

"FOLLOW I MUST; I CANNOT GO BEFORE":

WOMEN AND POWER

IN SHAKESPEARE'S FIRST TETRALOGY

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For

MY MOTHER AND MY FATHER

for their faith in liberal education and in me.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines women and power in four Shakespearean plays, 1, 2, and 3 *Henry VI* and *Richard III*. Its main focus is on the aristocratic women, and particularly the two queens, Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Grey.

Despite the patriarchal prescription of feminine subjection, these women are not without power both in interpersonal relationships and in the wider political and military sphere. But their power, though real and not an illusion, is linked inextricably to their relationships with the men in their lives.

The first three chapters discuss female power in the context of various gender relationships; the marital in the first, the mother-son in the second and lastly, the father-daughter and those of allies and lovers. The final chapters look at the use of the principal "feminine weapons"; the tongue and sexuality.

Chapter 1: Introduction

"And, being a woman, I will not be slack/ To play my
part in Fortune's pageant"

Were I a man, a duke, and next of blood,
I would remove these tedious stumbling-blocks
And smooth my way upon their headless necks;

(2H6, I.ii.63-64)¹

The speaker, Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester, dreams of being Queen of England, but finds herself unable to "remove" the heads of those who stand between her and the queenship she craves because she is a woman in a patriarchal society. Yet, the patriarchal decree which denies Eleanor the authority to smooth her way upon the headless necks of her enemies is not the last word on women and power even within the social order created by the patriarchy. For power, as Michel Foucault asserts, is a "multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate" which "by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power ... [that] are always local and unstable" (92-93). Power, therefore, "comes from everywhere" (93) and "is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (94) -- it is exercised even by women in patriarchal societies, women such as Eleanor Cobham, Margaret of Anjou, and Elizabeth Grey in Shakespeare's first tetralogy. Eleanor, for instance, after her initial observation on her lack of authority to "remove" the "tedious stumbling-blocks" in her way, resolves that she "will not be slack/ To play [her] part in Fortune's pageant" (I.ii.66-67). And indeed

¹ All references to Shakespearean plays are to the Arden editions.

she goes on to do just that -- which indicates that she does have some form of power at her disposal. The forms and effects of the power exercised by Eleanor and the other women, principally the Plantagenet women, in the four plays of the tetralogy are the subject of this dissertation.

Shakespeare's early history plays were written during the reign of England's second queen regnant, Elizabeth I.² It is impossible to determine how far the fact of a female monarch influenced Shakespeare's delineation of the queens and duchesses in his plays. But in view of the contemporary belief that Elizabeth transcended the "limitations" of her sex, what is more relevant to a study of Shakespearean women characters is the Renaissance idea of woman, i.e. the "average" woman.

In "An Homily of the State of Matrimony", the eighteenth of the *Certain Sermons or Homilies*, read in Anglican churches throughout England from 1562 onwards, the Renaissance woman was told that she was

a weak creature, not endued with like strength and constancy of mind [as man]; therefore they be the sooner disquieted, and they be the more prone to all weak affections and dispositions of mind, more than men be; and lighter they be, and more vain in their phantasies and opinions.... she is the weaker vessel, of a frail heart, inconstant, and with a word soon stirred to wrath.

(456-457)

Woman's alleged moral and intellectual frailty made it "imperative" that she submit completely to the authority of her father before her marriage,

²Andrew Cairncross, the Arden editor of the *Henry VI plays* gives 1590-1591 as the probable date of the trilogy (Introduction to *1H6*, xxxviii; Introduction to *2H6*, xlvi; Introduction to *3H6*, xlv). Michael Hattaway, who edited the plays for Cambridge, concurs: "the whole sequence was *written* sometime before 1592" (Introduction to *1H6*, 41). As for *Richard III*, Antony Hammond, editor of the Arden edition, gives 1591 as its probable date (Introduction to *R3*, 61).

and after her marriage, to that of her husband, whom she vowed not only "to haue and to holde ... for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickenes and in health, to loue, cherish" but "to obeye" as well (*The Boke of Common Prayer*, 191). Indeed, William Whately, the prominent Jacobean preacher, tells the bride in *The Bride Bush* of 1617 that

If ever thou purpose to be a good wife, and to live comfortably, set down this with thyself: mine husband is my superior, my better; he hath authority and rule over me; nature hath given it to him ... God hath given it to him.

(Stone 1977, 151)

The Renaissance woman, then, had minimal "authority and rule" in her interpersonal relations with the men in her life -- in theory at least. The reality, as Lawrence Stone, the social historian, points out, could be different, for

Their monopoly of certain work responsibilities, their capacity to give or withhold sexual favours, their control over the children, their ability to scold all gave them useful potential levers of power within the home.

(1977, 199)

Thus, while the "states of power" engendered in a woman's interpersonal relations with the men in her life were generally not in her favour, she was not entirely "powerless" if she were aware of and willing to use the "levers" at her disposal. And this obviously did not escape the notice of the patriarchy -- as is suggested by its elevation of silence and chastity as the primary virtues expected of every woman, and the corresponding demonization as shrew and whore respectively, of women who employed the traditional "feminine weapons" of the tongue and sexuality.

But the efficacy of the "levers of power" or "weapons" available to a woman varied, depending not only on the personalities of the individuals involved but also on their social status. While the "ability to scold" was a "lever" that women of all classes could use, other "levers" were more successful when used by women of certain classes than by others. With aristocratic women, for instance, "work responsibilities" as such were minimal and once married, their contribution to the family finances was more or less over, since whatever lands and moveables they might own or inherit became their husbands'.³ As the author of *The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights* (1632) puts it so succinctly: "That which the husband hath is his own, that which the wife hath is the husband's" (130). Hence, to quote Simone de Beauvoir, "The richer the husband, the greater the [economic] dependence of the wife", for particularly among the nobility "woman had only a parasitic existence" (101, 103). Yet, this said, the noblewoman did perhaps have the advantage over her sister of the lower classes when it came to withholding sexual favours. For while her husband could -- and often did -- seek sexual satisfaction from other women, his need to provide a legitimate male heir to continue the family line gave a wife a not insubstantial "lever of power" to use against him.

While both husband and wife possessed "levers of power", those of the former had undeniably greater force. The powerful economic lever was for all practical purposes totally in his hands, especially in the case of the nobility. In addition, he had the authority of both ecclesiastical and civil law behind him, for the church required a wife to vow obedience to her husband, citing as its authority St. Paul's exhortation in his letter to the Ephesians:

³cf. Lawrence Stone. *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, 195-196; and Ian Maclean. *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, 76-81.

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in everything.

(5:22-24)⁴

Moreover, the civil authorities, for their part, were quick to take the cue. Indeed the author of *The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights* declares that "women have no voise in Parliament, they make no lawes, they consent to none, they abrogate none" because "All of them are understood either married or to be married" (6).

The "levers of power" at a woman's disposal, by contrast, were not only relatively less effective than her husband's, but also "illicit". She could use her sexuality as a weapon against her spouse but that meant either denying him his "marital rights" or breaking the seventh commandment and losing her "honour". Using her tongue was only a little less "illicit" in a society which shared Lear's opinion that "[a] voice ... ever soft,/ Gentle and low [is] an excellent thing in woman" (*Lr*, V.iii.271-272). The "force relations" in marital relationships were certainly unequal. And, more often than not, the state of power engendered between husband and wife was in the former's favour.

In father-daughter relationships, the "force relations" were even more unequal. Some of the "levers of power", such as the economic, were considerably less effective in this relationship and others -- notably sexuality -- could not be used at all.

But while there was hardly any ambiguity to speak of in a woman's position vis-à-vis her husband and father -- she was simply subordinate to

⁴The same injunction is found in Col. 3:18.

them -- the same cannot be said of that vis-à-vis her son. The fifth commandment exhorts children to "honour" both "thy father *and* thy mother (Exodus 20:12; my emphasis). This suggests that, in theory at least, the "force relations" between mother and son were more equal than those between husband and wife or father and daughter; or perhaps even a little in favour of the mother. But does it? Catherine Belsey has observed that the mother "frequently disappeared" from Renaissance interpretations of the commandment (158). Moreover, that Renaissance mothers, such as Dorothy Leigh and Elizabeth Grymeston,⁵ who wrote tracts addressed to their sons, found it necessary to preface them with apologies for their "presumption" in writing argues that motherhood was a site of conflict in the Renaissance. The collision between maternal authority and "womanly" submission in the mother-son relationship made the "force relations" in it the most unstable among those in the three principal kinds of gender relations.

This dissertation, concerned with women -- principally aristocratic women -- and power in Shakespeare's first tetralogy, is divided into two parts. The first, consisting of chapters 2, 3, and 4, discusses female power in the context of the principal gender relationships: the husband-wife relationship in Chapter 2, the mother-son in Chapter 3, and the remaining kinds (those between relatives, lovers, and allies) in Chapter 4. But since those husbands, sons, lovers, and allies are kings and dukes -- men with vast political powers -- female power in these plays often extends beyond the private sphere into the public. Hence the discussion of "power" will include both its "non-political" and political aspects. The second half of this

⁵*The Mother's Blessing*, which ran to fifteen editions between 1616 and 1630, was written by Dorothy Leigh for "my beloved Sonnes, George, John, and William Leigh" (Travitsky, 56), while Elizabeth Grymeston's *Miscelanae, Meditations, Memoratives*, written for "her loving sonne Bernye Grymeston" (ibid., 52), also enjoyed considerable popularity, with four editions between 1604 and 1618. See Betty Travitsky. *The Paradise of Women*, 50-68; and Elaine V. Beilin. *Redeeming Eve*, 266-285.

dissertation examines the use of the two traditional "female weapons" and their contribution to the power of the women in the four plays. Chapter 5 looks at speech, and Chapter 6, at sexuality.

As my references to a "tetralogy" would indicate, I shall be treating the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III* as a unit. Although the existence of a "tetralogy" as such remains unproven, I believe that, in the context of a study on power such as this, considering the four plays as a whole will be rewarding. For taken together, these plays trace a series of rises to and falls from power -- indeed a veritable "Fortune's pageant" (2H6, I.ii.67). Margaret of Anjou, for instance, progresses from a "fairest beauty" (1H6, V.iii.46) content to do her father's pleasure (V.iii.127) via a period as "England's bloody scourge" (2H6, V.i.118) to a "wither'd hag" (R3, I.iii.215) uttering "frantic curse[s]" (I.iii.246).

The "pageant" in which Margaret and the other characters participate is based on fact. But while there was, for instance, a real Margaret of Anjou whose husband, Henry VI of England, did indeed lose his crown, the "history" in these plays is not quite that to be found in modern studies of the period such as Bertram Wolffe's biography of Henry VI.⁶ For in the Renaissance, "history" was concerned less with historical accuracy and objectivity as such than with didacticism, with teaching humanity the Divine will as revealed in the events of the past. We find, for instance, the following declaration in the preface to John Hardyng's *Chronicle* of 1543:

Wherefore Goddes woorde and holy scripture
Which abandoneth all maner vanitee
Yet of Chronicles admitteth the lecture
As a thing of great fruite and utilitee
And as a lanterne, to the posteritee

⁶Bertram Wolffe. *Henry VI*. London, Methuen, 1983.

For example, what they ought to knowe
 What waies to refuse, and what to folowe

(Campbell, 57-58)

Hence, although history was said to present "images of true matters, such as indeed were done, and not such as fantastically or falsely may be suggested to have been done" (Sidney, p.87 ll.32-34), that did not stop the historians and chroniclers such as Hall and Holinshed from interpolating speeches they considered appropriate to individuals and situations. For so long as the dictates of literary decorum were obeyed and historical figures spoke in a manner appropriate to their rank and circumstance, neither the chroniclers nor their readers were unconcerned about the lack of a strict historical basis. Hall, for instance, reporting the proceedings of the Parliament of October 1459, provides York with a long speech, for which there is no historical evidence, delineating the House of Lancaster's usurpation of the crown and his own claim to it (245-247).

