of this scene, featuring Barbara Jefford as a beautiful, feminine Margaret, participating in the handshake.

Later, as the plot is revealed to the King by York's staunchest ally, the Earl of Warwick, all blame is placed on Suffolk and Cardinal Beaufort. It would be in York's, and therefore Warwick's, best interests for the Queen to be implicated in Humphrey's murder in order to lessen her influence over the King. Instead Warwick silences Margaret's attempts to defend Suffolk. He tells her to "be still…For every word you speak in his behalf / Is slander to your royal dignity" (*2H6* 3.2.207-09). If Margaret truly were to blame, these characters would make that fact plain to the audience.

[9] "In general, and with the exception of criminal cases, a husband in later medieval England was legally responsible for his wife's actions because the two were one person in the eyes of the law...married women in England might find themselves effectively effaced as legal subjects" (Kelleher 138). This was particularly true for aristocratic women.

Based on our understanding of the chronicles, it would not have been credible for Shakespeare to label Margaret the instigator. In Act 1 when Suffolk seeks Margaret's patience, he is reacting to an angry princess venting her frustrations. She saves her greatest outburst for Humphrey's wife Eleanor: "Not all these lords do vex me half so much / As that proud dame, the Lord Protector's wife" (*2H6* 1.3.76-77). Margaret's biggest complaint is that Eleanor's dresses are more expensive than her own. She speaks in the jealous tones of a resentful teenager full of petty grievances, not in the voice of an experienced politician engaged in courtly intrigues. She is far angrier at Eleanor than Humphrey. And when Margaret first speaks openly against Humphrey, Suffolk has provided the instruction, and Humphrey has provided the opening. As Margaret offers her opinion regarding the York and Somerset dispute, Humphrey tries to silence her with the words, "These are no women's matters" (*2H6* 1.3.118). We expect Margaret to reduce him to ashes on the spot. Instead, she patiently bides her time and diligently undermines Humphrey's position as Protector, as instructed by Suffolk. Her exchange with Humphrey and its consequences provide a particular challenge to the notion that Shakespeare was creating a stereotypical woman in Margaret. She neither conforms to Humphrey's ideals of a woman nor acts the part of the shrew in response to his attempts to silence and dismiss her.

The plot against Humphrey is a success: "good Duke Humphrey traitorously is murdered / By Suffolk and the Cardinal Beaufort's means" (*2H6* 3.2.123-4). This success brings about unintended consequences for Beaufort, Suffolk, and for Margaret. Beaufort dies from shame and guilt. Suffolk is banished from the realm and is murdered at sea. And Henry succumbs to a madness that creates an irreparable rift between him and

Margaret. After the murder of Humphrey, we hear little from Margaret from Act 3 Scene 3 until Act 5 Scene 1. She is so quiet that editor Roger Warren draws our attention to her uncharacteristic reserve in Act 4 Scene 9 and wonders if "her silence may be eloquent, inviting the performer to suggest alienation from the crisis and the King, or absorption in her own grief for Suffolk, or both" (see footnote to line *2H6* 4.9.1).

The Margaret we have seen up to now is not one to shy away from a fight or to withhold her opinion on any matter. It seems likely that she is adrift and directionless without Suffolk. Her only thought on the matter of Cade and the rebels threatening the kingdom is, "were the Duke of Suffolk now alive / These Kentish rebels would be soon appeased" (*2H6* 4.4.40-1). This comment reflects Margaret's naivety regarding English politics or her blind faith in Suffolk. The Duke was a valiant soldier but disastrous as a commander and an even worse negotiator. His regency of France ended when he was taken hostage after losing control of vast territories. And in his marriage bargain with Margaret's father, he gave away two powerful duchies in exchange for Margaret's marriage to Henry. Perhaps what Margaret truly laments is the action that led to Suffolk's death. Without Duke Humphrey, the King and the kingdom are falling apart. Without Suffolk guiding her, Margaret is lost.

Margaret's longing for a strong leader at this point in the action is not simply an expression of sadness for Suffolk. She expresses a practical longing for a tough and charismatic leader to thwart Cade's attack and the attack from York that is looming. King Henry—the man who should be that leader—expresses a similar sentiment about the crisis he and the kingdom are facing:

> Thus stands my state 'twixt Cade and York distressed,
> Like to a ship that having scaped a tempest,

Is straightway calmed and boarded with a pirate. (*2H6* 4.9.32-4)

These are hardly the rousing words of a commander-in-chief. Henry has the power to squash these rebellions, but he chooses not to exercise that power. Rather than take action, he chooses to believe that "God our hope will succour us" (*2H6* 4.5.54). Rather than lead, Henry bemoans that he has been placed on the throne: "Was never subject longed to be a king / As I do long and wish to be a subject" (*2H6* 4.9.5-6). "The deepest flaws in Henry's leadership derive not from an inability to see, but from an inability or unwillingness to act" (Lull 93).

Up to this point, Margaret has been a political apprentice under the guidance of Suffolk. She is accused of taking a strong leadership role in the conspiracy against Humphrey. But textual evidence would seem to indicate she was still finding her place amongst the men who worked actively against the Duke. Without Suffolk and faced with her husband's aversion to ruling his own kingdom, Margaret is forced to take a stronger hand, as the following chapters will demonstrate.

Living with a King Unwilling to Act

From the very beginning of *2 Henry VI*, the audience knows Margaret is aware of her husband's failings. She expresses her discontent with his leadership skills as early as Act 1 Scene 3. She describes Henry's religious devotions and claims: "all his mind is bent to holiness" rather than tiltyards or weapons (*2H6* 1.3.56). In her frustration she declares, "I would the college of the cardinals / Would choose him Pope, and carry him to Rome" (*2H6* 1.3.62-3). There is even a hint of reproach against Suffolk when she recalls Suffolk's wooing on Henry's behalf: "I thought King Henry had resembled thee / In

courage, courtship, and proportion" (*2H6* 1.3.54-5). She makes this accusation openly after Henry's reaction to Humphrey's death. She claims Suffolk falsely wooed her and won her love for Henry with tales of Henry's father's victories just as Cupid wooed Dido and won her love for Aeneas.[10] Margaret vents her wrath against Henry, demanding, "Am I not witched like her? Or thou not false like him?" (*2H6* 3.2.119).

Margaret soldiers on despite Henry's flaws, attempting to fill the gaps created by the King's ineptitude. Prior to Humphrey's murder, we watch Henry stand idly by as York, Beaufort, Buckingham, and Margaret accuse Humphrey. As Suffolk places Humphrey under arrest and the former Lord Protector exits the scene, Henry exits too, commanding, "My lords, what to your wisdoms seemeth best / Do or undo, as if ourself were here" (*2H6* 3.1.195-6). Henry abandons control over the situation. Margaret is shocked and questions, "What, will your highness leave the Parliament?" (*2H6* 3.1.197). Henry says his "heart is drowned with grief" (*2H6* 3.1.198). Henry continues:

> Even so myself bewails good Gloucester's case
> With sad unhelpful tears, and with dimmed eyes
> Look after him, and cannot do him good,
> So mighty are his vowèd enemies. (*2H6* 3.1.217-20)

His sadness is palpable and the audience must feel for him. And at the same time, this speech is preposterous. Henry blames the conspirators for bringing these false charges against Humphrey, simultaneously abdicating the decision-making authority and the responsibility for the outcome. King Henry VI, anointed by God King of England, could shatter this plot against Humphrey with a word should he choose to do so. The real

[10] Cupid was disguised as Aeneas' son Ascanius and told stories "of his father's feats during the siege of Troy, [to make] Dido fall in love with Aeneas" (see note to lines *2H6* 3.2.116-18). Margaret claims she has been bewitched by Suffolk's tales of Henry V's valor which made her love her weak husband, Henry VI.

sadness in this scene is in the knowledge that, if Henry were as mighty as Humphrey's enemies, there would be no need for a Protectorship. Henry would rule in his own right. And the threat of civil war would be negated. Henry's decision to exit the Parliament leads to further bad decision-making which sets the kingdom on the path to civil war and catapults Margaret into the position of captain of the ship in the tempest. As both she and the kingdom are abandoned by King Henry, she expends her energy not "steer[ing] the happy helm" as Suffolk promises but in attempting to right the ship (*2H6* 1.3.101).

The news of Humphrey's murder shocks Henry profoundly. After waking from his swoon, Henry blames Suffolk for Humphrey's death and claims that only "in the shade of death shall I find joy; / In life, but double death, now Gloucester's dead" (*2H6* 3.2.54-5). Henry loves his uncle so deeply that he feels as though he has died as well. Margaret is distraught that Henry seems to love Humphrey more that he loves her. Henry does not respond to Margaret's claim that she should, "Die Margaret, / For Henry weeps that thou dost live so long" (*2H6* 3.2.120-1). Instead he banishes Suffolk. When Margaret tries to plead for "gentle Suffolk," Henry is enraged by her pleas (*2H6* 3.2.293). In this singular moment of command, he accuses her: "Ungentle Queen, to call him gentle Suffolk" and informs her that "when I swear, it is irrevocable" (*2H6* 3.2.294, 298). Suffolk must go, and Henry will not hear Margaret's words to the contrary. Margaret loses Henry's love and Suffolk's companionship in one blow.

Margaret and Suffolk

Margaret and Suffolk take their leave of one another in a painful and extended parting scene lasting 113 lines. Scholar Geoffrey Bullough tells us that the "Chronicles

do not make him in love with her, nor ascribe to her anything more than a deep affection and loyalty" (94). However, critics have taken this scene as evidence that the two are engaged in an adulterous affair. Shakespeare certainly invented an erotically charged partnership. But there is no hard evidence even in this most sexually suggestive scene that they are anything more than "two friends" in a relationship "condemned" by Suffolk's banishment who "Embrace, and kiss, and take ten thousand leaves" (*2H6* 3.2.357-58). The farewell is compared to "death" by Suffolk and "a deathful wound" by Margaret which may seem overstated for a friendship temporarily parted, but should also be seen as foreshadowing given that Suffolk's banishment will be his death (*2H6* 3.2.405, 408). And even though she implores him to "take my heart with thee" there is no evidence of any consummation of their relationship beyond the kisses exchanged here (*2H6* 3.2.412).