We can only speculate how far Shakespeare meant his history plays to be a "lanterne to the posteritee", but there can be no doubt that, like Hall and most others of his day, he did not feel constrained (except in the broadest sense) by historical fact when writing them. As Sir Philip Sidney puts it in *The Defence of Poetry*,

whatsoever action, or faction, whatsoever counsel,
 policy, or war stratagem the historian is bound to recite,
 that may the poet (if he list) with his imitation make his
 own, beautifying it both for further teaching, and more
 delighting, as it please him: having all, from Dante's
 heaven to his hell, under the authority of his pen.

(p. 89, ll.28-33)

Whether poet or historian, Shakespeare makes "the Wars of the Roses" his own, selecting the events he wishes to dramatize and omitting others;

telescoping some -- Margaret's arrival in England and Eleanor's disgrace, for example, which, historically, occurred in 1445 and 1441 respectively -- expanding or conflating not just events but characters such as the two Earls of Warwick;⁷ even adjusting the facts. Margaret's part in the death of York (3*H6*, I.iv.), for instance, is unhistorical. For, if Shakespeare could not have her defeat Edward IV in the Battle of Tewkesbury -- for *that* would change the course of history! -- he could have her stab York, and thereby underline the "tigerish" nature attributed to her in popular mythology. Thus through the selection and re-working of the material he found in his sources, Shakespeare directs his audience's perceptions of the women in his first tetralogy -- Margaret of Anjou, Elizabeth Grey, Eleanor Cobham, Anne Neville, the Duchess of York, and Joan of Arc (or Joan la Pucelle as he prefers to call her). Historical personages though they were, he makes them "his own".

Since the principal characters and events in the plays, though not inventions, are presented through the eyes and imagination of the male playwright who brought them to life on the Renaissance stage, it must be emphasized that all conclusions reached in this study refer only to the literary representation of the aristocratic women in the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, and may not necessarily be applicable to the historical personages on whom the characters are based, to women of the Renaissance, or even to women characters in Renaissance drama in general.

⁷Shakespeare conflates Anne's father, Richard Neville, and her maternal grandfather, Richard Beauchamp, both Earls of Warwick. Historically, the Warwick who was in France during the events described in 1 *Henry VI* was Richard Beauchamp but Shakespeare attributes his deeds to his son-in-law, Richard Neville, the King-maker, who grieves for the loss Maine and Anjou in 2 *Henry VI*, saying

... myself did win them both;
Those provinces these arms of mine did conquer:
And are the cities, that I got with wounds,
Deliver'd up again with peaceful words?

(I.i.118-121)

Chapter 2

**"it pleased his Majesty/ To raise my state to title of a
queen"**

Elizabeth Grey's first speech after her marriage to Edward IV in 3 *Henry VI* begins with the observation that "it pleas'd his Majesty/ To raise [her] state to title of a queen" (IV.i.66-67). For, like all brides in the Renaissance, Elizabeth has surrendered her name and rank upon her marriage, and assumed those of her husband. To quote "The Fourme of Solemnizacyon of Matrymonye" in Edward VI's *Boke of Common Prayer*, "A man ... shall be ioyned unto his wyfe, and they two shalbe one flesh"(194)¹ -- i.e. his "flesh", not hers.

As "one flesh" with their husbands, the Plantagenet wives in Shakespeare's first tetralogy find their "states" raised to "titles" of queens and duchesses. Elizabeth, Margaret of Anjou, and Anne Neville become Queens of England; Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester and "second woman in the realm" (2*H6*, I.ii.43). Marriage, for these women, means social advancement, and for Margaret, Elizabeth, and Eleanor, greater eminence and power than the daughters of impoverished dukes or knights could ever have known.² Margaret participates in councils of state, frees and executes

¹quoting Ephesians 5:31. This quotation may also be found in Genesis (2:24), Matthew (19:5), Mark (10:7-8) and 1 Corinthians (6:16).

²The dramatist makes no mention of Eleanor's antecedents but there can be little doubt that she too has been "raised" by her marriage. Humphrey rebukes her ambitions for the crown, saying,

Art thou not second woman in the realm,
And the Protector's wife, belov'd of him?
Hast thou not worldly pleasure at command,
Above the reach or compass of thy thought?

(2*H6*, I.ii.43-46. My emphasis)

prisoners, and actively leads a political faction. Elizabeth's activities may not quite match Margaret's -- she "merely" promotes the interests of her relatives and, if Richard and Hastings are to be believed, engineers the falls of her enemies. But she too is leader -- albeit titular³ -- of a political faction, as the numerous references in *Richard III* to "the queen's allies" indicate. And while there are no dramatized instances of Eleanor exercising political power, she is not entirely "powerless". For Winchester alleges, in *1 Henry VI*, that "[Humphrey's] wife is proud; she holdeth [him] in awe" (I.i.39). Moreover in *2 Henry VI*, Humphrey himself refers to occasions on which "the abject people" "[did] follow [her] proud chariot wheels/ When [she did] ride in triumph through the streets" (II.iv.11, 14). Margaret, Elizabeth, and Eleanor enjoy their power and eminence by virtue of being married to their husbands -- as all of them are well aware.

The fragility of their position is summed up by Elizabeth as Edward, her husband, lies mortally ill: "If he were dead, what would betide on me?/ ... The loss of such a lord includes all harms" (R3, I.iii.6, 8). Her words recall, in a minor key, Edward's own words to her shortly after their wedding:

What danger or what sorrow can befall thee
 So long as Edward is thy constant friend
 And their true sovereign whom they must obey?
(3H6, IV.i.75-77)

What danger or sorrow could befall Elizabeth as queen we might well ask. None, perhaps -- while Edward remains king and her "constant friend". But were he removed by death or his enemies, she would be vulnerable to all

The historical Eleanor was, like Elizabeth Grey, daughter of a knight. Her father was Sir Reginald Cobham. Eleanor was lady in waiting to Gloucester's first duchess, Jacqueline, Countess of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland, and was Gloucester's mistress before becoming his wife.

³Although Richard considers "the Queen and her allies" his enemies, it is Rivers, Dorset and Grey upon whom he seeks revenge, not Elizabeth herself (R3, I.iii.330-333). It should also be noted that it is the rule of "the Queen's sons and brothers" (and Richard's) that the Third Citizen fears rather than that of the Queen herself (II.iii.28-30). Cf. pp.68-69

danger and sorrow. Indeed, Elizabeth seeks sanctuary twice, once when Edward is captured by Warwick (IV.iv.31) and again after his death, when Richard arrests her relatives, Grey and Rivers (R3, II.iv.66).

In these plays, a queen's feelings for her husband are complex indeed. As Elizabeth's grief on the death of her husband is prompted not only by love for him but by fear for herself and her children, so Margaret's scorn for hers is similarly tempered. Her protestation in the following passage is not the simple case of hypocrisy or even Petrarchan hyperbole that it appears to be:

King. How, madam! Still lamenting Suffolk's death?

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

Thou wouldest not have mourn'd so much for
me.

Queen. My love; I should not mourn, but die for thee.

(2H6, IV.iv.21-24)

The death of Suffolk may deprive Margaret of a lover and ally in the hostile English court, but it could never affect her fate as gravely as Henry's would.

After mourning Suffolk in Act IV Scene iv, Margaret makes no further reference to him in 2 or 3 *Henry VI*. Dramatic economy on the part of Shakespeare? Perhaps. But this silence may also point to the pragmatism of a woman who now has a more important matter to attend to: the Yorkist threat. Should Henry lose his crown -- or his life -- she would lose hers too: "If you be ta'en, we then should see the bottom/ Of all our fortunes" (2H6, V.ii.78-79).

Elizabeth and Margaret's fears suggest a view of widowhood at variance with that of the author of *The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights*, who urges widows to rejoice:

Why mourne you so, you that be widowes? Consider
how long you have beene in subjection under the

predominance of parents, or your husbands, now you be
free in libertie, 'froepro prii juris', at your owne Law.

(232)

Indeed, in the Renaissance, the widow enjoyed greater autonomy than other women.⁴ Not only was she accountable to neither father nor husband, but she was also financially independent: she had her jointure from the estate of her late husband and could also own property which the law permitted her to manage herself.

But it is not greater self-determination or financial independence that the aristocratic wives of Shakespeare's first tetralogy associate with the deaths of their husbands. Insecurity, danger, loss of status and power; these are what Elizabeth and Margaret expect in widowhood. And their fears are well-founded:

Who sues, and kneels, and says 'God save the Queen'?

Where be the bending peers that flatter'd thee?

Where be the thronging troops that follow'd thee?

Decline all this, and see what now thou art:

For happy wife, a most distressed widow;

...

For one being sued to, one that humbly sues;

For Queen, a very caitiff, crown'd with care;

...

For she being fear'd of all, now fearing one;

For she commanding all, obey'd of none.

(R3, IV.iv.94-98, 100-101, 103-104)

The "Ubi Sunt" topos in Margaret's speech points to the changes in their circumstances. Their status and power held as it were directly from their

⁴cf. Alan MacFarlane's *Marriage and Love in England*, 281-285; Lawrence Stone's *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, 632-648; and Pearl Hogrefe's *Tudor Women: Commoners and Queens*, 10-15.

husbands, widowhood brings a loss not an increase in their power. In *Richard III*, Margaret may claim to be queen,⁵ but she knows, as everyone else does, that, with Henry dead, she is a spent political force and a political irrelevance. It is partly for this reason that she is at "liberty" "to fill the world with words" (3H6, V.v.43).⁶ The Yorkists have nothing to fear from her. As her curse on Elizabeth implies, one must either be mother or wife to be "England's Queen" (R3, I.iii.209). And Margaret is neither. She is no longer a player in the game of power -- *that* is now played out among the Yorkists themselves. Yet Elizabeth, too, soon finds herself shut out of the game. It is significant that she stands on her maternal rights to gain entrance into the Tower -- "I am their mother; who shall bar me from them?" (IV.i.21) -- rather than on her status and authority as Queen Mother.

If the deaths of Henry and Edward spell the end of the queenships of their wives, Humphrey's lack of ambition means his wife's hopes of a crown remain but a dream: "Follow I must; I cannot go before,/ While Gloucester bears this base and humble mind" (2H6, I.ii.61-62). Since he, not she, is "[the] man, [the] duke, and next of blood" (I.ii.63), his refusal to contemplate any thought of the crown for himself, leaves Eleanor as "second woman in the realm" (I.ii.43). In the patriarchal society in which she lives, queenship depends upon the kingship of a husband. Yet, even were she queen, political power would not accrue to her automatically. For if "it pleas'd his Majesty/ To raise [her] state to title of a queen" (3H6, IV.i.66-67), the extent of the power accompanying that title would depend, among other factors, upon His Majesty's pleasure. Thus, while Anne succeeds to the title previously held by Margaret and Elizabeth, she has none of the political power of her predecessors. Her sole attempt at asserting authority fails when

⁵cf. R3, I.iii.112, 155-156, 161-162.

⁶It is of course also due to her dramatic function as a choric figure

she is denied access to the princes in the Tower despite assuring Brackenbury, the lieutenant, that "I'll bear thy blame,/ And take thy office from thee, on my peril" (*R3*, IV.i.24-25). Her assurances are simply not enough. Brackenbury knows she lacks the influence with Richard to achieve any success as "An earnest advocate to plead for him" (I.iii.87). She may well be queen but she has as much power in England at this moment as the "quondam queens".

Yet even as queen, Margaret and Elizabeth find their power on occasion limited by their husbands. Elizabeth may succeed in advancing her relatives, but she cannot prevent her young son being "put unto the trust of Richard Gloucester,/ A man that loves not me" (I.iii.12-13), while Margaret, accused by the Yorkists of "Hav[ing] wrought the easy-melting King like wax" (*3H6*, II.i.171), often finds Henry "a tedious stumbling-block" to her wishes. Suffolk, for instance, is exiled in spite of her support for him. That she resorts to tears and pleas -- which fail to bring about the desired effect -- suggests her impotence on this particular occasion:

Queen. O Henry, let me plead for gentle Suffolk!

King. Ungentle Queen, to call him gentle Suffolk!

No more, I say; if thou dost plead for him

Thou wilt but add increase unto my wrath.

(*2H6*, III.ii.288-291)

And if Henry appears more afraid of Margaret in *3 Henry VI* than he does in *2 Henry VI* -- he attempts to "steal away" before she comes to avoid her wrath (*3H6*, I.i.219) -- he nevertheless goes ahead with the disinheritance of their son, something he knows she would violently oppose.

As we shall see, the extent of the political power "it pleases his Majesty" to allow "her Majesty" depends largely on the balance of power in their relationship. In theory, as the "superior" partner in the relationship and, in most cases, as her sovereign, the balance should favour him. But he does

not quite have everything his own way, for as Foucault observes, "there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations" (94). Although subordinate to their husbands, the queens and duchesses are not without recourse to some forms of power. Like all other wives, they have access to the "levers of power" identified by Lawrence Stone, in particular, the "capacity to give or withhold sexual favours" and the "ability to scold" (1977, 199). But by their very nature, these "levers" prove more successful in the "affective" rather than the "politic" marriages. That, Eleanor, for instance, is "the Protector's wife, belov'd of him" (2*H6*, I.ii.44), whom Gloucester has married for her own sake rather than for power or money,⁷ argues that her scoldings, pleas, and sexual favours mean more to him than they would had he other motives for marrying her. Eleanor, thus, succeeds in subduing her husband's "choler" with her own in Act I Scene ii of 2 *Henry VI* only because Gloucester loves her:

Duchess. What, what, my lord! Are you so choleric
 With Eleanor, for telling but her dream?
 Next time I'll keep my dreams unto myself,
 And not be check'd.

Gloucester. Nay, be not angry; I am pleas'd again.

(I.ii.51-55)

The efficacy of the "levers of power" would be greatly reduced in the "politic" marriages arranged for Warwick's daughters in 3 *Henry VI*, or the abortive ones for the Earl of Armagnac's daughter in 1 *Henry VI* (V.i.15-20) and Bona of France in 3 *Henry VI*.⁸ "Knots of amity" (1*H6*, V.i.16) and "sumptuous dower[ies]" (V.i.20) are the reasons for these marriages, with the brides -- Anne, Isabella, the Earl's daughter, and Bona -- important only in as

⁷cf. p.12, n2.

⁸cf. 3*H6*, II.vi.89-99; III.iii.49ff.

far as they are the means through which the men are bound together, and money or property transferred from one man to another. The negotiations for Anne's marriage to Edward, Prince of Wales, makes this clear:

King Lewis. Yet, ere thou go, but answer me one doubt:

What pledge have we of thy firm loyalty?

Warwick. This shall assure my constant loyalty:

That if our Queen and this young Prince agree,

I'll join mine eldest daughter and my joy

To him forthwith in holy wedlock's bands.

(III.iii.238-243)

Being merely incidental to the whole business -- and the word is used advisedly -- these brides' claims on their husbands' affections are minimal. Love might of course develop *after* marriage. But unless or until it did, they would have little personal influence with their husbands. Indeed they might well suffer the fate of Blanche in *King John*, who fails to persuade her new husband, Lewis, to "go not to arms/ Against [her] uncle" (III.i.234-235):

Which is the side that I must go withal?

I am with both: each army hath a hand;

And in their rage, I having hold of both,

They whirl asunder and dismember me.

(III.i.253-256)

Such is the tragedy of a woman when the alliance that her marriage is meant to effect sours, or, to put it another way, when other "motives" are "stronger with [her husband] than the name of wife" (III.i.239, 240).

Unlike Blanche, Isabella does not appear on stage at all. The dramatist does not show us how the estrangement between her husband, Clarence, and her father affects her. Shakespeare's primary concern is with the struggle for the crown of England, a crown which will ultimately -- whatever the final outcome of the wars -- adorn the head of a man. History

in this instance, as so often, is "his-story", not "her-story". Men are the focus, not their female relatives -- for that is what the women in these plays are: the female relatives of men. It is Clarence and the part he plays in the political life of the kingdom that are "relevant" to "history" as presented in 3 *Henry VI*, his wife and her fate are insignificant. But while the dramatist is silent on the matter, Isabella's fate cannot be too different from Blanche's, for, like the latter's, her marriage is a "politic" one.⁹ And in marriage, as in the play as a whole, women are only of secondary importance.

Shakespeare's Margaret and Elizabeth do not appear to have had much choice in the matter of their respective marriages to Henry and Edward. Margaret meets Henry only after the wedding, accepting the marriage apparently, out of filial obedience: "And if my father please, I am content" (1*H6*, V.iii.127). Certainly her father does very well out of her marriage:

the duchy of Anjou and the county of Maine shall be
releas'd and deliver'd to the King her father, and she
sent over of the King of England's own proper cost and
charges, without having any dowry.

(2*H6*, I.i.57-61)

Elizabeth for her part seems to agree to marry Edward IV out of love for her children:¹⁰

King Edward. Now tell me, madam, do you love your
children?

Lady Grey. Ay, full as dearly as I love myself.

King Edward. And would you not do much to do them
good?

Lady Grey. To do them good, I would sustain some

⁹cf. 3*H6*, IV.i.117-119 and IV.ii.7-12.

¹⁰This might be modified in performance. Cf. p.99.

harm.

(3H6, III.ii.36-39)

Yet, Margaret and Elizabeth are more fortunate than Blanche and Isabella in as far as their husbands marry them for love, and that love is an important factor in the balance of power in their relationships. Suffolk's "wondrous rare description .../ Of beauteous Margaret" (1H6, V.v.1-2) leaves the inexperienced young Henry with "such sharp dissension in [his] breast", so "sick with working of [his] thoughts", so "perplexed with a thousand cares" (V.v.84, 86, 95) -- in short as completely "bere[ft] ... of his wits with wonder" (V.iii.195) as Suffolk could have hoped -- that he instructs him to "agree to any covenants" for the hand of Margaret (V.v.88).¹¹ Similarly Edward's love -- or lust, if one prefers -- for Elizabeth puts him into her power: he makes her his wife and queen rather than his concubine as he had originally intended: "One way or other, she is for a king;/ And she shall be my love, or else my queen" (3H6, III.ii.87-88). Elizabeth gets not just her late husband's lands for which she had come, but a crown as well! If such is the effect of love on the traditional balance of power between the sexes, it is hardly surprising that the Machiavellian Richard of Gloucester marries

... not all so much for love
As for another secret close intent,
By marrying her which I must reach unto.

(R3, I.i.157-159)

Far from giving a woman power over him, he will give her the illusion of it to gain power over her. He declares in true Petrarchan fashion that Anne has the power of life and death over him (I.ii.155-186). Indeed he actually

¹¹The infatuation does, however, seem to turn into love --
Nay, take me with thee, good sweet Exeter:
Not that I fear to stay, but love to go
Whither the Queen intends.

(3H6, II.v.137-139)

-- albeit not "romantic" or "erotic" love, as shall be demonstrated in Chapter 6. Cf. pp.100-101.

gives her that symbol of male power, the sword. But it is his will that prevails, not hers, and Anne, unlike Elizabeth, is a political cipher.

In these plays, a woman's power in her relationship with her husband is a function of the affection or love he feels for her. Should he be politically influential, it may be possible for her to extend that power into a wider sphere. "Non-political" power may be transformed into political power. This is what happens in the first "wooing" scene in *Richard III*. It is Anne who has charge of the funeral procession of Henry VI at the beginning of the scene, but with Richard's subsequent ascendancy over her, she relinquishes her charge of it to him. In this case, it is of course the man not the woman whose "power" has been "transformed"; nevertheless this does illustrate how power within interpersonal relationships may be extended into a wider sphere. Anne *chooses* to resign her charge to Richard. She is not forced to do so.

While Margaret finds her political power circumscribed on occasion by the pleasure of His Majesty, her husband, she does find a way round this difficulty. If in 2 *Henry VI*, she fears that "If [Henry] be ta'en, [they] then should see the bottom/ Of all [their] fortunes" (V.ii.78-79), in 3 *Henry VI* she "divorce[s her]self/ Both from [his] table ... and [his] bed" (I.i.254-255) and leaves him in London where he falls into the hands of the Yorkist Warwick.¹² Is she no longer interested in being queen? Not quite. Circumstances have merely changed. A new player has emerged:

... I here divorce myself

Both from thy table, Henry, and thy bed,

Until that act of parliament be repeal'd

¹²cf. 3*H6*, I.ii.56-57 and II.i.111-115. Historically, and in both Hall and Holinshed, Margaret did not meet Henry in London after the disinheritance of their son, Edward. Henry fell into Yorkist hands at Northampton in July 1460 and was escorted to London, where York was proclaimed heir in October. Margaret however escaped the Yorkists. They were not reunited till February 1461 after the Second Battle of St. Albans. Thus the episode in which she castigates him for the disinheritance of Edward, and her "desertion" of him appear to be entirely the invention of Shakespeare. See Hall 244-252 and Holinshed 655-660.

Whereby *my son* is disinherited.

(I.i.254-257; my emphasis)

Margaret now has Edward's welfare and interests to consider in addition to those of Henry and herself. It is "love ... to her son" that "Hath made her break out into terms of rage" (I.i.271-272). The advent of Edward also means that Henry is not quite as important to her as he once was. Her son is a prince of the royal house and (until his disinheritance) lawful heir to the throne of England. She may derive nearly as much eminence and power from her relationship to him as from her relationship to his father. That the prince is by Margaret's side in every scene in which she appears, while Henry in contrast features in just three of those scenes -- all of which are in the first half of the play (I.i, II.ii, II.v) -- is indicative of his greater importance to her. It should be noted, too, that while her reaction to Henry's death is not dramatized, her cataclysmic grief over that of Edward is. In *3 Henry VI*, as far as Margaret is concerned, Edward has taken over his father's political role, hence it is he who now gives her the legitimacy the latter had in *2 Henry VI*.

Power is predicated upon the acceptance of the authority of "the dominant" by "the dominated". Where this acceptance does not occur, power fails as it does at the Tower in Act IV Scene i of *Richard III*. Brackenbury does not recognize Anne's authority. But since in this instance, the queen's authority has come into collision with that of the king, the outcome is hardly unexpected. Yet, even when such collisions do not occur, "subjects" may refuse to accept the queen's authority, particularly if they are magnates in a country such as the England of Henry VI and Edward IV, where first Henry's failure, like Richard II's, to "Cut off the heads of too fast growing sprays" and to "root away/ The noisome weeds" (*R2*, III.iv.34, 37-38), and then the usurping Edward's dependence upon the support of his adherents, have left the monarchy weak and the aristocracy strong. As Margaret complains:

Beside the haught Protector, have we Beaufort
 The imperious churchman; Somerset, Buckingham,
 And grumbling York; and not the least of these
 But can do more in England than the King.

(2H6, I.iii.68-71)

Margaret's first attempt to participate in a council of state meets with hostility from Humphrey of Gloucester: "Madam, ... These are no women's matters (I.iii.116-117). She faces male chauvinism yet again later on the battlefield of Wakefield. Yet, while the Lancastrian army is constantly referred to as "the army of the Queen" (3H6, I.ii.64, I.iv.1), it is Clifford and Northumberland, rather than Margaret although she is present, whom the captured York chooses to address: "Come, bloody Clifford, rough Northumberland,/ I dare your quenchless fury to more rage" (I.iv.27-29). If it is Margaret's authority that Gloucester and York do not recognize, it is Elizabeth's crown that her "subjects" question. On her first appearance as Edward's queen, in Act IV Scene i of 3 *Henry VI*, Elizabeth faces open criticism of Edward's marriage to her from a group of hostile nobles -- a group which includes her new brothers-in-law, George and Richard. Implicit in their criticism, as Elizabeth is aware, is their refusal to recognize the "rais[ing of her] state to title of a queen" (IV.i.67).