Margaret and Suffolk kiss, embrace, and sigh with sorrow at their enforced parting. She says, "Loather a hundred times to part than die. Yet now farewell, and farewell life with thee" (*2H6* 3.2.359-60). He claims,

> If I depart from thee, I cannot live.
> And in thy sight to die, what were it else
> But like a pleasant slumber in thy lap? (*2H6* 3.2.392)

Roger Warren explains that the words "die" and "lap" in this context had a sexual connotation in Elizabethan English "so this is the most overt allusion in the play to their affair" (*2H6* 47). But even an "overt allusion" is not a definitive conclusion. Warren believes this is proof enough although he reserves judgement on the pair as he believes Shakespeare "does not pass external 'moral' judgements upon them" (47). Others take a different view of this fictitious infidelity. Howard and Rackin discuss "Margaret's

unwomanly self-assertiveness. She does not reciprocate her husband's affection, but openly prefers the courtly Suffolk" (68). In their analysis of this parting scene, Margaret is "a sexually mature and erotically powerful figure…dangerous to men and to the good order of the kingdom" (Howard and Rackin 73). Angela Pitt absorbs and reflects York's view of Margaret: she is a categorical, unremitting "trull" *i.e.*, a whore (*3H6* 1.4.114). Pitt believes that Margaret's relationship with Suffolk "had, from the first, overtones of adultery" and that "Under the influence of such a creature of evil, both her allies and her enemies are doomed to failure or death" (153). Pitt's view is textually inaccurate. Suffolk stated in *1 Henry VI* that he "mayst not wander in that labyrinth: / There Minotaurs and ugly treasons lurk" (*1H6* 5.5.145-66).

Others believe the scene itself has no place in the play. Writing alone in *Stages of History*, Rackin claims that "Margaret's adultery has no real impact on the action of the *Henry VI* plays…[her] sexual transgressions are dramatically unnecessary" (158). Janet Adelman calls the scene of Margaret and Suffolk's parting bizarre, extraneous, and "an instance of the youthful Shakespeare's stylistic experimentation" (117).

It is strange that the critics should take this erotic flirtation as proof positive of adultery when the men in the play never accuse Margaret of an affair with Suffolk.[11] Perhaps it matters little to these men because accusations of adultery are commonplace between them. When Warwick silences Margaret's defense of Suffolk, Suffolk goes on

[11] York calls her a whore, and later his son Richard says to Prince Edward, "Whoever got thee, there thy mother stands, / For well I wot thou hast thy mother's tongue" (*3H6* 2.2.133-34). However, this sounds more like a commentary on Edward's likeness to his mother than a question of parentage. Richard chooses not to accuse Prince Edward of bastardy openly which is surprising given that it becomes his default action in *Richard III* as he discredits his brothers' and his nephews' claims to the throne. Richard does this so often in *Richard III*, that in order to save her daughter from marriage to Richard, the widowed Queen Elizabeth volunteers to, "confess she was not Edward's daughter" (*R3* 4.4.199). Not one of Margaret's enemies makes the claim that her son Edward is unfit to inherit the throne in either *2 Henry VI* or *3 Henry VI* due to a question of parentage (or for any reason).

the offense, claiming that Warwick's mother "took into her blameful bed / Some stern untutored churl" (*2H6* 3.2.212-3). Warwick retorts that Suffolk "thyself wast born in bastardy" (*2H6* 3.2.223). This was the ideal opportunity for Warwick to accuse Margaret and Suffolk of adultery, but he passes it up.

Perhaps these men consider an affair between Margaret and Suffolk implausible because Margaret proves her unflagging loyalty to Henry. Margaret refers to Henry as the "sole possessor of my love" (*3H6* 3.3.24). These words could be contrived to win King Lewis's support for her cause, or they could be spoken in earnest. Margaret is at her most sincere in Act 4 Scene 4 when she laments for Suffolk and wanders the stage cradling his head in her arms. Her sadness and anger are raw and palpable as she urges herself to "Think therefore on revenge, and cease to weep" (*2H6* 4.4.3). When Henry turns his attention to her mourning, he claims "Thou wouldest not have mourned so much for me" (*2H6* 4.4.23). Shakespeare rhymes Margaret's response, coupling these characters' lines and lives together: "No my love, I should not mourn, but die for thee" (*2H6* 4.4.24). These words spoken in spite, anger, or irony could still be truthful.

Ultimately Margaret and Suffolk's supposed affair does not have an effect on the action of *2 Henry VI*. Despite Shakespeare's highly-charged parting between Suffolk and Margaret, Humphrey's concerns about "women's matters", and Margaret's depression at Suffolk's death, Lords Clifford, Northumberland, and Westmorland seek out Margaret when they are ashamed of Henry's actions. These lords see Margaret as a valid alternative to Henry's leadership and follow her into battle when she is "ready to put armour on" (*3H6* 3.3.230). Clifford in particular has greater faith in Margaret's abilities in battle than Henry's when he says to Henry, "I would your highness would depart the

field, / The Queen hath best success when you are absent" (*3H6* 2.2.73-4). Surely these men would not follow her into battle to secure the throne for Prince Edward if it was common knowledge or even seriously suggested that Margaret's son was not the legitimate heir to the crown. She proves herself a relentless and successful commander until her forces are overrun and she loses her son and reason to fight, as the following chapter will demonstrate.

Captain Margaret

In the absence of Humphrey, Beaufort, and Suffolk, the Duke of York and his cronies step in to fill the power void in Act 4 Scene 5 of *2 Henry VI*. This moment proves to be a pivotal turning point for Margaret and her role as Queen. Wishing Suffolk were there to lead, she responds to Henry's sentimentality that "God our hope will succour us" with this depressing thought: "My hope is gone, now Suffolk is deceased" (*2H6* 4.5.54, 55). Margaret is without Suffolk's instruction, leadership, and companionship. She believes she has lost Henry's love. The kingdom is under assault. And Henry wants to leave it all in God's hands. Margaret is catapulted into a true leadership position recognized by friends and foes alike.

She stands up for Henry, his crown, and his kingdom as York declares Henry a "false King" and claims the throne for himself (*2H6* 5.1.91). Somerset, Clifford, and Margaret brand York a traitor, and York turns on Margaret with the full force of his malice:

> O blood-bespotted Neapolitan,
> Outcast of Naples, England's bloody scourge! (*2H6* 5.1.117-18)

York cuts down old Lord Clifford. York's son Richard, the "foul stigmatic," murders Somerset. And young Clifford sums up the situation (*2H6* 5.1.215):

> Shame and confusion, all is on the rout!
> Fear frames disorder, and disorder wounds
> Where it should guard. (*2H6* 5.1.31-3)

In the midst of the disorder brought on by Henry's failures, Margaret gives the orders. She presses him to run for his life, "Away my lord, you are slow, for shame, away!" (*2H6* 5.2.72). He cannot resist the urge to call on higher powers and question their fate, "Can we outrun the heavens? Good Margaret, stay" (*2H6* 5.2.73). While he calls on God, Margaret is pragmatic. She knows what will happen if Henry is captured: the same thing that happened to Richard II. York has explained to the audience and his allies that Henry IV:

> Seized on the realm, deposed the rightful king,
> Sent his poor queen to France from whence she came,
> And him to Pomfret; where, as all you know,
> Harmless Richard [II] was murdered traitorously. (*2H6* 2.2.24-7)

Editor Roger Warren quotes the acclaimed Dr. Samuel Johnson to corroborate Margaret's intuition. Dr. Johnson says, "The Queen's reproach is founded on a position long received among politicians, that the loss of a King's power is soon followed by loss of life" (see note to lines *2H6* 1.1.237-8). She blasts Henry for his weakness and takes command in her final speech of *2 Henry VI*:

> What are you made of? You'll nor fight nor fly.
> Now is it manhood, wisdom, and defence,
> To give the enemy way, and to secure us
> By what we can, which can no more but fly.
> If you be ta'en, we then should see the bottom
> Of all our fortunes; but if we haply scape—

> As well we may if not through your neglect—
> We shall to London get where you are loved,
> And where this breach now in our fortunes made
> May readily be stopped. (*2H6* 5.2.74-83)

Henry continues to disappoint Margaret and his allies as the action is restarted in *3 Henry VI*. He preaches patience to the "gentle Earl of Westmorland" and tells his "Cousin of Exeter" that "frowns, words, and threats / Shall be the war that Henry means to use" as if harsh language was enough to shake York's resolve (*3H6* 1.1.61, 72-3). Clifford responds in his characteristically direct way, "Patience is for poltroons" (*3H6* 1.1.62). After being forced into an absurd debate regarding who has a better claim to the throne—absurd because Henry sits on the throne, therefore his is the best claim—Exeter alone among Henry's allies defects to York's cause. Henry's reaction is histrionic: "All will revolt from me, and turn to him" (*3H6* 1.1.152). This too is absurd. Henry wears the crown. He is the rightful heir. Unwilling to fight for his crown, Henry hands the crown to York at the first sign of physical aggression. Warwick "stamps with his foot, and the Soldiers show themselves" (stage direction at line *3H6* 1.1.170). Henry requests from Warwick, "Let me for this my lifetime reign as King" (*3H6* 1.1.172). York consents with the promise that Henry "Confirm the crown to [York and his heirs]," and in exchange York will allow Henry to "reign in quiet while [he] liv'st" (*3H6* 1.1.173-4). Henry hastily capitulates and, in his own words, "unnaturally shall disinherit" his son, Prince Edward (*3H6* 1.1.194). Clifford, Northumberland, and Westmorland immediately abandon Henry, but they do not abandon his cause. Clifford says, "let us tell the Queen these news," and the three take turns cursing Henry as they exit (*3H6* 1.1.183).

Margaret confronts Henry for disinheriting their son in a scene that opens like one of Shakespeare's comedies. At Margaret's entrance, Exeter tries to "steal away" from her

anger (*3H6* 1.1.212). Henry says, "so will I" but is stopped by Margaret who claims she "will follow" him (*3H6* 1.1.213, 214). These few lines play out like a comedy of errors with husbands fleeing angry wives threatening to give chase. Henry is very much the henpecked husband Duke Humphrey had imagined as he pleads with Margaret to "Be patient" and begs pardon from both his wife and his son (*3H6* 1.1.215). The comical nature of the scene ends abruptly as Margaret heaps scorn upon Henry, wishes their son had never been born, and that she had never laid eyes on him. After claiming she would sooner have died than allow the act of Parliament that disinherited their son, she divorces herself "Both from thy table, Henry, and thy bed, / Until that act of Parliament be repealed" (*3H6* 1.1.249-50).