We have seen that marriage leads to an increase in the political power of Margaret and Elizabeth. But power may flow from wife to husband as well as from husband to wife. The patriarchy, however, expects marriage to consolidate male not female power. Indeed the marriages that Humphrey of Gloucester and Warwick -- who serve as father figures to Henry and Edward respectively -- consider "good" are those which increase or at least secure male power. In 1 *Henry VI*, Humphrey arranges a marriage for Henry with the daughter of the Earl of Armagnac while in 3 *Henry VI*, Warwick

arranges one for Edward with Bona, sister of Lewis of France. The Earl being "near knit to Charles" and "A man of great authority in France" (1H6, V.i.17, 18), a marriage between his daughter and the King of England would "surer bind [the] knot of amity" between the warring kingdoms (V.i.16). Similarly, marriage between Edward and Bona would, as Warwick explains, "sinew both these lands together" and effectively prevent the Lancastrians getting any aid from France: "having France thy friend, thou shalt not dread/ The scatter'd foe that hopes to rise again" (3H6, II.vi.91-93).

In these plays, when power flows from wife to husband, the former is not so much the source of that power herself as the "channel" through which it flows to him. Such is the role of Elizabeth of York, daughter to Edward IV, in *Richard III*.¹³ As her father's heir after the deaths of her brothers, she is in a sense the repository of his power and thus marriage to her would help to legitimize dubious claims to the throne. If Richmond "by that knot looks proudly on the crown" (IV.iii.42), so does Richard: "I must be married to my brother's daughter,/ Or else my kingdom stands on brittle glass" (IV.ii.60-61). Considered of vital importance by both claimants to the throne, she is nevertheless a notable absentee in the play.¹⁴ Her absence is indicative of her role as merely a repository rather than a source of power in herself. It is quite enough for the new King Henry VII to invoke her name when he takes the crown:

¹³In her essay "'Neither Mother, Wife Nor England's Queen': The Roles of Women in *Richard III*", Madonne Miner asserts that Anne Neville has a similar function for Richard (40). However I find no indication in the text that he considers her politically important. He never reveals what his "secret close intent" is.

¹⁴Elizabeth of York does appear in two other sixteenth century plays about Richard III, Thomas Legge's *Richardus Tertius* and the anonymous *The True Tragedie of Richard the Third*. In Legge's play, Richard woos Elizabeth herself, not her mother (Part 3, IV.v.), though, significantly, she is known as "oldest daughter of Edward" rather than "Elizabeth"; while in *The True Tragedie*, Richard's rival, Richmond, proposes to Elizabeth on the battlefield of Bosworth (Scene xx) -- albeit after obtaining the permission of both her mother and the nobles of England to marry her (2082-2086). In this play, it is Elizabeth, not her mother, who is present when her father, Edward IV, "reconciles" the warring factions in his court (Scene ii), and she is also given the second part of the epilogue on the subsequent history of the House of Tudor -- the other two parts being taken by the "Messenger" and the "Queene", her mother.

O now let Richmond and Elizabeth,
 The true succeeders of each royal House,
 By God's fair ordinance conjoin together

(V.v.29-31)

Her presence on stage is quite unnecessary.

A woman's effect on her husband's power may well be adverse too, as Henry VI and Edward IV discover. Despite the suitably advantageous matches being arranged for them by their closest councillors, both Henry and Edward choose to "[match] more for wanton lust than honour/ Or than for strength and safety of [the] country" (3H6, III.iii.210-211). Henry, after hearing Suffolk's "wondrous rare description" (1H6, V.v.1), decides to marry Margaret of Anjou, "the daughter of a worthless king,/ Having neither subject, wealth, nor diadem" (2H6, IV.i.80-81). Not to be outdone, Edward chooses Lady Elizabeth Grey, widow of a Lancastrian sympathiser, Sir John Grey;¹⁵ a woman who brings neither wealth nor alliance to "strengthen [the] commonwealth/ 'Gainst foreign storms" (3H6, IV.i.36-37). For Henry and Edward, their choice of an "affective" marriage not only makes an "unsuitable" woman, "England's royal Queen", but also has serious implications for their political power. In withdrawing from matches arranged for them, the kings insult their betrotheds and their families, and, perhaps more importantly, anger their nobles, who expect their king to win honour and allies for the kingdom through his marriage, not dishonour and enemies. For love of their queens, both kings perform deeds that

¹⁵There is some confusion in Shakespeare's accounts of the political sympathies of Sir John Grey, first husband of Elizabeth Woodville. In 3 *Henry VI*, Grey is represented as a Yorkist, for Edward says that he "in justice cannot well deny" Elizabeth's suit for the repossession of Grey's lands "Because in quarrel of the house of York,/ The worthy gentleman did lose his life" (III.ii.5-7) and Richard agrees that "It were dishonour to deny it her" (III.ii.9) -- though, as the Arden editor points out, the reference to lands being seized by the conqueror (III.ii.3) would seem to indicate that Grey was fighting against the victorious Yorkists (III.ii.6n). But in *Richard III*, Richard reminds Elizabeth that "you and your husband Grey/ Were factious for the House of Lancaster" (I.iii.127-128). Historically, Grey was a Lancastrian and was killed while fighting for their cause in the Second Battle of St. Albans.

alienate their nobles. This does not augur well for Henry and Edward. For their power, like their wives', is predicated upon acceptance by their "subjects" -- as Henry learns when he meets the two keepers who insist that they "were subjects but while [he was] king" (3*H6*, III.i.80). He is no longer king because they have now chosen to give their allegiance to Edward:

You are the king King Edward hath depos'd;
And we his subjects, sworn in all allegiance,
Will apprehend you as his enemy.

(III.i.69-71)

Henry's surrender of Maine and Anjou for the hand of Margaret suggests that he has little regard for the "labours" and "honours" of those who fought to win France. Humphrey and Warwick certainly appear to think so. The idea is implicit in both Humphrey's long speech with its images of destruction and negation, and its catalogue of the various "labours" and "honours" which will "die" as a result of the king's action (2*H6*, I.i.74-102), and in Warwick's laments on the loss of Maine which he had conquered (I.ii.118-121, 210-214). Indeed, Warwick's subsequent support for the Yorkist claim may well have been prompted by disaffection to the Lancastrian Henry VI. If Warwick salutes York in 2 *Henry VI* as his "rightful sovereign with honour of his birthright to the crown" (II.ii.61), he has little trouble with his conscience in 3 *Henry VI* when he returns his allegiance to the "usurping" Lancastrians. The ease with which "Injurious Margaret" (III.iii.78) becomes "My noble Queen" (III.iii.195) argues a pragmatic, indeed self-interested, approach to the question of the legitimacy of monarchs.

Edward also loses support as a result of his marriage. Warwick who "pawn[s his] credit and [his] honour" (III.iii.116) to persuade Lewis of France of the legitimacy of Edward's crown and his love for Bona, finds himself in an awkward situation when Edward's messenger arrives with news of his marriage to Elizabeth. Angered at being thus "dishonoured", Warwick, who

"came from Edward as ambassador" "return[s] his sworn and mortal foe" (III.iii.256, 257). Moreover, besides Warwick, Edward loses several other supporters, including Somerset, Montague, and Clarence, his own brother, though the loss of the latter's support is caused less by the marriage itself than by the actions that Edward's love for Elizabeth has prompted him to take:

Richard. And yet, methinks, your Grace hath not done
well

To give the heir and daughter of Lord Scales
Unto the brother of your loving bride;
She better would have fitted me, or Clarence:
But in your bride you bury brotherhood.

George. Or else you would not have bestow'd the heir
Of the Lord Bonville on your new wife's son,
And leave your brothers to go speed elsewhere.

(IV.i.50-57)

While these marriages do not make much difference to Richard's loyalty to Edward -- he has already announced (at least to the audience) his intention to "hew [his] way" to the crown "with a bloody axe" (III.ii.181) -- they are the principal cause of Clarence's break with Edward. It is presumably at Elizabeth's request that Edward arranges these marriages for her brother and son. In a sense, therefore, Edward's love for her has, albeit indirectly, caused the erosion of his power: "in [his] bride [he] bur[ies] brotherhood" (IV.i.54).

In the Renaissance, woman, the "irrational" being, was subject to her husband. But the Pauline principle that "the husband is the head of the wife" (Ephesians 5:23) implied not only that the wife must obey her husband and be guided by him in all things, but also that the husband was responsible for his wife. Hence the very power that Humphrey of Gloucester is given over his wife, Eleanor Cobham, is used to undermine him. Eleanor, who

wishes to promote Humphrey's political career, becomes a tool in the hands of his enemies and causes his fall instead. For although it is she who is caught using witchcraft, Humphrey, as her husband, is implicated in her crime, as he himself admits:

Noble she is, but if she have forgot
 Honour and virtue, and convers'd with such
 As, like to pitch, defile nobility,
 I banish her my bed and company,
 And give her as prey to law and shame,
 That hath dishonour'd Gloucester's honest name.

(2H6, II.i.186-191)

And if such is the view of the husband himself, it does not require much for his enemies to take it one step further:

The Duchess by his subordination,
 Upon my life, began her devilish practices:
 Or if he were not privy to those faults,
 Yet, by reputing of his high descent,
 As next the King he was successive heir,
 And such high vaunts of his nobility,
 Did instigate the bedlam brain-sick Duchess
 By wicked means to frame our sovereign's fall.

(III.i.45-52)

His wife's crime and the suspicion of his possible involvement are enough "To tumble down [Gloucester]/ From top of Honour to Disgrace's feet" (I.ii.48-49), and with the addition of several other trumped-up charges, he is charged with treason himself.

The Yorkists charge that Margaret is the cause of Henry's downfall:

For what hath broach'd this tumult but thy pride?
 Hadst thou been meek, our title still had slept;

And we, in pity of the gentle King,
 Had slipp'd our claim until another age.

(3H6, II.ii.159-162)

The ambition of York and his sons make it highly unlikely that their "title" would have "slept" had Henry been married to a woman as docile as Anne Neville rather than the strong-willed Margaret. But it is true that the Yorkist "title" would have "slept" for at least a while longer had Margaret not taken it upon herself to free Somerset and take him along to St. Albans (2H6, V.i.83-89). Moreover, that it is possible at all for the Yorkists to use her as a scapegoat suggests that Margaret does have an influence on the political power of her husband. Neither she, Elizabeth nor Eleanor wishes to erode her husband's political power. But through her adultery, political intriguing, or "unseemly" influence over him, each of these women has the power to weaken the respect and support of her husband's subordinates for him, or be used by his enemies to cause his downfall.

Richard's complaint in *Richard III* that "men are rul'd by women" (I.i.62) is not his alone but that of the patriarchy as a whole. The careers of the two queens, Margaret and Elizabeth, bear testimony to the power of wives. In the final play of the tetralogy, the dominating and subversive wife is finally contained, reduced to her least threatening and most "comforting" aspect: "the wailing widow", one of the two biblical types of the defenceless and destitute.

All the women in *Richard III* are widows: Margaret, Elizabeth, Anne (before her marriage to Richard), and the dowager Duchess of York. None of them takes any part in the political life of the kingdom. In contrast to the *Henry VI* plays, in which women feature prominently in "public" scenes of court and battle, in *Richard III* women are largely confined to "private" scenes of domesticity and/or lamentation. This change is indicative of a

diminution of female political involvement at the end of the tetralogy. It is caused by the deaths of the husbands from whom the women derived whatever power they may have had, and by the ascendancy of forces antagonistic to them: the Yorkists in the case of the Lancastrian women, and Richard of Gloucester in the case of the Yorkists.