Margaret leaves Henry after promising that:

> The northern lords that have forsworn thy colours
> Will follow mine, if once they see them spread,
> And spread they shall be to thy foul disgrace
> And utter ruin of the house of York. (*3H6* 1.1.252-55)

Even after Margaret and her allies secure the throne for Henry and her son a second time, Henry abdicates his power and his son's title to the crown. The audience watches with incredulity as Henry says to Warwick,

> Warwick, although my head still wears the crown,
> I here resign my government to thee,
> For thou art fortunate in all thy deeds. (*3H6* 4.6.23-5)

Henry—again in Margaret's absence—gives Margaret no credit for rallying the troops, defeating York, securing the support of France, allying their army with Warwick, and protecting their son through years of hardship. He does not claim the title to the throne for his son. Henry stands by as Warwick and Clarence discuss the succession:

"therein Clarence shall not want his part" (*3H6* 4.6.57). Warwick intends to install Clarence as the heir, making his daughter, Clarence's wife, the next queen. Henry makes Warwick and Clarence "both Protectors of this land / While I myself will lead a private life" (*3H6* 4.6.41-2). Henry fails his family once again and misjudges Margaret, claiming the "joy of liberty is half eclipsed" by her absence—as if she will be pleased with the current state of affairs (*3H6* 4.6.63). She divorced herself from him the first time he made this decision. He could have looked to her as a helpmeet then, and he should do so now.

There was precedence for English kings relying on their French queens among Henry's forebears. Helen Castor in *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth* describes several instances in which queens of England ruled in their husbands' names while their kings were away from court. Henry II looked to his mother, the dowager Holy Roman Empress Matilda, and his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, for advice in political matters while he was waging campaigns in France. Isabella of France, queen to Edward II, administered the kingdom while the king put down the Scottish rebellions. These kings were Henry's direct ancestors and their French queens were Margaret's ancestors. Margaret may have been more capable than most queen-consorts because of the examples she witnessed in her own home. Her father's household was under the administration of her grandmother Yolanda of Aragon while her mother Isabelle of Lorraine "made her way to Naples as an advance guard for her imprisoned husband's claims here" (Castor 330).

Although Margaret exits in anger after Henry's first abdication, Shakespeare begins to demonstrate the many positive sides to her power. Margaret exercises her princely authority to divorce herself from Henry until she can reverse her son's

disinheritance. In this declaration, she becomes the *de facto* head of the family and chief of the Lancastrian army. She sets a manly example for her eighteen-year-old son—an example that was lacking in his father—and Prince Edward rises to the challenge, nobly declaring that he will follow Margaret until he can "return with victory from the field" (*3H6* 1.1.262). Rather than staying with his father "to be murdered by his enemies," Edward will valiantly attempt to reclaim his right to the throne on the battlefield (*3H6* 1.1.261). Explaining to her husband and son that the time for words has passed, Margaret leads Prince Edward into action, claiming Henry "hast spoke too much already" (*3H6* 1.1.259). Manly acts of valor are the only remaining option to reclaim Edward's title as heir, and Margaret leads by example.

We witness more examples of her princely power as the Queen leads the Lancastrian army, in alliance with the northern lords, Clifford, Northumberland, and Westmorland. Their army is victorious in several battles following her outraged speech to Henry. One of York's sons is cut down by Margaret's lieutenant, young Lord Clifford. Margaret herself stabs York "to right our gentle-hearted king" (*3H6* 1.4.176). Margaret reclaims custody of Henry so he cannot be used by York to lend legitimacy to his cause. Richard declares, "The army of the Queen hath got the field" (*3H6* 1.4.1). In his report to York's surviving sons, Warwick explains,

> But whether 'twas the coldness of the King
> Who looked full gently on his warlike queen
> That robbed the soldiers of their heated spleen,
> Or whether 'twas report of her success,
> Or more than common fear of Clifford's rigour,
> Who thunders to his captives blood and death,
> I cannot judge. (*3H6* 2.1.122-28)

Warwick cannot say with certainty why his soldiers "had no heart to fight" (*3H6* 2.1.135). He blames the unmanliness of the King, the manly belligerence of the Queen, and relentless Clifford's cruel and avenging actions. Warwick considers the Queen an equal among these men and is willing to ally himself with her against York's sons later in the play (prior to Henry's second abdication).

When Margaret becomes desperate for fresh troops and supplies, she demonstrates political savvy and maturity in King Lewis of France's court. She is willing to "strike her sail and learn awhile to serve / Where kings command" and "to my humble seat conform myself" (*3H6* 3.3.5-6, 11). She modestly pleads her case to Lewis on behalf of "That Henry, sole possessor of my love" and her "son Prince Edward, Henry's heir" (*3H6* 3.3.24, 31). A scant 130 lines after naming Warwick a traitor, Margaret will "forgive and quite forget old faults" of her former enemy when he is willing to join her cause (*3H6* 3.3.200). She expediently claims his "words have turned my hate to love" when he asks "my noble queen let former grudges pass" (*3H6* 3.3.199, 195).

As the battle is rejoined with Margaret and Warwick on the Lancastrian side and Edward and Richard on the Yorkist side, Margaret gives a rousing speech to her troops that recalls Queen Elizabeth I's speech on the eve of the battle of Tilbury. In an extended metaphor describing seas and shipwrecks, Margaret calls on her supporters to help her and her son right the ship of state that is threatened "with wrack" upon the "ruthless sea" of Edward of York's rule (*3H6* 5.4.23, 25). She tells these "Great lords, wise men ne'er sit and wail their loss" and to have courage because "'Twere childish weakness to lament or fear" (*3H6* 5.4.1, 38).

Prince Edward, Margaret's truest ally, speaks next as we imagine Suffolk would have done had he been present:

> Methinks a woman of this valiant spirit
> Should, if a coward heard her speak these words,
> Infuse his breast with magnanimity
> And make him, naked, foil a man-at-arms. (*3H6* 5.4.39-42)

Margaret's speech has so inspired her son, he believes her words could give enough courage to a naked man that he could defeat an armed and armored soldier. The lords of Oxford and Somerset agree, claiming "'twere a perpetual shame" for warriors to be "faint" in the face of "Women and children of so high a courage" (*3H6* 5.4.51, 50). Oxford goes on to claim that Prince Edward is the living likeness of his "famous grandfather" Henry V (*3H6* 5.4.52). Margaret, undeterred by a compliment to her son that fails to give her credit for his bravery, graciously gives thanks to both lords for their kind words and support. She knows they will back her cause as she orders them to "give signal to the fight!" (*3H6* 5.4.82).

And Margaret demonstrates her courage, strength of will, and devotion to her son in her final scene on stage. As her enemies take her captive and kill Prince Edward, she begs them to "dispatch me here" (*3H6* 5.5.69). She wants them to kill her too, showing herself to be the opposite in character of Henry who preferred his life before his honor (paraphrase of line *3H6* 1.1.247).

Margaret the "She-wolf"

Margaret proves herself a successful and formidable antagonist against Henry's foes. In the battles she is forced to fight and princely decisions she is forced to make,

Shakespeare also demonstrates the negative side of Margaret's power. As she has exerted herself on Henry's behalf, as she gains political power and military strength throughout Parts 2 and 3 of *Henry VI*, the men around her blame Margaret for actions outside her control and question her very nature. York starts this process early in *2 Henry VI* when he labels Margaret, "England's dear-bought queen" (*2H6* 1.1.251). York implies that Margaret was not worth the price paid for her marriage to Henry. This is the kindest thing he and his misogynistic sons say about her in the ten acts that make up these two plays.

Much later as Margaret holds him captive, York excoriates her womanhood. Sitting atop his molehill with a paper crown atop his head, York opens and closes his speech by calling attention to her foreignness. He calls her the "She-wolf of France, but worse than wolves of France" and closes by naming her a "false Frenchwoman" (*3H6* 1.4.111, 149). He compares her to predatory animals, wolves, and tigers: "O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide" (*3H6* 1.4.137).[12] She is "more inhuman…O ten times more than tigers of Hyrcania" (*3H6* 1.4.154-55). He resorts to petty name calling, and claims she is ugly. She is an "Amazonian trull," "shameless," "proud," and "abominable" because she is not pretty enough to deserve her pride (*3H6* 1.4.120, 128, 133). And worst of all, she is unwomanly. He demands to know how she could "drain the life-blood of the child [Rutland]…And yet be seen to bear a woman's face?" (*3H6* 1.4.138-40). He continues:

[12] These are two of several speeches in *2-3 Henry VI* in which one or more characters are referred to as a wolf or wolves. In each case, the reference indicates the wolf-like character is acting as a predator preying on a perceived enemy. Margaret refers to Duke Humphrey as a wolf preying on the king and kingdom at line *2H6* 3.1.78 and twice calls York a wolf in *3 Henry VI* at lines 1.1.243 and 5.4.80. York calling her a wolf could be construed as her being treated as an equal to the martial men of the play except this characterization is considered more unseemly in a woman than in a man.

> Women are soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible;
> Thou [are] stern, obdurate, flinty, rough, remorseless.
> (*3H6* 1.4.141-42)

She is a “ruthless queen” and “too cruel” for handing York a cloth soaked in the blood of his son Rutland: “This cloth though dipped’st in blood of my sweet boy” (*3H6* 1.4.156, 166, 157). This is the scene of her “savage cruelty" in Stephen Greenblatt’s words. He notes that “sadistic pleasure is no longer limited to the male world” (Greenblatt 196). French calls her “openly horrible” because she “does not behave as women are supposed to: she is false to her skin…Because she has not behaved better than the men, but rather, has acted *like* them” (61). French further explains that this is why she is “subhuman” according to York (61). Pitt says, “Margaret is totally evil and unnatural because she lacks womanly qualities” (153).

Stage productions of this scene have tended to emphasize Margaret’s femininity by sexualizing her behavior as she taunts York. Terry Hand’s 1977 casting of Helen Mirren “deliberately added an overtly sexual element to the relationships in the play” (RSC *H6* 354). Mirren “caresses York’s face – but leaves it smeared with his child’s blood. She watches his agony in twitching, feline fascination. When he collapses in her lap, she rocks him maternally before clasping a sword and thrusting him through, a final erotic release” (RSC *H6* 354). Fiona Bell’s 2000 performance directed by Michael Boyd also linked sex with violence. Bell described her own performance: “I thought she should be practically salivating when she is humiliating York and definitely be sexually aroused” (RSC *H6* 355). Tina Packer who has both played the part of Margaret and directed this scene believes, “This man Margaret so hates is the man with whom she goes through a most intimate act. Killing someone can be as intimate as lovemaking” (32). She goes on

to describe how she positions herself to stab York and the visceral quality of the moment. She says, “I can smell his body” (Packer 32). Barbara Jefford “was a radiant young beauty” whose “taunting and murder of York was spine-chilling in its sheer cruelty” (Clarke).

Penny Downie took a different tack in this scene. She believed that Margaret should behave like an animal but remain human, otherwise it was “impossible to deal with her emotions at Tewkesbury” when her own son is murdered (Downie 132). Katy Stephens appears to have followed Downie’s approach in her 2006 performance of Margaret in Michael Boyd’s production of both history cycles, an octology of the histories, for the Royal Shakespeare Company. In this unique production, Shakespeare scholar Kate Wilkinson explains that Stephens’ Margaret “created a greater distance between the character and the audience’s sympathy” because she “was fighting for her own son’s future with such inhumane violence” (66). However, Margaret was redeemed in the eyes of the audience in the scene of her son’s murder. That “moment revealed a humanity in Margaret that had not previously been apparent" (Wilkinson on Boyd 67).

Margaret is not acting out of kindness when she torments and stabs York. But then, why should she? York is the traitor here, not Margaret. Margaret believes she is saving the kingdom, the King, Prince Edward, and herself from this traitor and the Parliamentary act by which Henry, the “timorous wretch,…hast undone thyself, thy son, and me” (*3H6* 1.1.232-33). Terrible in her glory, Margaret is justified in her joy at York’s defeat.

Unlike Margaret of the chronicles who sat on the sidelines of the battlefield while Clifford struck down York, Shakespeare gives Margaret direct action against York. The

Duke of York demands that "Hard-hearted Clifford, take me from the world, / My soul to heaven, my blood upon your **heads**" (*3H6* 1.4.167-68, emphasis added). In his enduring sexism, he will blame both Clifford and Margaret for his death but refuses to die by her hand. Margaret, perhaps thinking she will claim her share of blood and blame, stabs York after Clifford stabs him.

Shakespeare's Margaret is an equal to York. She captures him in battle. Her retribution is an act of war—a war that he starts and she attempts to finish. If she is cruel, why should we shudder? As an audience we are reacting to our own gendered views of the world. As Martha Kurtz says, "We can see the nightmare violence for what it is more clearly in a woman than in a man because we are less accustomed to it there" (271). If we are more shocked by her cruelty than the barbaric acts committed by the men, that is because, as a society, we have become habituated to violence perpetrated by men.

One cannot help but wonder what the men of the play believe Margaret is supposed to do. Like Humphrey before them, York, Edward, and Richard believe she is meant to stay out of these affairs of state. Even her ally Northumberland sheds tears looking on the scene of York's torment and death. The implication seems to be that Margaret should be weeping and perhaps merciful as Northumberland claims,

> Had he [York] been slaughterman to all my kin,
> I should not, for my life, but weep with him,
> To see how inly sorrow gripes his soul. (*3H6* 1.4.169-71)

In response to Northumberland's tears, Margaret stays focused on the task at hand and recalls the actions that placed them all in this scene. She says to the Northern lord, "Think but upon the wrong he did us all" (*3H6* 1.4.173). York is the traitor. And York is the character who has described to the audience what happened when Richard II was

overthrown. King Richard was murdered. Queen Isabella was sent back to her father in France. They had no son to disinherit, but it seems safe to assume his life would not have ended peacefully. Margaret assumes this too; else she would not keep Prince Edward by her side at all times. She says as much to Henry when Edward chooses to follow his mother rather than, in her words, stay behind "to be murdered by his enemies," (*3H6* 1.1.261). Even if she survives to be banished to France, her son's life will be forfeit.

Margaret's enemies and critics speak of her "crimes" in these plays. These two scenes (the deaths of Rutland and York) are most frequently cited. Although Shakespeare makes it clear from the action on stage and the men's own words that Margaret was not even present at Rutland's death, she is blamed for it by her peers and critics alike. As Janet Adelman says, "Given that Margaret wasn't even present at Rutland's death, the degree to which she is retroactively made responsible for that murder is astonishing" (240). York inaccurately accuses her of draining the life-blood of his son and holds her responsible for this act of violence (*3H6* 1.4.138). But her true "crime" seems to be her refusal to conform to York's stereotype of a woman, that "Women are soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible" (*3H6* 1.4.141). Theodora Jankowski claims that "in terms of early modern gender construction… [Margaret is] appalling" (112). She is not a likeable character nor is she a good woman; however, she is "successful at male jobs that men have tried to do and failed" and that is the real threat that Margaret poses (Jankowski 113).

As a result of this sexism, when Margaret is forced to watch as her son is cut down by her enemies, no man present weeps for her. Downie says, "She shows no sympathy for York and it is difficult to feel any sympathy for her after this episode [the

molehill execution of York]" (131). "Unlike Northumberland, who pitied York, no one in the play pities Margaret…[because] she had defied the conventions of role" (Dash 191).

Condemned by the men of the play for defying their deeply held stereotypes of a woman's place (as defined by York in his molehill speech), she is denied the death she begs for. In the enduring sexism characteristic of York men, they refuse to treat her as an equal and end her life. Instead, they (attempt to) banish her and infantilize her, returning her to her father like an unwanted child. Edward orders his brother to "waft her hence to France" like Richard II's Queen Isabella (*3H6* 5.7.41). They will regret this seeming act of charity as she foretells, "So come to you and yours as to this prince" (*3H6* 5.5.82).

Margaret is forced to live with the consequences of her princely actions—the very real losses that resulted from her decisions. And she is forced to live on in history as an object of revulsion. Irene Dash says, "As for the critics, the majority adopt York's point of view" (187). Roy Aycock, in his otherwise well-argued analysis of the relationship between Margaret and Richard in *Richard III*, makes the claim that "*Henry VI* (2 and 3) shows Captain Margaret as cruel and ruthless. Of her many feats of derring-do, two acts of cruelty in particular place her in competition with our villain-hero" Richard who murdered his way to the throne (74). Aycock goes on to inaccurately recount that she "participates in the death of young Rutland" (74). We know Margaret was not present at Rutland's death. And Aycock's argument does not hinge on her presence. Yet he repeats the fallacy asserted by York that she has "drain[ed] the life-blood of the child" in a scholarly-reviewed work (*3H6* 1.4.138). M.L. Stapleton also quotes York, claiming "her victim's point seems well taken: 'How ill-beseeming is it in thy sex / To triumph like an Amazonian trull'" in his analysis of the molehill scene (17). He unfavorably compares

her to the lawless Jack Cade, who “does not seem more contemptible” than Margaret (Stapleton 17). Angela Pitt, clearly no fan of Margaret, quotes Richard, claiming that upon her entrance in *Richard III*, Margaret is the “‘foul wrinkled witch’ Richard calls her” (155). Not only does Pitt spare no sympathy for Margaret, she blames Margaret for her own son’s death. She says, “nothing Margaret fosters or hopes for can ever come to good” (Pitt 155).

Dash notes that “A critic who tends to accept either York’s description of her or Edward’s is overlooking the dramatic context in which the speeches occur” (186). Although Margaret’s words, deeds, and decisions may seem terrible, they were acts of war deemed necessary by an embattled queen defending the king and the kingdom against powerful traitors. Even her worst actions do not approach those of the men who wear the blood of many lives on their hands. Margaret knows this, and as a result, she refuses to answer for her so-called “crimes” in *2-3 Henry VI* or when she reappears unexpectedly in *Richard III*. She perseveres in her struggle to right the wrongs committed in these earlier plays.

Shakespeare’s Margaret is a portrait of extreme contradictions. Fiercer than the Margaret of the chronicles, his fictional Margaret is relentless, uncompromising, and cruel toward her enemies whom she hunts down and attempts to destroy. She also is loyal and loving toward her friends and family, defending her husband when he is unwilling to defend himself. Shakespeare has made Margaret more active and emotionally complex than the version of her we discover in the chronicles. Margaret is present for and a participant in York’s death as well as present for her own son’s death, experiencing firsthand the extremes of triumph and anguish. These contradictions were invented by

Shakespeare, forcing audiences to consider what it means to be a man or a woman wielding executive power in times of conflict. Who is to blame for civil war: the man who commits treason or the woman who refuses to yield to him? Demonstrating Shakespeare's ambivalence about queens exercising power, these questions go unanswered in the *Henry VI* plays. Margaret takes on a less ambiguous role in *Richard III*. "Having lost all, she fears no one" (Dash 193). She is more effective, and she gets the last word, as we see when Shakespeare anachronistically adds her to *Richard III*.

Chapter V

Widow and Prophetess in *Richard III*

Although she appears in two scenes only, Margaret's presence in *Richard III* is powerful and pervasive. Her cursing haunts the men and empowers the women for the duration of the play. Historically Margaret was a pauper, living out the end of her life in exile in France. She died in 1482, a year before Edward IV's death. But Shakespeare's Margaret defies Edward IV's banishment of her at the end of *3 Henry VI* and reappears in *Richard III*. Shakespeare adds her to *Richard III* to fulfill her curses and to stage manage the "utter ruin of the house of York" with the help of the Duchess of York and the widowed Queen Elizabeth (*3H6* 1.1.255). This unusual artistic decision suggests Shakespeare invested in the powerful character he created in the previous plays and felt Margaret deserved a pivotal place in the action that continues into *Richard III*.

On stage and screen however, this has not always been the case. Many productions have excluded Margaret. We will briefly explore the history of these productions and what Margaret's loss represents. *Richard III* without her is a very different play than the one in which Shakespeare placed Margaret deliberately and anachronistically. This thesis will continue to make the case for Margaret as essential to the entirety of the tetralogy, including *Richard III*. The following pages will argue that Shakespeare plucks Margaret from banishment and the grave with an intent that goes beyond a need for her to serve as the voice of divine justice as the chronicles and critics have stated. Shakespeare's Margaret serves as a female counterpoint to Richard's male aggression. In Margaret, Shakespeare created the only character strong enough to act

against Richard and to lead the women against him. Textual evidence suggests that Shakespeare had far more respect for Margaret than twentieth and twenty-first century critics and producers, as this chapter will show.