Richard's power and the women's corresponding lack of it are underlined by his constant interruption of the domestic scenes to which they have been confined. Of the seven scenes in which the women appear,¹⁶ Richard interrupts five in person, notably I.ii. and IV.iv, both of which begin as scenes of lamentation and are turned into "wooing" scenes by Richard. His power is felt even in the two scenes in which he does not appear. The playful exchanges of the Duchess and her grandson, York, in II.iv. come to an end with the entrance of the messenger who bears the news of Richard's arrest of Rivers and Grey, while in IV.i, first Brackenbury, on Richard's orders, stops Elizabeth, the Duchess, and Anne from visiting the princes, then Stanley brings news of Richard's coronation. Male interruption of domestic scenes is a feature exclusive to the final play of the tetralogy, and all the interruptions are caused by the same man: Richard. Indeed, it is he, who in causing the deaths of the husbands and sons who provided for them and/or gave them definition, has shut the women out of the public sphere and confined them to the domestic. As Margaret puts it, "A husband and a son thou ow'st to me" (I.iii.170). And, correspondingly, Richard owes Elizabeth, three sons and a brother; Anne, a husband and a father-in-law; and the Duchess, a son and two grandsons. With the loss of their male relatives, the women, particularly Margaret and Elizabeth who were so powerful while their husbands were king, have recourse only to curses and lamentation.

¹⁶R3, I.ii, I.iii, II.i, II.ii, II.iv, IV.i, IV.iv.

The patriarchy's chief hope for containing the potentially subversive power of the women lies in the fact that their "power" over their husbands is double-edged: should their husbands fall or die, their power would be at an end. As Humphrey of Gloucester warns Eleanor his wife,

And wilt thou still be hammering treachery,
To tumble down thy husband *and thyself*
From top of Honour to Disgrace's feet?

(2H6, I.ii.47-49. My emphasis).

Chapter 3

"Madam my mother, I do cry you mercy"

By Act II Scene ii of *Richard III*, both Richard's brothers, Edward IV and Clarence, are dead, "leav[ing] the world for [him] to bustle in" (I.i.153). For all intents and purposes, he is the most powerful person in the kingdom. Yet, in this scene, he falls onto his knees, saying:

... I do cry you mercy:

I did not see your Grace. Humbly on my knee

I crave your blessing.

(II.ii.104-106)

The person to whom he kneels and whose blessing he says he craves is not the new King Edward V but Richard's mother, the dowager Duchess of York. In this little episode between Richard and the Duchess two conflicting kinds of power relations meet, that of gender and that of the family. For the man and woman involved are a son and his mother. As the man in a gender relationship, Richard, possessed of the "superior" moral and mental faculties of the male, has authority over the Duchess, the woman and the "weaker vessel". She is, however, no "ordinary" woman but Richard's mother, and, as her son, he is bound by the fifth commandment "to honour" her.

While the Renaissance patriarchal order demanded the subordination of woman to man, the mother-son relationship reversed their roles, giving the woman authority over the man. As Peter Erickson comments, "From the standpoint of sexual politics, the relation between mother and son [was] a special one not easily integrated into the patriarchal order" (156). Indeed in

The King's Book, A Necessary Doctrine and Erudition for any Christian Man published in 1543, the word "parents" is equated with "fathers":

And by this word "honour", in this commandment, is not only meant a reverence and lowliness in words and outward gesture, which children ... ought to exhibit unto their parents ... but also a prompt and a ready obedience to their lawful commandments, a regard to their words.... This is the very honour and duty which ... children do owe unto their parents And that children owe this duty to their fathers, it appeareth in many places of scripture.

(Belsey, 157)

As Catherine Belsey has noted, mothers routinely disappear from Renaissance interpretations of the fifth commandment (158).

In the case of Richard and his mother, there is a further complication. Like most of the royal sons in Shakespeare's first tetralogy, he becomes King of England and his mother's sovereign. As his subject, the Duchess then owes her son respect, allegiance and obedience. The subservience demanded in the Renaissance even from the mother of the king is well illustrated in the letters of Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond, to her son Henry VII, one of which, in 1501, includes the following plea: "And if I be too bold in this, or any of my desires, I humbly beseech your grace of pardon, and that your highness take no displeasure". Margaret Beaufort signs herself "your humble servant, beadwoman, and mother" (Travitsky, 71). She is both "servant" and "mother" to Henry VII; paradoxically both his subordinate and his superior.

The Tudor theory of "the king's two bodies" made the issue of maternal authority over a royal son even more complex. This theory held that the monarch had a "body natural" which was subject to all the

infirmities of an "ordinary" human being, and a "body politic" which was infallible and immortal, subject to neither infancy nor old age. It was this concept that proved the stumbling block to Elizabeth I's attempt to invalidate a grant given by her brother, Edward VI, on the grounds of his minority. The judges ruled that the grant was legal for "the king" could never be under age:

altho' the natural Body of the King is subject to Infancy,
yet when the Body politic is conjoined with it, and one
Body is made of them both, the whole Body shall have
all the Properties, Qualities and Degrees of the Body
politic which is the greater and more worthy, and in
which there is not nor can be any Infancy.

(Axton, 17)

In view of the continuity of the body politic from one monarch to the next, "the King" did not have a mother as such.

These contradictions are inherent in the relationships between the mothers and sons in Shakespeare's first tetralogy. Foucault's observation that "power" is "a complex [and unstable] strategical situation" produced by a "moving substrate of force relations" (93) is certainly true of the "power" in these relationships.

A series of maternal blessings and curses in *Richard III* keeps before the audience the injunction of the fifth commandment to honour one's mother. The blessing Richard asks for and receives from his mother in Act II Scene ii is balanced by the curse she later lays on him. And if the "prayers" of Richard's mother "on the adverse party fight" (IV.iv.191), the mother of his antagonist, Richmond, "prays continually for [her son's] good" (V.iii.85). But this would be unlikely to cause Richard much anxiety. His attitude to maternal authority is clearly pragmatic: "the obedient son" is merely a role

he plays for his own ends, of a piece with his subsequent performance in III.vii. as "the Christian Prince" for the benefit of the Mayor and citizens of London. For the Richard who kneels to ask his mother's blessing is the same man who in Act IV Scene iv speaks to her as his social and political inferior:

King Richard. Who intercepts me in my expedition?

Duchess. O, she that might have intercepted thee --

By strangling thee in her accursed womb --

From all the slaughters, wretch, that thou hast
done.

...

King Richard. A flourish, trumpets! Strike alarum,
drums!

Let not the heavens hear these tell-tale women

Rail on the Lord's anointed. Strike, I say!

Either be patient and entreat me fair,

Or with the clamorous report of war

Thus will I drown your exclamations.

(IV.iv.136-139, 149-154)

The Duchess is a "tell-tale woman" while Richard is "the Lord's anointed"; the authority of a man and a sovereign overrides that of a mother. She may speak only if he permits her to:

Duchess. O let me speak.

King Richard. Do then, but I'll not hear.

Duchess. I will be mild and gentle in my words.

King Richard. And brief, good mother, for I am in
haste.

(IV.iv.160-162)

By contrast, Margaret of Anjou, mother of Edward, Prince of Wales, not only speaks far more than her son does, but very often speaks for him, most

notably in accepting Warwick's suggestion of a marriage between his daughter and Edward:

Yes, I agree, and thank you for your motion.

Son Edward, she is fair and virtuous,

Therefore delay not, give thy hand to Warwick;

(3H6, III.iii.244-246)

Edward's subsequent acquiescence is almost as perfunctory as that of the absent Anne.

The freedom to speak, to say what one wishes when one wishes, and the corresponding power to grant or deny that freedom are the privileges of "the dominant". In his relationship with his mother, it is Richard who has that power and who is dominant. His mother lacks the right to speak. She is the subordinate party in their relationship. That he addresses her as "good mother" means nothing. For him, it is a purely formulaic mode of address, used perhaps with a touch of irony and scorn. To Edward, however, his mother's authority prevails over whatever authority gender or rank may give him. That she "rules" him is established in the opening scene of 3 *Henry VI*. As the stage direction (I.i.217SD) and speeches indicate, she sweeps into the parliament with him in her wake. The Quarto stage direction lists her first: "Enter the Queene and the Prince". More suggestively, the stage direction in the Folio omits Edward completely: "Enter the Queene". Moreover, Margaret speaks -- and at considerable length -- before he does. She takes the lead in everything, and everyone expects her to. Hence it is that when suggesting the marriage between his daughter and the prince, Warwick seeks her consent before that of her son:

That if our Queen and this young Prince agree,

I'll join mine eldest daughter and my joy

To him forthwith in holy wedlock's bands.

(III.iii.241-243)

As noted earlier, it is Margaret who answers him, accepting his "motion" on Edward's behalf.

Edward's youth -- he is called a child (V.iv.50), "youthful Edward" (V.v.11), "so young a thorn" (V.v.13), "lad" (V.v.32) and "boy" (V.v.31, 49) -- may explain his submission to maternal authority, but that submission is voluntary. That he chooses to accept his mother's authority is clear from the brief custody battle that takes place at the end of I.i:

Queen Margaret. ... Come, son, let's away;
Our army is ready; come, we'll after them.

...

King Henry. Gentle son Edward, thou wilt stay with
me?

(I.i.262-263, 266)

Edward chooses his mother. His decision is hardly surprising for she stands for the identity and rights his father has denied him:

When I return with victory from the field
I'll see your grace: till then I'll follow her.

(I.i.269-270)

Although Margaret of Anjou, Elizabeth Grey, and the Duchess of York are all mothers of kings or would-be kings of England, the extent of their roles in the political life of the kingdom varies, for their involvement in politics is a function of the "strategical situation" engendered by the various force relations at work in their relationships with their sons.

Margaret is the most politically active of the three mothers. In the last chapter, we saw that the legitimacy of her political power in 3 *Henry VI* is derived largely from her son. Ruling Edward, Margaret rules the kingdom -- or at least the parts of it that recognize the Lancastrian government. It is she who organizes the Lancastrian opposition to the Yorkists, commands the

army; conducts negotiations with the enemy and seeks foreign aid. She is head of government and commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

The Duchess of York has none of Margaret's authority over her son, nor any of her political power. Indeed she has no political role. That she is never in court is indicative of this. Her scenes are domestic ones. Significantly, when trying to persuade Brackenbury to admit her to the Tower, the Duchess appeals to her relationship with his prisoners -- "I am their father's mother: I will see them" (R3, IV.i.22) -- rather than to her relationship with Richard, the man who had given him his orders, or to her rank as the Duchess of York, reflecting her awareness of her lack of both maternal authority and political power.

External forces also affect the mothers' authority over their sons and therefore, their political power, as Elizabeth Grey's anxiety about "what would betide on [her]" (I.iii.6) after the death of her husband, Edward IV, indicates:

Elizabeth. The loss of such a lord includes all harms.

Grey. The heavens have bless'd you with a goodly son

To be your comforter when he is gone.

Elizabeth. Ah, he is young, and his minority

Is put unto the trust of Richard Gloucester,

A man that loves not me,

(I.iii.8-13)

The young Edward V cannot and indeed will not be a "comforter" to his mother. While the relative youthfulness of Margaret's son may account for her dominance, that Elizabeth's son is a child serves only to limit her authority and power. Like Henry VI before him, the boy king is taken from his mother and put into the custody of a Protector. Such is her impotence that Elizabeth loses her youngest son even while in sanctuary. The maternal authority she asserts in taking the young Duke of York with her into

sanctuary is denied by the members of the court who see her action as "an indirect and peevish course" (III.i.31) to be expected of a "mere" woman. In this collision between maternal authority and male power, the former comes off second best. Whether the Cardinal succeeds in persuading her to surrender the child or "from her jealous arms pluck[ed] him perforce" (III.i.36), is not clear. But however it is achieved, his success underlines the defeat of a mother's authority by gender politics.