Richard III on Stage

Richard III has stood alone more often than it has been performed as part of this history cycle. As a singular tragedy it has enjoyed popularity since its first casting with the laudable Richard Burbage in the title role. It has been continuously performed since its first staging in the 1590s. Queen Margaret disappeared early from these productions. John Jowett in his Oxford edition of the play describes the second-most famous adaptation by Colley Cibber. In 1700, Cibber cut the text dramatically and altered it to reflect the cultural and historical period in which it was performed (*R3* 72). Performance historian Rebecca Brown explains that Cibber first cut Margaret from the play along with several other dominant characters. Brown suggests this was either an attempt to reduce the number of speaking parts (fifty-two) to a number that could be managed reasonably by an acting troupe, or a means of making Richard more domineering.

In 1821 William Macready looked back to Shakespeare's original text in an attempt to revive the Bard's vision, while retaining many of Cibber's cuts and additions. Jowett explains that in Macready's staging of the play, "Margaret, Hastings, and Clarence were [re]introduced only for the opportunities they offered Richard, not as significant dramatic roles in themselves. Margaret's role in particular remained severely curtailed" (*R3* 90).

With few notable exceptions twentieth and twenty-first century performances carry on the tradition of cutting Margaret although they have added back the men's parts that were reduced in past performances (RSC *R3* 173). Exceptions include Barry Kyle's 2003 staging at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre featuring an all-female cast and "Linda Bassett's powerful Queen Margaret," and the 1982 BBC series directed by Jane Howell with Julia Foster as Margaret. The all-female performance was meant to "rehabilitate the notion that the female voice is also a voice of history, just one that's rarely heard" (Wilkinson 65). However, the critics Lois Potter and Elizabeth Klet quoted by Kate Wilkinson seemed to believe the female actors were better at performing the male parts than the female parts. In contrast, in a 2011 all-male production by the theater troupe Propeller that included Queen Margaret, the male performers were better at portraying the women's "warrior-like resolve" (65, 68). As an audience it seems, we are unable to set aside our own stereotypes of gender roles and accept Shakespeare's gender-bending characters as they are written. Perhaps the women reviewing Kyle's all-female performance mimic the women in this history cycle who "have great difficulty liking or sympathizing with others of their sex" (Dash 156).

In a very few cases including Peggy Ashcroft's performance in John Barton's production (discussed in Chapter 2), Margaret's part has been expanded. Sam Mendes' 1992 production by the Royal Shakespeare Company included a Margaret who "haunted the doorways above the stage at the death of each of Richard's victims, repeating her earlier prophetic curses as each came to pass. She remained in this vantage point throughout Act 5, tapping one piece of wood against the other as time ran out for Richard. The fight against Richmond was evenly matched until Margaret appeared before

Richard, causing him to falter and fall beneath Richmond's sword" (RSC Productions 1963-2003, n.d., para 11).

It is more typical for actors playing Richard and for directors stage managing *Richard III* to cut rather than expand Margaret's part. For instance, Antony Sher documents his time playing Richard in Bill Alexander's 1984 production. In his diary and sketchbook titled *Year of the King*, we can follow the progression or perhaps more aptly, the diminution of Margaret, from rehearsal to opening night. Pat Routledge played Margaret in this production. In Sher's first mention of the "Queen Margaret scene [1.3]," Sher explains that the director wanted "to try a different way of playing the scene" and recalls Pat Routledge as saying she is "'the mother-in-law that won't go away,'" kicking off rehearsals by cutting Margaret down to a stereotype (165). In his next mention of Margaret, Sher explains that it is "increasingly difficult forcing the text to fit [the director's] idea…Pat is doing very interesting things though" (172). A reader might almost be comforted that a correction is in the works until Mal Storry (the actor who plays Buckingham) goes "very quiet" and says, "'It's all wrong. It undermines Margaret's power'" (Sher 172). They try other approaches to Margaret in her scene with Richard, and Sher proclaims the "result is a disaster" (185). It seems the only solution to the problematic confrontation between Margaret and Richard is greatly reducing her part. Margaret is allowed her confrontation of Richard, but not the dialog that follows, in which "Shakespeare has her cursing the others again. Most of this stuff gets cut" (206). Sher attempts to reassure his readers by explaining that "Pat loses a lot [of her lines] but takes it well and with good humour" (206). One can almost hear the echo of Richard's

own pretend sympathy toward Margaret at the end of this very same scene, "She hath had too much wrong, and I repent / My part thereof that I have done to her" (*R3* 1.3.307-8).

The widely acclaimed postwar *Richard III* starring Laurence Olivier and directed by John Burrell at the Old Vic in 1944 (adapted into a successful film version in 1955) cut out Margaret completely. Ian McKellen's fascist *Richard III* under the direction of Richard Eyre at the National Theatre in London in 1992 (also a movie in 1995) and the wicked *Richard III* performed by Mark Rylance and directed by Tim Carroll at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in 2012 also excised Margaret from these plays.

Eliminating Margaret completely from *Richard III* is not an easy task. Even when she is cut from the two scenes in which she appears on stage, her presence is pervasive. Lady Anne first invokes her name in Act 1 Scene 2 while cursing Richard. When Richard denies Anne's murderous accusations, she rebuts him, "Queen Margaret saw / Thy bloody falchion smoking in his [Prince Edward's] blood" (*R3* 1.2.91-2), bringing Margaret into the story before her appearance in the following scene. Richard says his actions were Margaret's fault: "I was provokéd by her sland'rous tongue" (*R3* 1.2.95) as if that were reason enough to commit murder.

Richard himself conjures the memory of Margaret while she floats about the stage in Act 1 Scene 3, before he is aware of her presence. He recalls the battle in which Queen Elizabeth's first husband was struck down, questioning, "Was not your husband / In Margaret's battle at Saint Albans slain?" (*R3* 1.3.129-30). And both Hastings and Buckingham recall Margaret's cursing from 1.3 at the moment of their preordained deaths. Hastings cries, "O Margaret, Margaret, now thy heavy curse / Is lighted on poor Hastings' wretched head" (*R3* 3.4.97-8). As Buckingham falls to the executioner's axe

for trying to right Richard's wrongs and his part in them, he too says Margaret's name twice upon his exit. Quoting her own warning, Buckingham says,

> Now Margaret's curse is fallen upon my head.
> 'When he,' quoth she, 'shall split thy heart with sorrow,
> Remember Margaret was a prophetess.' (*R3* 5.1.25-7)

If Margaret is cut from her two scenes, a director must then decide what to do with these lines (and many others not cited here). As Mary Clarke says about editing this tetralogy, "Heavy cutting seldom simplifies Shakespeare. The words may seem lifeless on the page but they are part of the overall design, and if whole scenes are lopped away then subsequent developments will seem arbitrary." Anne, Richard, Hastings, Buckingham, and Elizabeth potentially lose powerful lines scattered throughout the play—all of which include references to Margaret and none of which makes sense to an audience experiencing the play without her.

As Martha Kurtz says, "Shakespeare seems to go out of his way to emphasize the plight of these helpless women" (270). The impact of cutting Margaret is particularly severe for the other women characters. Without Margaret, the other women's losses are significantly lessened in scope. The scenes in which the Duchess and Elizabeth confront Richard lose their context at best or need to be cut for clarity, making these strong women appear weak. Elizabeth and the Duchess of York appear directionless and mere victims of Richard's actions; they are simple pawns rather than corrective forces for righteousness under Margaret's tutelage and orchestration. The Duchess of York's railing against Richard in Act 4 Scene 4 seems more random than deliberate without the preface of Margaret's instruction. One might feel forced to cut these lines as well. Then the

Duchess barely has a part, which would be a great loss. How else would we know Richard is so evil his own mother wishes he had not been born?

If Margaret is cut, Richard's "wooing" of Queen Elizabeth in Act 4, Scene 4 also risks being cut or entirely misinterpreted. Without Margaret's tutelage of Elizabeth, instructing her how to withstand Richard, and the Duchess' attack on him in Elizabeth's presence, Richard's "wooing" scene with Elizabeth is too easy to interpret as Richard himself sees it: as Elizabeth giving in to him.[13] Without Margaret the play has few women, all with very small parts, and all of whom appear weak. It is very different from Shakespeare's play in which these women are strong and exit the action deliberately and by choice. "Margaret's dismissal from performances utterly destroys the balance of the play" (Besnault & Bitot 118).

Perhaps Margaret is cut from the play because she is Richard's competitor for control of the action. Kate Wilkinson believes the play is "a star vehicle about the lead actor" and cutting was and is employed "to keep the focus on Richard's character" (52). Although impossible to prove, it is easy to imagine that the male superstars playing the role of Richard III, working with the men who produce and direct these productions, would not want to compete with a woman for the spotlight. There is too much potential for a star in the role of Richard to be upstaged by a Margaret, especially when played by a superstar actress. Margaret's absence from many widely-acclaimed productions could also be self-perpetuating. Directors can cite precedence. She is labeled unnecessary

[13] Warren Cherniak quotes Ian McKellen as claiming that Margaret's removal is necessary because her presence "might confuse cinema audiences" unless lines were added to explain who she is (46). The McKellen film version of *Richard III* somewhat redeems itself by giving some of Margaret's lines to the Duchess in the scene in which she blasts Richard. This film also adds a scene on the eve of battle in which Richmond marries young Elizabeth, clearing up any ambiguity about whether or not Elizabeth gives in to Richard's wooing of her daughter.

because so many productions have been box office hits without her. We wonder which came first: cutting her from productions because she is unnecessary to the action or calling her unnecessary because she has been cut from the play "successfully" in the past.

Removing Margaret from stage and screen productions, as though her appearance is a printer's error, changes Shakespeare's intentions for the entirety of the play, not just Margaret's place in it. Shakespeare created Margaret as the architect of Richard's downfall. As such, she is central and pivotal to the action and to the empowerment of the women around her, as the following argument will demonstrate.

Shakespeare's Purpose

In the canon of Shakespearean criticism and commentary, there is much debate about what Margaret stands for in *Richard III*. We know she is not there simply as a reminder of Richard's past crimes as some critics cited above have suggested. Richard himself is quite honest about the tragedies that have come before the action of this play and his part in them. Lady Anne recalls the horrors that led to King Henry VI's death while standing over the dead king's open casket (Act 1 Scene 2). And together, Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York, Richard's mother, keep his recent crimes top of mind for the audience (Act 4 Scene 4).

Echoing the voices of the chroniclers Hall and Holinshed, Phyllis Rackin sees Margaret as "the voice of Divine vengeance" (*Anti-historians* 337). Some claim she "emerges as the embodiment of female revenge," whereas Penny Downie sees her as an "ageless figure of moral nemesis" (RSC *R3* 187). Downie, who played Margaret in Adrian Noble's 1988 adaptation of the tetralogy titled *The Plantagenets*, discusses her

performance of Queen Margaret in the Cambridge series, *Players of Shakespeare*. From Downie's perspective, "to call Margaret simply mad [in *Richard III*] is a crude reduction of her complexity…She is altogether so original that labels are unhelpful" (115). Downie sees her as "obsessive, jealous, destructive, [and] capricious… [and she] is a woman who always speaks out, at precisely the right time, and seems to get away with it" (123). Although Downie's last comment was in the context of the *Henry VI* plays, it seems especially poignant when considered in *Richard III* where Margaret's only recourse, her only action, is that of speech.

Although Margaret rails against her enemies (almost every other character) in *Richard III*, she "is not just some crazed bitch walking around court cursing people," according to Sarah Fallon who played Queen Margaret in all four plays of the tetralogy at the American Shakespeare Center in the 2008/09 season (Minton 2). M.L. Stapleton insists that Margaret is present because of her histrionics: "Margaret resembles a ghost such as Agrippina in *Octavia*, or a fury such as Megæra in *Thyestes*, or the spiteful goddess Juno in *Hercules Furens*, spitting curses in ahistorical moments that Shakespeare invents for decisive dramatic effect" (101).

Phyllis Rackin (quoted above) states that Margaret is unnecessary to the plot of *Richard III*. She does concede in her frequently cited text, *Engendering a Nation* coauthored with Jean E. Howard, that the "strongest characters in those earlier plays [the histories] are often women" (218). Margaret, they continue, "provides the only significant opposition to the villainous protagonist through most of [*Richard III*]" (Howard and Rackin 218). Sadly, these two comments are buried in the notes section of *Engendering a Nation*. In her recent essay titled, "Richard III: A Modern Perspective," in

the 2014 Folger edition of *Richard III*, Rackin admits that "Although Margaret appears in only two scenes, the other characters' recollections of her curses and prophesies sustain her status as Richard's competitor for control and interpretation of the dramatic action" (349). But Professor Rackin breezes past this point with characteristic aplomb, simultaneously making and missing the argument.

Rackin is right that, from a purely historical point of view, Margaret has no real role in *Richard III*. The end would be the same without her as countless productions of the play have proven. However, one's position on Rackin's statement that Margaret has no role in the plot is dependent on one's definition of "plot." In his *Poetics*, Aristotle defined plot as "the arrangement of the incidents." As Roy Aycock says, "the play, on one level at least, is a dramatic working-out of [Margaret's] imprecations and prophecies" (70). Rather than leaving to chance that the self-proclaimed "villain" will be undone by his own deeds and conscience, Shakespeare adds Margaret as a direct antagonist to Richard, a direct challenge to his power (*R3* 1.1.30). Her words and deeds provide structure for "the arrangement of the incidents" and allow Margaret to challenge and ultimately defeat Richard. A close reading of the text will demonstrate the power Margaret wields directly against Richard and indirectly via her influence on Richard's mother the Duchess of York and Queen Elizabeth, Richard's widowed sister-in-law. In editor John Jowett's words, "It is the women who identify or implement these causes of [Richard's] defeat" (*R3* 2). And it is Margaret who leads them.

Margaret in Action

Margaret first appears on stage ghost-like and choric in Act 1 Scene 3. Bereft of her son, husband, and crown, she recounts the crimes that have come before the action of *Richard III*. Widowed, wandering, and suffering the consequences of her princely words and deeds in *2-3 Henry VI*, she reminds the audience of her personal losses. Margaret drifts ghostlike, but she is focused on her intent. When she is ready, she announces herself to the characters on stage, demanding their attention and establishing herself as an equal and a force to be reckoned with. Shakespeare uses a variety of plot and speech devices in 1.3 that deliberately position Margaret as an equal to Richard. In her first address to the crowd surrounding her, she demands their attention:

> Hear me, you wrangling pirates that fall out
> In sharing that which you have pilled from me.
> Which of you trembles not that looks on me?—
> If not that, I being queen, you bow like subjects,
> Yet that, by you deposed, you quake like rebels.
> (*To Gloucester*) O gentle villain, do not turn away.
> (*R3* 1.3.158-63)

To which Richard alone responds, "Foul wrinkled witch, what mak'st thou in my sight?" (*R3* 1.3.162). Richard, commanded to attention, is surprised by her appearance, and he takes it personally. She stands in a room with at least a half-dozen people, but Richard demands to know why she stands in "my sight." Margaret calls him out as he attempts to flee her verbal attack.

This is the only time we see Richard off balance before the scenes immediately preceding his defeat. Not coincidentally, this is the only scene he shares with Margaret. He asks a question he should know the answer to, "Wert thou not banishèd on pain of

death?" (*R3* 1.3.165). Richard tries to silence her, argue against her, mock her with the help of Dorset who calls her a "lunatic," and ignore her, all to no avail (*R3* 1.3.255). She does not exit the scene until she has said everything she intends to say.

Any member of the audience familiar with her role in *1-3 Henry VI* should know things are not going to proceed as her enemies demand or predict. Margaret refocuses the conversation on her losses. She persists in cursing all of those present. Richard's attempts to silence her descend into the petty name-calling and childish tricks that we see again when he is confronted by his mother in Act 4. He interrupts Margaret's curse. For ten beats, they complete each other's thoughts, fill in each other's blanks, and attempt to outdo one another.

> MARGARET: Thou rag of honour, thou detested—
> RICHARD: Margaret.
> MARGARET: Richard.
> RICHARD: Ha?
> MARGARET: I call thee not. (*R3* 1.3.230-4)

Margaret maintains the upper-hand, speaking the final syllables of their shared line. Richard, putting on a show and acting as if he is magnanimously resolving a misunderstanding between them, says to her, "I cry thee mercy then, for I did think / That thou hadst called me all these bitter names" (*R3* 1.3.235-6). Margaret speaks her final crushing line to Richard, "Why, so I did, but looked for no reply" (*R3* 1.3.237). Richard is beneath her contempt and not worthy of her attention. He addresses her again, and she ignores him.

The princely power Margaret exercised in the *Henry VI* plays has come back to haunt her here but also to give her power against Richard. Her grief sustains her as Richard attempts to rebuff her memories and cursing. He takes a page from her playbook

and recalls, “The curse my noble father laid on thee” (*R3* 1.3.171). But Margaret, like Richard, “cannot brook the accent of reproof” (*R3* 4.4.152). She is adamant in her refusal to answer for the crime of which she is accused. This crime, the slaying of Rutland, Richard’s brother, was not committed by Margaret (as discussed earlier). Yet Hastings, Rivers, Dorset, and Buckingham all speak as though Margaret has stabbed young Rutland. Margaret is guilty of taunting York with a handkerchief steeped in his son’s blood and tormenting him before his violent end. Margaret also stabs York in *3 Henry VI* Act 1 Scene 4, but this is not the crime of which she is accused.[14]

Margaret ignores their accusations and stays focused on her ultimate goal, Richard’s downfall. Like the queen of the chessboard, she moves anywhere and everywhere, using Elizabeth to outflank Richard. She takes the long view of history; she sees there are two battles to be won. First she must defeat Elizabeth, bringing her as low as Margaret herself. Then Elizabeth, as inheritor of the power of Margaret’s grief, will set the stage to defeat Richard. Margaret alone has powers that can exceed Richard’s. Margaret will pass on those powers to Elizabeth, but only after Elizabeth has suffered as profoundly as Margaret.

[14] It is not entirely clear why Hastings, Rivers, Dorset, and Buckingham lay the blame for Rutland’s death at Margaret’s feet when they can more accurately blame her for York’s death. Although Clifford strikes the first, and presumably fatal, blow in York’s death, Margaret personally cuts him with her sword, ensuring he will not survive. Perhaps because Rutland is described as a “babe” and Margaret is a woman and a mother, they hold her to an alternative or higher standard (*R3* 1.3.180). York calls her more “inhuman” than a cannibal for dipping a cloth in his son’s blood (*R3* 1.4.154). The placing of blame for these crimes is further complicated by the fact that it is impossible to unravel who started it, *i.e.*, it is impossible to point to the originating offense that began this civil disharmony. We do know York was a traitor to his king, claiming the throne for himself. We know they engaged in battle because Margaret refused to accept the accord that disinherited her son, and, Margaret believed, endangered her husband’s life. We also know that Margaret is not acting primarily for her own advantage. When she stabs York, she says, “here’s to right our gentle-hearted king” (*R3* 1.4.176).

Margaret is bent on cutting Elizabeth down to her own unhappy state because Elizabeth is the usurper of her power, a “Poor painted queen, vain flourish of my fortune” (*R3* 1.3.241). She rants and rails against Elizabeth in Act 1 Scene 3, sounding very much like the crazed old woman they accuse her of being. But there is a warning in her words, a warning she reserves for Elizabeth alone. Margaret reveals, “The day will come that thou shalt wish for me / To help thee curse this poisonous bunch-backed toad” (*R3* 1.3.245-6). However, that day cannot come until the woman who has usurped her place usurps “the just proportion of [her] sorrow” (*R3* 4.4.104). Elizabeth does not understand Margaret’s attack on her. Richard explains, “you have all the vantage of her wrong” (Arden *R3* 1.3.309).

As Margaret’s curses become prophesies and her prophesies become history, she does not relent. By the time of her second appearance in Act 4, nearly every one of Margaret’s forewarnings has come to pass. Clarence is dead. The two young princes are dead. Lords Hastings, Rivers, Vaughn, and Grey are all dead. Buckingham remains, but Margaret foretold his death too; so we know he does not have long to live. Richard remains. As John Jowett says, the power of her predictions “cannot be deflected. Richard shows no sign of caring that the machinations by which he kills Rivers, Vaughan, Gray, Hastings, and Buckingham enact not only his programme but also Margaret’s. By the logic that they die, so will he” (*R3* 48).

Queen Margaret, the Duchess, and Queen Elizabeth

Margaret reenters in Act 4 Scene 4 at the peak of the women’s grief. When the reminders seem most unnecessary, Margaret pushes the blade in deeper. Elizabeth’s

husband, sons, and brother are dead. And still Margaret reminds Elizabeth of the crimes that led to her losses:

> I had an Edward, till a Richard killed him:
> I had a Harry, till a Richard killed him. (*R3* 4.4.37-8).