The mothers derive political power rather than authority from their sons. They may command but they only do so on behalf of their sons and not in their own right. It is for this reason that Edward IV magnanimously spares the life of Margaret of Anjou, and that the Yorkists in *Richard III* are relatively untroubled by her running loose in England. Being a Plantagenet only by marriage, she is no threat at all after the deaths of her husband and son. Their deaths, in particular that of Edward, mark the end of her power.

Nor are the sons important to their mothers for political reasons only. In the last two plays of the tetralogy, the women are defined *as* mothers. In Act IV Scene i of *Richard III*, a brief scene of just over a hundred lines, the word "mother" appears seven times.¹ All the women in this scene -- even Anne who has no children of her own -- see themselves as mothers: Elizabeth as the princes' mother, the Duchess of York as "their father's mother", and Anne as their mother "in love" (IV.i.21-23). That Anne is accompanied by Clarence's daughter² emphasizes her role as a surrogate mother. Indeed the scene is presented as a confrontation between mothers and the patriarchy; the mothers trying to gain access to the children in the tower, the representatives of the patriarchy preventing them.

¹It is interesting to note that the word "mother" appears more often in *Richard III* than in any other Shakespearean play, appearing no less than forty-nine times. The only other plays in which the word occurs more than thirty-five times are *Hamlet* (41), *Coriolanus* (44), and *King John* (38) -- all of whose protagonists have problems of some sort with their mothers. See Marvin Spevack's *A Complete and Systematic Concordance to the Works of Shakespeare Vol. V*.

²cf. R3, IV.i.OSD, 1-2.

Margaret and Elizabeth, the two principal women in *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III*, are identified primarily as mothers. The latter is introduced in Act III Scene ii of *3 Henry VI* as a widowed mother pleading with the king for the return of her late husband's lands to her sons. She has three more scenes in the play, in the second of which she is an expectant mother who "wean[s] me from despair/ For love of Edward's offspring in my womb" (IV.iv.17-18); and in the third, which is also the final scene in the play, she comes onto the stage with her infant son, the future Edward V. In *Richard III*, her role changes from that of grieving widow to grieving mother. Significantly, when Rivers attempts to take her mind off the death of her husband, he does so by reminding her of her duties to her son:

Madam, bethink you, like a careful mother,
Of the young prince your son: send straight for him;
Let him be crown'd; in him your comfort lives.
Drown desperate sorrow in dead Edward's grave,
And plant your joys in living Edward's throne.

(II.ii.96-100)

In the patriarchal world of the tetralogy, a woman's children are, as the Duchess of York says, her "comfort" and "crutches" (II.ii.56, 58).

Even Margaret of Anjou, that "manly woman" as Hall calls her (249), is defined by her role as a mother. Paradoxically, indeed, it is maternal love that makes her "manly". Her political manoeuvrings in *3 Henry VI* are framed by two scenes which put them into perspective, Act I Scene i and Act V Scene v. In her first scene in the play, she bursts into the parliament, raging at Henry's disinheritance of Edward, their son, and in her last, grieves in an equally violent fashion for Edward, who is murdered before her eyes by York's three sons. Her part in the play thus begins and ends with her

firmly in the role of mother.³ This emphasis on her maternal role continues in *Richard III*, in which she is more bereaved mother than bereaved widow. Her curses on the Yorkists, for instance, are for her son's murder rather than her husband's. Correspondingly, she sees the Yorkist deaths as retribution for the death of Edward rather than that of Henry:

Bear with me: I am hungry for revenge,
 And now I cloy me with beholding it.
 Thy Edward he is dead, that kill'd my Edward;
 Thy other Edward dead, to quit my Edward;
 Young York, he is but boot, because both they
 Match'd not the high perfection of my loss.
 Thy Clarence he is dead, that stabb'd my Edward;
 And the beholders of this frantic play,
 Th'adulterate Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan, Grey,
 Untimely smother'd in their dusky graves.

(IV.iv.61-70)

In all, she mentions Edward twelve times⁴ and Henry just five.⁵

In the patriarchal world in which Margaret lives, a woman is defined as wife and mother. Procreation, to put it bluntly, is her function. Margaret thus defines herself as Edward's mother. Remaining "undaunted" through all the vicissitudes of the civil war, her spirit is broken only by his murder⁶ after which, she begs each of York's sons in turn to kill her:

³That Margaret is a more active participant in the political struggles of 3 *Henry VI* than she is in those of 2 *Henry VI* is indicative not of the loss of Suffolk, her lover and ally in 2 *Henry VI* -- she gains new allies in young Clifford, Warwick and Oxford -- but of her love for her son whose rights are threatened by the Yorkists. While Margaret refers to "Henry's hope" (III.iii.58), "Henry's friends" (III.iii.143 & 201), and Henry's "realm", "subjects", "statutes", and "treasure" (V.iv.77-79), "Henry" is not Henry of Windsor the man but Henry of Windsor the symbol and figurehead of the House of Lancaster to which her son is heir. As Marilyn French puts it, "Henry is its [her army's] standard [but] Edward is the cause" (61).

⁴cf. R3, I.iii.120, 170, 192, 200, 211 & 267; IV.iv.21, 25, 40, 63, 64 & 66.

⁵ibid., I.iii.119, 170 & 192; IV.iv.25 & 41

⁶ Shakespeare omits the account in the Chronicles of Margaret's earlier breakdown:
 ... it was to her declared, how that kyng Edward had
 gotten again the garland, and that kyng Henry her

Nay, never bear me hence; dispatch me here:

Here sheath thy sword; I'll pardon thee my death.

What, wilt thou not? Then, Clarence, do it thou.

...

What! wilt thou not? Where is that devil's butcher?

Richard, hard-favour'd Richard, where art thou,

Thou are not here: murder is thy alms-deed;

Petitioners for blood thou ne'er put'st back.

(V.v.67-69, 75-78)

Unlike Lady Macbeth, Margaret knows the implications for a mother of her child's -- especially her only son's -- death. As old Talbot observes to his son, "In thee thy mother dies" (*1H6*, IV.vi.38).

While the mothers derive their political power and identity from their sons, the sons too rely upon their mothers for the legitimacy of their status and, hence, their authority. Richard, like Robert Faulconbridge in *King John*, asserts his claim as his father's heir by inferring that his mother's son is not his father's:

Tell them, when that my mother went with child

Of that insatiate Edward, noble York

My princely father then had wars in France,

And by true computation of the time

husband was desolately left post alone, and taken prisoner, how the Erle of Warwicke and his brother were bothe slain and ded, and all their armie destroyed, scatered or taken When she harde all these miserable chaunces and misfortunes, ... she like a woman all dismaied for feare, fell to the ground, her harte was perced with sorowe, her speache was in maner passed, all her spirites were tormented with Malencholy.

(Hall , 297)

Found that the issue was not his-begot;

(R3, III.v.85-89)

Richard levels a similar accusation at Edward, Prince of Wales: "Whoever got thee, there thy mother stands" (3H6, II.ii.133), although on this occasion the accusation is calculated to insult rather than to undermine, and nothing more is made of Edward's alleged bastardy.

In the Renaissance, a son's status was linked inextricably to his mother's honour. While his father gave him name, status, and rank, only she could confirm his paternity and thus his right to that name, status, and rank. As the bastard Faulconbridge puts it in *King John*, "But for the certain knowledge of that truth/ I put you o'er to heaven and to my mother" (I.i.61-62). Mothers were the custodians of their children's legitimacy. It lay in their power to validate -- or invalidate -- their identities. Elizabeth Grey, for instance, tries to do the latter -- albeit with the best of intentions:

[I'll] Slander myself as false to Edward's bed,
 Throw over her the veil of infamy;
 So she may live unscarr'd of bleeding slaughter
 I will confess she was not Edward's daughter.

(R3, IV.iv.208-211)

While the patriarchal society was structured to exclude women from power, its organizing principle of passing authority and power from father to son made it dependent upon wives and mothers both for its continuity and for its legitimacy. Just one adulterous woman could subvert the entire process of patrilineal inheritance and the social order which rested upon it. A mother's infidelity -- real or supposed -- could mean the loss of name, status, and power for her son. As one's paternity was crucial, a mother's primary importance to her son was that she stood guarantor to his paternity.

But being their mothers' sons is equally important to some of the sons in these plays. The civil wars between Lancaster and York, and York and

Tudor are the result of men's claims to be their mothers' sons and heirs. Both the Yorkist and Tudor claims to the crown are made through mothers, with Richard, Duke of York, the original Yorkist claimant, making his claim through two women:

My mother, being heir unto the crown,
 ...
 By her I claim the kingdom: she was heir
 To Roger, Earl of March, who was the son
 Of Edmund Mortimer, who married Philippe,
 Sole daughter unto Lionel Duke of Clarence:

(2H6, II.ii.43, 46-49)

Richmond, the first Tudor king, makes no mention of his claim to the throne till after his defeat of Richard and even then does not speak of his mother in connection with it. He merely states quite simply that "Richmond and Elizabeth" are "The true succeeders of each royal House" (R3, V.v.29-30). But he is "the true succeder" of Lancaster only because, to adapt York's words:

My mother, being heir unto the crown,
 ...
 By her I claim the kingdom: she was heir
 To John, Duke of Somerset, who was the son
 Of John Beaufort, who was
 Second son unto John Duke of Lancaster:

The two mothers, Anne Mortimer and Margaret Beaufort, mark the transition from one dynasty to the next, from Plantagenet/Mortimer to York, and from Lancaster to Tudor.

Mothers were potentially disruptive forces in the Renaissance patriarchal chain of inheritance. While the "force" of its own "mother-founder" might serve the interests of a new dynasty, nevertheless fear and

suspicion surrounded that force, since it could surface in another mother to disrupt *their* dynasty and establish a new one in its place. If the historical Margaret Beaufort was instrumental in bringing the Tudors to power, a century later, another woman, Mary Stuart, would do the same for the new Stuart dynasty.

Mothers cause the patriarchy much anxiety in the tetralogy. They dominate their sons and bear their "offices" (Margaret of Anjou), disrupt patrilineal succession by transmitting their rights of inheritance to another family (Margaret Beaufort); they even have the power to destroy the succession altogether by making -- through their infidelity -- the children of other men their husbands' heirs, an accusation levelled at both Margaret (3H6, II.ii.133) and the Duchess of York.⁷ In *Richard III*, the patriarchy's fears of potentially subversive maternal power is manifested in the image of the mother as destroyer of life, which, rather than the traditional one of protector and nurturer of children, dominates the play. Moreover, the traditional image is itself perverted by its use earlier in the tetralogy. Joan, for instance, uses it to persuade Burgundy to return to the French cause (1H6, III.iii.44-51), while it is also associated with Joan's successor as "the English scourge", Margaret of Anjou, about whom Eleanor Cobham warns her nephew, Henry VI, that "She'll hamper thee and dandle thee like a baby" (2H6, I.iii.145). Likewise Suffolk, in bidding Margaret farewell, says:

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?
Here could I breathe my soul into the air,
As mild and gentle as the cradle-babe
Dying with mother's dug between his lips;

(III.ii.387-392)

⁷cf. R3, III.v.85-89 and III.vii.9-10.

The next occurrence of the traditional image of the mother seems innocent enough to begin with. Margaret, berating Henry for disinheriting their son, speaks eloquently of the selfless nature of maternal love:

Hadst thou but lov'd him half so well as I,
 Or felt that pain which I did for him once,
 Or nourish'd him as I did with my blood,
 Thou would'st have left thy dearest heart-blood there,
 Rather than made that savage duke thine heir,
 And disinherited thine only son.