Margaret continues to blast Elizabeth (and the Duchess of York) with reminders of Richard's crimes and Elizabeth's complicity in his crimes. Her goal is the utter destruction of Richard. Her strategy is to reduce Elizabeth to a state equal to her own misery and to bequeath the power she wields in that misery.

The Duchess of York, wallowing in her own sorrows, tries to defend Elizabeth by recalling Margaret's hand in her husband and son's deaths. Margaret twists the knife, reminding the Duchess of the losses she has not yet named, "Thou hadst a Clarence too, and Richard killed him" (*R3* 4.4.43). As if that were not enough, Margaret blames the Duchess for giving birth to Richard, "From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept / A hell-hound that doth hunt us all to death" (*R3* 4.4.44-5).

But even as Margaret continues these attacks, a shift in the balance of power occurs in this scene. The women achieve parity in their grief. Elizabeth, no longer queen, sits with her mother-in-law, the old Duchess of York. The RSC edition of the play includes editorial stage directions indicating that Margaret sits among the women in scene 4.4. The Duchess "sits down" at line 29. Elizabeth "sits with her" at line 34. And Margaret "sits with them" at line 38. In the Oxford text, the stage directions are quite different. Margaret remains standing after entering first while the Duchess and Elizabeth sit in sorrow at line 24. Margaret is on her feet and "coming forward" at line 31 to

address the two women. The Duchess stands after line 40, and Elizabeth rises to her feet at line 109.[15]

The Oxford staging that places all three women on their feet feels more in keeping with what we know of Margaret. We know Margaret is not above using her "talk and tears / Both full of truth" to advance her cause (*3H6* 3.3.158-59). We also know Margaret is not likely to sit and weep while there is work to be done as she explains in *3 Henry VI*:

> Great lords, wise men ne'er sit and wail their loss
> But cheerly seek how to redress their harms…
> We will not from the helm to sit and weep,
> But keep our course… (*3H6* 5.4.1-22)

Sitting or standing, the women are on even ground. They plot Richard's future like the three Fates of Greek mythology. They prefigure the three witches of *Macbeth* who prophesy a king's demise (*M* 1.3).[16] "In the wicked world ruled by Richard III, the women line up on the side of heaven and the Earl of Richmond… in a chorus of distinctively female lamentation—all victimized and bereaved, all gifted with the power to prophesy and curse and articulate the will of Providence" (Rackin *Anti-historians* 338).

In this new state of equality, the Duchess is empowered to resist Margaret's verbal bombardment. She decries the unfairness of Margaret's attacks, "O Harry's wife, triumph not in my woes! / God witness with me, I have wept for thine" (*R3* 4.4.54-5).

[15] Neither the First Folio of 1623 nor the Quarto of 1597 includes stage directions marking the women's positions within the scene. Only their entrances and exits are indicated. Alan C. Dessen discusses similarly ambiguous stage directions in his *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters*. He says, "The absence of a conclusive signal...may be significant or may only be circumstance...In this instance, the choice by editors or directors or critics will probably be based upon their overview of the tragedy and their sense of 'character'" (21).

[16] In the midst of both scenes, the targets of the women's plots are announced by drums. The Third Witch says, "A drum, a drum— / Macbeth doth come" (*M* 1.3.28-9). And as the Duchess of York resolves to go on the offensive, "My damned son which they two sweet sons smothered. / I hear his drum" (*R3* 1.3.128-9).

Margaret, realizing she is close to achieving her goal of bringing both women low in order to empower them, says, "Bear with me: I am hungry for revenge" (*R3* 4.4.56).

Margaret tallies the list of the dead and proclaims, "Richard yet lives…But at hand, at hand, / Ensues his piteous and unpitied end" (*R3* 4.4.64-9). The tone of Margaret's speech, indeed the whole play, lightens here. We get a sense of nervous excitement. This is the moment we have all been waiting for. Elizabeth knows it and declares, "O, thou didst prophesy the time would come" (*R3* 4.4.74). Before the battle is taken to Richard, Margaret proceeds to give her longest speech of the play, thirty-two lines of uninterrupted insults hurled at Elizabeth. It is Margaret at her worst—thirty-two lines to say, "I told you so." At the end of this speech, to our surprise, Elizabeth replies, "O thou well skilled in curses, stay awhile, / And teach me how to curse mine enemies!" (*R3* 4.4.110-11). Elizabeth's excitement cannot be repressed. She desires more of Margaret's tutelage. What she does not realize is that Margaret has taught her everything she needs to know. Margaret says to Elizabeth,

> Now thy proud neck bears half my burdened yoke,
> From which, even here, I slip my wearied neck,
> And leave the burden of it all on thee. (*R3* 4.4.105-7)

Although Margaret maintains that Elizabeth's losses "Matched not the high perfection of my loss," in a perverse gesture of respect, she passes her crown of sorrow to Elizabeth and with it the power and burden of unbalancing Richard (*R3* 4.4.61). Elizabeth wants Margaret to put words in her mouth, "My words are dull. O, quicken them with thine" (*R3* 4.4.118). Margaret, in her final line, reveals and relinquishes to Elizabeth the source of her power, "Thy woes will make them sharp, and pierce like mine" (*R3*

4.4.119). Margaret exits the play, passing her power on to the Duchess and Elizabeth who take up her cause straightaway.

As Margaret exits, the Duchess convinces Elizabeth to "go with me, / And in the breath of bitter words let's smother / My damnèd son which thy two sweet sons smothered" (*R3* 4.4.126-8). Richard enters here demanding to know "Who intercepts my expedition?" (*R3* 4.4.130).[17] In response, the women take turns heaping hatred and scorn upon him. Speaking as they have never spoken before in the play, the women demand that Richard account for his crimes. The Duchess begins by wishing he had never been born, that she had strangled him "in her accursèd womb" (*R3* 4.4.132). She calls him a toad and cries out, "where is thy brother Clarence? / And little Ned Plantagenet, his son?" (*R3* 4.4.139-40). Her son is dead and her grandson by Clarence is missing, presumed dead. Elizabeth points to his stolen crown and recounts his many other crimes. She interrogates him about "the dire death of [her] two sons and brothers," shouting, "Tell me, thou villain slave, where are my children?" and demanding to know, "Where is kind Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan, Grey?" (*R3* 4.4.137, 138, 141).

Marilyn French would have us believe that Richard "is completely impervious to the women" (69). However, as Warren Cherniak notes, "From this point in the play, power and confidence seep away from Richard" (64). The text clearly shows an off-balance Richard who responds like a child to these upbraidings. He commands his soldiers to "Strike alarums, drums! / Let not the heavens hear these tell-tale women" (*R3* 4.4.142-3). Worried that God will hear the women's lamentations, he charges his marching band to drown out the sounds of the women's condemnation. And he insists the

[17] This line feels like an echo of Richard's earlier demand of Margaret, "Foul wrinkled witch, what mak'st thou in my sight?" (*R3* 1.3.164).

women “be patient and entreat [him] fair” (*R3* 4.4.145). This is a laughable suggestion for two reasons. First, these women are not treated fairly by Richard; they have no obligation to treat him fairly in return. And second, he is throwing a tantrum like a spoiled child. He is embarrassed and angry that Elizabeth and his mother are scolding him in front of Catesby and his army.

His mother, the Duchess, pulls rank on this childish king. She reminds him, “Art thou my son?” and insists he listen, claiming she “will be mild and gentle in [her] speech” (*R3* 4.4.148, 153). But there is nothing mild nor gentle about the way she excoriates the entirety of his life, from his “grievous” birth to his “treacherous” present, confessing she never had a “comfortable hour” in his company (*R3* 4.4.160,164, 165).

Richard tries to escape her critique, but his powers are waning while the women’s powers are on the rise. His attempts to rebuff her attack are ineffectual. He says he will march on to “not offend your grace” (*R3* 4.4.170). But he cannot escape as the Duchess continues her harangue. He meekly tries to change her tone by claiming she is “too bitter” (*R3* 4.4.172). But she carries on and curses him and prophesies his future. Using Margaret’s words, she labels him a “toad,” a thing of “hell” and foretells that he “wilt die” in “shame” as he lived his life (*R3* 4.4.139, 159, 173, 185). Either he will die or she will perish so that she may “never look upon [his] face again” (*R3* 4.4.176). She calls forth her “most heavy curse” upon him (*R3* 4.4.177).

> Which in the day of battle tire thee more
> Than all the complete armour that thou wear’st.
> My prayers on the adverse party fight,
> And there the little souls of Edward’s children
> Whisper the spirits of thine enemies,
> And promise them success and victory.
> Bloody thou art, bloody be thy end.

Shames serves thy life, and doth thy death attend
(*R3* 4.4.178-185).

Like Margaret, the Duchess is gone before he can reply. She abandons Richard to "the spirits of thine enemies" that will wrack him upon the eve of the Battle of Bosworth. Perhaps it is her speech that calls them forth to whisper in Richard's ear and plant the seeds of doubt and remorse while promising Richmond success and victory.

In the line immediately following the Duchess's exit, Elizabeth adds her "Amen" to the older woman's curses. What follows is a mirror of the shocking wooing scene between Richard and Anne.[18] This time Richard has come to woo Elizabeth to gain her daughter's hand in marriage. As Richard threatens her daughter's future, Elizabeth shows bravery and cunning. Picking up the yoke passed to her by Margaret, she matches Richard line for line, rejecting and opposing every point he argues.

RICHARD: Say I will love her everlastingly
ELIZABETH: But how long shall that title 'ever' last?
RICHARD: Sweetly enforce unto her fair life's end.
ELIZABETH: But how long fairly shall her sweet life last?
RICHARD: So long as heaven and nature lengthens it.
ELIZABETH: So long as hell and Richard likes of it.
(*R3* 4.4.270-75)

She is witty, punning, and bantering in a way we have never seen before. And, risking his anger and her own life, she dares to interrupt Richard when he says he will swear his love, "by my George, my garter and my crown—" (*R3* 4.4.287). Matching him

[18] This scene is also a mirror of the wooing scene between Margaret and Suffolk in *1 Henry VI*, Act 5 Scene 2, in which a princess is held captive by the verbal assault of her partner in the scene. Both men, Richard and Suffolk, underestimate the women with whom they converse, assuming that Elizabeth and Margaret, respectively, are conquered at the close of conversation.

beat for beat, she derides his oath, “Profaned, dishonored and the third usurped” (*R3* 4.4.288).

As Margaret demonstrated to her in Act 1 Scene 3, Elizabeth completes several shared lines with Richard, cutting off his attempts to win her over.

> RICHARD: Now by the world—
> ELIZABETH: 'Tis full of thy foul wrongs.
> RICHARD: My father's death—
> ELIZABETH: Thy life hath that dishonored.
> RICHARD: Then by myself—
> ELIZABETH: Thyself thyself misusest.
> RICHARD: Why then, by God—
> ELIZABETH: God's wrong is most of all.
> (*R3* 4.4.295-98)

Elizabeth maintains the upper-hand for several more shared lines, and then she seems to realize this will go on forever if she does not relent. Marilyn French twice insists that Richard persuades Elizabeth to give him her daughter's in marriage (64, 70). But as Irene Dash rightly clarifies, if “We have heard her scene with Margaret” we will not be fooled by Elizabeth as Richard is (205). Dash argues that Richard believes he is repeating his earlier successful wooing scene with Anne, because he believes all women are the same. “Because of his misogyny, he fails to hear the nuances that separate the responses of the women” (Dash 205). And thus the balance of power has shifted in Elizabeth's favor. She speaks a sonnet's worth of lines more than Richard, and that is enough to demonstrate he is no longer in control. Elizabeth rebuffs and parries every thrust in this rhetorical battle for her daughter's future. She, in Richard's own words, dares to “mock” him; she calls him “not honest,” and a “devil” (*R3* 4.4.260, 281, 338). This kind of open criticism would have signed her death warrant if Richard was at the height of his powers.

Instead, he carries on in a speech full of twists, turns, and confused double negatives that begins “Myself myself confound…” (*R3* 4.4.319). Richard argues from a position of weakness. He is forced to claim he will “repent” his crimes and needs Elizabeth to “plead” his case to her daughter (*R3* 4.4.317, 334). He is in this position because Elizabeth refuses his demand to “Harp not on that string, madam; that is past,” that is, she refuses to get over the fact that he has killed her sons (*R3* 4.4.285). Now it is Elizabeth’s memory, Elizabeth’s cursing, and Elizabeth’s strength that will undo Richard.

As his metaphors turn grotesque (“But in your daughter’s womb I bury them [your sons], / Where in that nest of spicery they will breed” (*R3* 4.4.333-4)) she ends the conversation, directing him to “Write to me very shortly” to receive her answer (*R3* 4.4.348). Elizabeth, her mind and tongue sharpened by her sorrow, realizes that if her daughter is the coveted prize, she has the means to decide the future. She cleverly allows vain Richard to assume he has won her agreement. Richard demonstrates his characteristic misogyny and, in Bate and Rasmussen’s words, “lack of understanding with regard to women” (RSC *R3* 183). He calls her a “Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman” (*R3* 4.4.350). Meanwhile Elizabeth defies, betrays, and undermines him. By giving her daughter in marriage to Richmond, Elizabeth helps to determine the victor of the Battle of Bosworth Field and saves England. In a stroke of womanly manipulation, she passes her power to her “princely” daughter (*R3* 4.4.325).

Richard III is the first Shakespearean tragedy, and one of only two tragedies in which so many of the women survive.[19] As the wife of “that poisonous bunch-backed

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[19] *Coriolanus*, Shakespeare’s other play that figures weeping women who are attempting to end a civil war, sees three women survive to the end of the action. Volumnia, Virgilia, and Valeria all live after being credited with negotiating peace. In the other nine tragedies, the minor women, Lady Capulet and the Nurse survive *Romeo & Juliet*. Calpurnia survives *Julius Caesar*. Cressida and the minor women, Cassandra,

toad" Richard, Anne alone dies, sadly and inevitably (*R3* 1.3.246). Queen Margaret, the Duchess of York, and Queen Elizabeth all persevere against the overwhelming odds of Richard's murderous nature. These women do not just survive this tragedy; they determine the succession of the throne, and retire at a time and place of their own choosing. In a gesture of respect, Shakespeare allows each of them to exit at a high point and at a point that she chooses rather than when she is ordered, dismissed, or banished. They persist until their mutual goal is accomplished: Richard is undone.

To excise Margaret from *Richard III* is to create a very different play from Shakespeare's intention. In this history cycle, Margaret and the other women "emblematize the suffering that public action [*i.e.*, war] often inflicts on private lives" (Kurtz 270). Margaret's memories keep that suffering alive in order to harness her grief and channel it to purge England of its woes. Shakespeare gives her a powerful and direct role in *Richard III*, influencing and inspiring the women, demonstrating the consequences of the princely power she wielded in Parts 2 and 3 of *Henry VI*, and avenging the wrongs that have come before. And he provides Margaret with an opportunity to redeem herself by giving her a power that parallels and even rivals Richard's own. Finally, he allows her the dignity to choose her own end, rather than submitting to the banishment imposed on her by her foes and rather than succumbing to the depressing end of the chronicles.

Andromache, and Helen, survive *Troilus & Cressida*. Bianca survives *Othello*, but exits under threat from Iago that she should be implicated in Roderigo's murder. In comparison, Tamora, Lavinia, Juliet, Portia, Ophelia, Gertrude, Desdemona, Emilia, Cordelia, Regan, Goneril, Lady Macbeth, Lady Macduff, Cleopatra, Charmian, and Iras are all murdered or commit suicide in *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Troilus & Cressida*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Antony & Cleopatra*, and *Coriolanus*. In addition to the leading ladies in these tragedies, Katharine, Elinor, and Constance, the strong noble women of the histories *Henry VIII* and *King John* also die under depressing circumstances (although none is murdered or takes her own life).

Shakespeare creates a Margaret for whom it would be out of character to sit "languishing and mourning in continual sorrow" (Bullough 206-7). Shakespeare's Margaret is indefatigable in pursuit of her enemies and powerful in her triumph over them. Yet Shakespeare grants her these powers in his characteristically ambivalent way. She is not a sympathetic character. She is cruel to her enemies and to those whom she would help. She actively seeks revenge against anyone she perceives as having wronged her (*i.e.*, every man and some of the women in *Richard III*). And yet Shakespeare's Margaret is relentlessly, persistently effective in unbalancing Richard and teaching the Duchess and Queen Elizabeth how to unseat him from his throne.

Chapter VI

Summary and Conclusions

The aim of this thesis has been to defend the Queen Margaret of William Shakespeare's invention by examining the textual evidence of the four plays that comprise this history series (*1-3 Henry VI* and *Richard III*). Shakespeare's Margaret is a powerful and dynamic character who defies sexist notions of womanliness and is essential to the action of all four plays of the first tetralogy. With few noteworthy exceptions (actors Penny Downie and Peggy Ashcroft and critics Madonne M. Miner and Irene Dash) the actors, producers, and critics who have excised, underestimated, or savaged Margaret should reexamine her from the perspective of their own gendered notions of what it means to be a woman. To condemn Margaret as an "unwomanly" character is to perpetuate gendered notions of women in general. Shakespeare created a challenge to the stereotypical notions of women in this extraordinary character. Are we, in the present era, still unable to see her as a courageous woman defying stereotypes?

Margaret was Shakespeare's first major woman character, but not atypical. Shakespeare did not write "soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible" women (*3H6* 1.4.141). Margaret, Cleopatra, and Cordelia all lead armies into battle. Cleopatra and Volumnia defy the expectations of the Roman ruling classes to defend their nations against crisis—in the first instance defying Rome itself and in the second to save Rome. Cleopatra and Juliet commit suicide, risking their eternal souls for a chance to be with their lovers. Desdemona marries a Moor and defends her love for him even whilst he strangles her. Rosalind and Viola dress as men to protect themselves from predatory men; Viola is

forced to protect herself from a predatory woman. Beatrice and Emilia believe men are useless except in their enviable ability to take up arms against their enemies. Both are willing to give up their lives to save the reputations of a dearest cousin and a friend. Emilia loses her life while saving Desdemona's reputation from the slanderous accusations of her husband, Iago. Lady Macbeth is driven mad by the consequences of her own ambition. Regan and Goneril are willing to kill their own father, sister, and husbands to seize the throne. Examples abound in Shakespeare's plays of women defying gendered conventions of womanly behavior.

This thesis has argued that the real "crime" Margaret has committed in this history cycle is violating stereotypes of womanliness: first the Duke of York's, then Edward IV's, and then Richard III's. Margaret refuses to be "soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible" as York expects of her (*3H6* 1.4.141). And why should she be? Treason has been committed against her family. Her husband is the rightful ruler of England and her son the rightful heir. Her husband is incapable of standing up for himself and abdicates his crown twice in order to "lead a private life," risking the abandonment of his son "to be murdered by his enemies," (*3H6* 4.6.42, 1.1.261).

Margaret is an embattled queen acting in "manhood, wisdom, and defence" because her husband refuses to and because she has a son to protect (*2H6* 5.2.74-83). Despite the accusations of her enemies, Margaret's intentions are far more princely than any of theirs. Margaret fights as a queen for her king and country. She fights as a wife and mother for her husband and child. She does not fight for herself.

In stark contrast stands York who claims "I will be king or die," because he believes the rightful King Henry's "churchlike humours fits not for a crown," because he

wills it so, and because he can trump up a convoluted claim to the throne (*2H6* 1.1.246, *3H6* 1.2.35). After York's death, his son Edward claims the throne: "'tis my right / And Henry but usurps the diadem," an absurd claim which reverses the truth that Edward is the usurper, not Henry (*3H6* 4.7.65-66). Edward's claim is backed by his brother George, an infamous traitor, and his brother Richard, who murders his way to the throne.

Shakespeare makes Margaret more memorable and at least as capable as the men in the tetralogy, wielding power that they refuse to acknowledge or understand. Shakespeare also gives Margaret her own unique brand of feminine cruelty. That she triumphs in her cruelty could have been a deliberate attempt by Shakespeare to create a box office sensation, a spectacle to sell tickets. He certainly created a controversy over her character, but perhaps not the one he intended.

No matter how Margaret is portrayed on stage, cut from productions, or criticized in academic papers, Shakespeare's text remains. In the *Henry VI* tetralogy, we watch in awe as a courageous young woman evolves into a politically astute queen, a devoted wife and mother, an ambitious politician, a successful general, and a bitter and vengeful widow. Margaret was one of Shakespeare's earliest explorations of womanhood and one of the most complex characters Shakespeare wrote. She should be as worthy of our respect as a critical audience as she was of Shakespeare's respect as a writer and inventor of real women.

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