(3H6, I.i.227-232)

But Margaret's attempts to protect her son's interests go disastrously wrong. "Dearest heart-blood" is spilt -- not hers but his. And the patriarchy lays the responsibility for his death squarely on her shoulders. "[Her] lovely Edward's death" "answer[s] for that peevish brat [Rutland]" (R3, I.iii.192, 194):

Richard. The curse my noble father laid on thee
 When thou didst crown his warlike brows with
 paper,
 And with thy scorns drew'st rivers from his eyes,
 And then to dry them, gav'st the Duke a clout
 Steep'd in the faultless blood of pretty Rutland --
 His curses then, from bitterness of soul
 Denounc'd against thee, are all fall'n upon thee,
 And God, not we, hath plagu'd thy bloody deed.

Elizabeth. So just is God, to right the innocent.

Hastings. O, 'twas the foulest deed to slay that babe,
 And the most merciless, that e'er was heard of.

Rivers. Tyrants themselves wept when it was reported.

Dorset. No man but prophesied revenge for it.

(I.iii.174-186)

In the eyes of the patriarchy, represented by the Yorkists, it is Margaret who has destroyed her own son. But Elizabeth, who lends her voice to the patriarchy here, will soon associate herself with the deaths of her own children:

O Dorset, speak not to me; get thee gone.

Death and destruction dogs thee at thy heels;

Thy mother's name is ominous to children.

(IV.i.38-40).

The ambivalence surrounding mothers is summed up in the archetypal mother figure of the Duchess of York. Margaret and Elizabeth lament only their own losses. Moreover, the former, in addition to not sharing the grief of others, actually "triumph[s] in [their] woes" (IV.iv.59), while the latter's grief is entirely personal, as Clarence's children point out:

Boy. Ah, Aunt, you wept not for our father's death:

How can we aid you with our kindred tears?

Girl. Our fatherless distress was left unmoan'd:

Your widow-dolour likewise be unwept.

(II.ii.62-65)

Uniquely, however, among the mothers in the play, the Duchess of York grieves for all the dead:

Alas, I am the mother of these griefs:

Their woes are parcell'd, mine is general.

She for an Edward weeps, and so do I;

I for a Clarence weep, so doth not she;

These babes for Clarence weep, and so do I;

I for an Edward weep, so do not they.

(II.ii.80-85)

Her grief is "general" -- encompassing even that of her Lancastrian enemy, Margaret: "O, Harry's wife, triumph not in my woes./ God witness with me, I have wept for thine" (IV.iv.59-60). With one exception, she mourns all the lost children of England and blesses those who remain:

[To Dorset] Go thou to Richmond, and good fortune
guide thee;

[To Anne] Go thou to Richard, and good angels tend
thee;

[To Elizabeth] Go thou to sanctuary, and good thoughts
possess thee;

(IV.i.91-93)

That exception is Richard. Her curse on him (IV.iv.188-196) balances her blessings on his victims, Dorset, Anne, and Elizabeth. It is the curse not just of the mother of Richard, but of all mothers and of "mother England" herself.

Yet, as Richard's mother, this symbolic "mother of England" is the indirect cause of the deaths of so many of England's children, as Margaret points out:

From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept

A hell-hound that doth hunt us all to death:

...

That foul-defacer of God's handiwork

Thy womb let loose to chase us to our graves.

(IV.iv.47-48, 53-54)

It is a responsibility the Duchess herself admits:

O my accursed womb, the bed of death!

A cockatrice hast thou hatch'd to the world

Whose unavowed eye is murderous.

(IV.i.53-55)

She is "the mother of all these griefs" (II.ii.80) not only because her grief encompasses that of all the mourners, but also because she has brought grief and destruction through her son, Richard, "the troubler of the poor world's peace" (I.iii.221), the "foul devil" who makes "the happy earth ... hell" (I.ii.50-51). She is an inverted image of the Blessed Virgin who brought joy and redemption into the world through giving birth to the Messiah. In the Duchess of York, the mother of both England and her destroyer, the mother is seen as the source of both life and death. Margaret puts it succinctly when she says of Richard: "this carnal cur/ Preys on the issue of his mother's body" (IV.iv.56-57).

Remarkably, the mother is held solely responsible for the destruction associated with her although others -- men -- are involved. While it is Clifford who kills Rutland, most of the anger and horror at his murder are reserved for Margaret, the "tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide" (3H6, I.iv.137), the murderous mother whose gloating over the killing of a son leads to the death of her own child. Likewise, the Duchess of York is made to bear all responsibility for bringing Richard into the world. Richard's father, as the almost complete silence concerning his "part" in his son indicates, is exonerated of all blame.⁸ Apparently, as Posthumus puts it in *Cymbeline*, "there's no motion/ That tends to vice in man, but .../ It is the woman's part" (II.iv.172-174). For evil came into the world through Eve, the mother of the human race, and, ever since, all mothers have passed the taint of Original Sin on to their children -- or so the patriarchy would have it.

In the tetralogy, the patriarchy has its own ways of dealing with mothers. It is noteworthy, for instance, that while the four plays span the reigns of five kings, only one of those five kings, Richard, is seen with his

⁸York's "part" in Richard is acknowledged only once, when -- significantly -- Margaret calls him "Thou loathed issue of thy father's loins" (R3, I.iii.232).

mother. Despite the fact that Henry VI first appears in *1 Henry VI* as a child,⁹ his mother, Katherine of Valois remains off-stage and unmentioned. Likewise, though the mothers of Henry's two immediate successors, Edward IV and Edward V, do feature in the plays, it is not in the same scenes as their sons. For her part, Edward IV's mother, the Duchess of York, is introduced only in Act II Scene ii of *Richard III* -- the scene in which his death is announced. There are no references to her prior to this scene although the sources do mention her in connection with events dramatized earlier in *3 Henry VI*, such as Edward's marriage to Elizabeth, of which Hall writes that "the duches of Yorke his mother, was so sore moved therewith that she disswaded that mariage as muche as she possible might" (366). In her turn, Elizabeth is on stage with her son, Edward V, only once -- in the last scene of *3 Henry VI*, where Edward is only a baby in the arms of a nurse. They are never seen together again. In *Richard III*, mother and son are kept apart by the dramatist and by Richard of Gloucester. The closest they come to each other is in Act IV Scene i where they are separated by the thick stone walls of the Tower, young Edward a prisoner within, Elizabeth, his mother, a "free" woman without.

Anne Mortimer and Margaret Beaufort, the mothers from whom the Yorkist and Tudor dynasties trace their descent and claims to throne, are entirely absent from the plays. The "real" founders of the dynasties, they find a place only in the genealogies of their male descendants. They prove exceptions to the rule which excludes women from the genealogies constructed to support the patriarchy. But they intrude into this male preserve only because it suits the purposes and needs of men to allow them to do so. Like Philippa Plantagenet, the "founder" of the abortive Mortimer

⁹Although the part is normally taken by an adult in modern productions, it does seem, as Michael Hattaway observes, "legitimate to infer from III.i.133 that in *1 Henry VI* the part of the king was taken by a boy player who would have surrendered his role to an adult for the later plays of the sequence" (Introduction to *1 Henry VI*, 38, n.9).

dynasty, precursor to that of York, Anne is mentioned only in connection with the claims of her male descendants. Margaret Beaufort fares a little better. References are made to her activities on three occasions.¹⁰ Elizabeth's concern with Margaret's "proud arrogance" (I.iii.24), and Richard's fear that she may "convey/ Letters to Richmond" (IV.ii.91-92) suggest that she is a political force to be reckoned with. But Margaret is doubly marginalized. For not only does she remain off-stage throughout the play, but her son supersedes her as "the true succeder" (V.v.30) of the House of Lancaster.

That Richmond does not trace his genealogy on stage as Richard of York does, is significant; for should he say, as York does, that "My mother [is] heir unto the crown" (2H6, II.ii.43), the implication would be that Richard of Gloucester has usurped Margaret Beaufort's crown and, since she is alive, King Henry Tudor may not reign till after Queen Margaret Beaufort does. Omitting all mention of a specifically Beaufort claim, and basing the legitimacy of the Tudor dynasty principally on its union of York and Lancaster, and on its role as the instrument chosen by God to bring peace and unity to the troubled kingdom of England, rather than on its derivation from Lancaster, enable the awkward issue of Margaret Beaufort's own claim to be circumvented. The crown is Henry Tudor's not Margaret Beaufort's. He unites the two royal houses by being the son of one female "heir" and the husband of the other. More importantly, he is the saviour who rids his country of "a bloody tyrant and a homicide" (V.iii.247), Richard:¹¹

O Thou, whose captain I account myself,
 Look on my forces with a gracious eye;
 Put in their hands Thy bruising irons of wrath
 That they may crush down, with a heavy fall,
 Th'usurping helmets of our adversaries;

¹⁰cf. R3, I.iii.20-29; IV.ii.86,91-92; V.iii.83-85.

¹¹For a discussion of Richard's role as tyrant, see Chapter VII of Moody E. Prior's *The Drama of Power*.

Make us Thy ministers of chastisement,
That we may praise Thee in the victory.

(V.iii.109-115)

As his oration to his soldiers reveals, Richmond fights in "the name of God" (V.iii.264) against "God's enemy" (V.iii.253, 254). And the overwhelming odds against a general "never trained up in arms" (V.iii.273) defeating an enemy with an army thrice the size of his own (V.iii.9-11), certainly suggest supernatural aid. That he is "England's hope" who will "bless a regal throne" and "prove our country's bliss" (3H6, IV.vi.68, 70, 74) has been foretold by Henry, and is recalled in *Richard III* by Henry's ghost (V.iii.129-131). Divine intervention makes Richmond king. Hence, the matter of a "Queen Margaret Beaufort" does not arise at all.¹²

¹²In the anonymous play, *The True Tragedie of Richard III*, however, Richmond's claim to the crown is based on his ancestry:

King. ... Lady Margaret his mother conspires against us,
And perswades him that hee is lineally descended from
Henry
The fourth, and that he hath right to the Crowne,
(1449-1451)

Richmond. My right it is, and sole inheritance,
And Richard but usurps in my authoritie,
(1644-1645)

Significantly, Margaret Beaufort's own claim is never mentioned. And later when Stanley offers the crown to Richmond after Bosworth Field, the matter of it being his inheritance is omitted:

the Peeres by full consent, in that thou hast freed them
from a tyrants yoke, haue by election chosen thee as
King, first in regard they account thee vertuous, next, for
that they hope all forraine broyles shall cease, and
thou wilt guide and governe them in peace....
(2087-91)

But in Legge's *Richardus Tertius*, Buckingham acknowledges that "the first right to the kingdom lies open to [the Countess of Richmond] and her son" (II.i. [p.409]). But for the good of the kingdom, Margaret Beaufort -- who, as in the other plays, never appears on stage -- sacrifices her own claim to the crown in favour of her son's:

the mother, inspired by the Holy Ghost, had perceived
an immense good for this kingdom of England. If [each]
hostile house which claims the uncertain sceptre as its
right should join in marriage, [then] there should be
eternal tranquility for the citizens, and it would make
fast a solid and certain trust in the peace, and there
would be a certain heir for a doubtful England.

(II.i. [p.409])

Indeed, the theme of "the union of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre and Yorke" is more prominent in Legge's play than it is in Shakespeare's or in the *True Tragedie*. In *Richardus Tertius*, Richard feels threatened not so much by Richmond himself as by his proposed marriage to Elizabeth of York.

In these plays, we find what Peter Erickson calls "the traditional patriarchal attitude" towards mothers: "the less said about mothers, the better" (156). The silences betray deep anxieties about their power and authority, and given the biblical injunction to "honour" one's mother, about their place in the patriarchal order.

The reduction of mothers, beginning with Margaret of Anjou, the most "manly" of them all, to voices of lamentation in *Richard III* is yet another attempt to defuse the maternal threat. The domineering and meddlesome mother of 3 *Henry VI*, who set armies in the battlefield, is reduced to lamenting and cursing in *Richard III*. Her laments cannot bring the dead to life, while her appeals to higher powers -- which may or may not act on her behalf -- emphasize her inability to act for herself. She has been neutralized, and so have Elizabeth and the Duchess of York. Indeed, in Act IV Scene iv the dramatist brings all the mothers together to form a chorus of impotent lamentation:

Duchess. Why should calamity be full of words?

Elizabeth. Windy attorneys to their clients' woes,

Airy succeeders of intestate joys,

Poor breathing orators of miseries;

Let them have scope, though what they will
impart

Help nothing else, yet do they ease the heart.

(IV.iv.126-131)

While the mothers fill the world with words, their male antagonist, Richard, in contrast fills it with "the clamorous report of war" (IV.iv.153). He controls the army whose drums and trumpets drown their voices. They have recourse only to words; he has the power to act.

But the image of the impotent, grieving mother occurs much earlier in the tetralogy. Its first appearance is in Bedford's lamentation on the death of

Henry V which he sees as the passing of not just the king but of the entire chivalric tradition of England which he embodied:

... now that Henry's dead,
 Posterity, await for wretched years,
 When at their mothers' moist eyes babes shall suck,
 Our isle be made a nourish of salt tears,
 And none but women left to wail the dead.

(1H6, I.i.47-51)

It is picked up at the end of that play, where one of those wailing women is identified as Lady Talbot who will be left to mourn both husband and son (IV.v.34). And in 2 *Henry VI*, when Henry feels unable to aid his uncle, Gloucester, who is arrested for treason, he likens himself to "the dam" that sees her calf taken away to "the bloody slaughter house" (III.I.212):

And as the dam runs lowing up and down,
 Looking the way her harmless young one went,
 And can do nought but wail her darling's loss;
 Even so myself bewails good Gloucester's case
 With sad unhelpful tears, and with dimm'd eyes
 Look after him, and cannot do him good;

(III.i.214-219)

The image of the powerless mother recurs in the "molehill" scene of 3 *Henry VI*:

Son. How will my mother for a father's death
 Take on with me and ne'er be satisfied!
Father. How will my wife for slaughter of my son
 Shed seas of tears and ne'er be satisfied.

(II.v.103-106)

The scene of the three "wailing mothers" in *Richard III* is thus the culmination of a motif which runs through the entire tetralogy. It is as

wailing mothers that mothers are at their least threatening, most vulnerable, and, hence, most acceptable.

After their reduction to voices of lamentation, the mothers leave the stage one by one. Margaret is the first, returning to France from whence she came. Next, the Duchess of York goes "to [her] grave" (R3, IV.i.94). While Elizabeth does not leave on the same note of finality as Margaret and the Duchess, she calls attention to her exit, announcing, before she leaves, that "I go" (IV.iv.428). The stage is thus set for Richmond to return order to England in Act V. The tetralogy's last mother is Margaret Beaufort, his mother. She does not appear at all, blessing her son by proxy through her husband, Stanley, who delivers her message only to dismiss it with "So much for that" (V.iii.86). The maternal threat has finally been contained by the patriarchy.

Chapter 4

"But I will rule both her, the King, and realm"

At the end of *1 Henry VI*, the Earl of Suffolk declares that

Margaret shall now be Queen, and rule the King;

But I will rule both her, the King, and realm.

(V.v.107-108)

Suffolk, who intends to be the queen's lover, anticipates a reversal of the "normal" flow of political power between the sexes in his relationship with Margaret, in that he will derive power through her. Nor is he the only man in Shakespeare's first tetralogy who achieves greater political power through his relationship with a queen; others include Margaret's supporters in *3 Henry VI* -- Young Clifford, Oxford, Warwick, and Lewis of France -- and Elizabeth's brother (Rivers) and sons (Dorset and Grey) in *Richard III*. The queens' relationships with these "other" men in their lives and the states of power engendered in these relationships are the subject of this chapter.

These relationships, whether between lovers, military allies, or relatives, involve a multitude of opposing force relations. While the patriarchy dictates that, by virtue of his "superior" mental, moral, and physical faculties, man be given dominance over woman, in these relationships the woman is a queen and -- with the exception of Lewis -- the man a subject who is required to obey her. To complicate matters further, he derives his political power from her, yet, being a woman, she depends on him to act on her behalf. And in the case of Margaret and Suffolk, the tradition of courtly love and the very nature of their adulterous relationship, tip the balance of power in her favour.

Until the last act of *1 Henry VI*, the Earl of Suffolk is a relatively unimportant character. Indeed his role in the first four acts of the play is so small that he might well be overlooked by the audience. He appears in only three scenes: the Temple Garden scene (II.iv.) in which he is just one of several law students present at the quarrel between Somerset and York, and the court scenes of III.i. and IV.i, in both of which his mute presence merely swells the numbers on stage. The audience only begins to take notice of this apparently insignificant character in V.iii. when he comes on stage with Margaret of Anjou. There has been no prior indication of his having any influence whatsoever with the king, yet he speaks confidently about arranging a marriage between Margaret and Henry. With his plan executed successfully between the close of *1 Henry VI* and the opening of *2 Henry VI*, he becomes a major character in *2 Henry VI*, playing crucial roles in the loss of France and in the fall of the Protector, Humphrey of Gloucester. Such indeed is Suffolk's influence and standing that he is the only "non-royal" in the hawking party of II.i. -- Gloucester and the Cardinal are both uncles of the king; Suffolk merely a distant cousin.¹

Suffolk's increasing prominence as a character in the play reflects his political ascendancy. And it is his meeting with Margaret that marks the change in his role. He derives his power from her.² In performance, this may be emphasized by placing Suffolk next to the queen on stage, for indeed, she features in all but one of his scenes in *2 Henry VI*. It is in Act IV Scene i, the only scene in which he appears without her, that the source of his power is most evident. Captured by a group of sailors on his way to France, he tries to use his status and authority as "a prince" (IV.i.44) to effect his release, the

¹cf. Cairncross, *2H6*, IV.i.50n.

²Although Hall does not mention an affair between Margaret and Suffolk, he identifies her as the source of Suffolk's power, asserting that Suffolk "by the meanes of the Quene, was shortly erected to the estate and degree of a Duke, and ruled the Kyng at his pleasure" (207).

measure of that status and authority being that he has "feasted with Queen Margaret":

Hast thou not kiss'd thy hand and held my stirrup?
 And bare-head plodded by my foot-cloth mule,
 And thought thee happy when I shook my head?
 How often hast thou waited at my cup,
 Fed from my trencher, kneel'd down at the board,
 When I have feasted with Queen Margaret?

(IV.i.53-58)

When this fails, he makes a more direct appeal to the Queen's authority: "I go of message from the Queen to France./ I charge thee waft me safely 'cross the Channel" (IV.i.113-114). This, unfortunately, also fails. And so Suffolk dies -- significantly on the only occasion in the play when he is separated from Margaret.

Dorset, Rivers, and Grey do not feature at all in the plays until their kinswoman, Elizabeth, becomes queen. And like Suffolk, who has a dukedom conferred upon him on his return from France with Margaret, they too enjoy social promotion. While Richard's complaint that "the Queen's kindred are made gentlefolks" (R3, I.i.95) is not quite true -- the Greys and Woodvilles being, as Elizabeth points out, "not ignoble of descent" (3H6, IV.i.69) -- they are elevated by the king; the elder of Elizabeth's two sons from her first marriage, for instance, being created Marquess of Dorset. Richard -- for once -- tells the truth when he asserts that nepotism is at work in the political careers of the Greys and Woodvilles:

She may help you to many fair preferments,
 And then deny her aiding hand therein,
 And lay those honours on your high desert.

(R3, I.iii.95-97)

That Grey, Dorset, Rivers, and Vaughan are referred to collectively as "the Queen's allies"³ or "the Queen's kindred"⁴ points to Elizabeth's role as the source of their political power.

Margaret's supporters in *3 Henry VI* do not gain any "honours" or "fair preferments" from their alliance with her. What they do gain, however, is "colour" for their armed offensives against the Yorkists. Her principal allies -- Young Clifford, Somerset, Oxford, Lewis of France, and Warwick -- are not completely disinterested supporters of her cause. It would be more accurate to describe their political sympathies as "anti-Yorkist" rather than "Lancastrian". Each of them battles the Yorkists for motives of his own, joining Margaret's faction not because they believe in the justice of her "quarrel" but because, as Bona, Edward IV's jilted bride, puts it: "My quarrel and this English queen's are one" (III.iii.216). Indeed Somerset's⁵ enmity towards York pre-dates the latter's claim to the crown, dating from their quarrel -- the subject of which is never clear -- in the Temple Garden (1*H6*, II.iv.). For his part, Young Clifford vows vengeance against the House of York (2*H6*, V.ii.49-60) for the death of his father, killed by York at the First Battle of St. Albans, a vow he keeps in *3 Henry VI* by killing first Rutland and then York; on each occasion, reminding his victim -- and the audience -- exactly why he does so.⁶ The dramatist leaves no doubt as to the nature of Clifford's reasons for fighting the Yorkists, establishing them unequivocally in the opening scene of *3 Henry VI* -- to be precise, in Clifford's renewal of his vow of allegiance to Henry:

King Henry, be thy title right or wrong,

Lord Clifford vows to fight in thy defence:

³cf. *R3*, I.iii.330, III.ii.99.

⁴cf. *ibid.*, I.i.72 & 95; II.i.137; II.ii.150; III.ii.49.

⁵The Somerset of 1 and 2 *Henry VI*, whose head Richard gleefully throws onto the floor in I.i. of *3 Henry VI* is John Beaufort, the first Duke, father of Margaret Beaufort and grandfather of Henry VII, while the Somerset of the last two acts of *3 Henry VI* is a compound of John's nephews, Henry and Edmund, the second and third dukes.

⁶cf. *3H6*, I.iii.21-51; I.iv.31-32, 109, 175.

May that ground gape and swallow me alive,
Where I shall kneel to him that slew my father!

(I.i.163-166)

Like Clifford, Oxford, too, seeks revenge for family members slain by the Yorkists:

Call him my king by whose injurious doom
My elder brother, the Lord Aubrey Vere,
Was done to death? and more than so, my father,
Even in the downfall of his mellow'd years,
When Nature brought him to the door of Death?
No, Warwick, no; while life upholds this arm,
This arm upholds the house of Lancaster.

(III.iii.101-107)

For both Oxford and Clifford, the vow to "uphold the house of Lancaster" is inseparable from the refusal to "kneel" to the men responsible for the deaths of fathers and brothers. For their part, Lewis and Warwick's support for the Lancastrian cause is linked inextricably to their desire to get even with Edward IV: Lewis for Edward's insult in jilting his sister, Bona, and Warwick for the "dishonour" of being sent on an abortive embassy. The latter describes their stand succinctly when he says

... I'll be chief to bring [Edward] down again:
Not that I pity Henry's misery,
But seek revenge on Edward's mockery.

(III.iii.263-265)

While the "Lancastrian" barons possess adequate military might to battle the Yorkists, they lack "colour" to do so. Edward is ostensibly the anointed king of England and their sovereign. Carrying arms against him would be treason -- unless, of course, he were not the king but an usurper. And this is where Margaret comes into the picture. As a representative of

the House of Lancaster, the "rightful" royal dynasty, she lends their armed struggle the legitimacy it needs and would otherwise lack. The reaction of the Northern lords to Henry's compromise with York at the beginning of 3 *Henry VI* -- particularly Clifford's "How hast thou injur'd both thyself *and us* " (I.i.185; my emphasis) -- argues that the barons cannot battle the Yorkists without the House of Lancaster. Like Young Mortimer in Marlowe's *Edward II*, they realize that "[their] behoof will bear the greater sway/ Whenas a king's name shall be under-writ" (V.ii.13-14). Similarly, Lewis's alliance with Margaret turns what would have been a French invasion of England into a more acceptable French-aided Lancastrian battle against the Yorkists.

Thus, if the kings, Henry and Edward, have the power to raise a woman's state to title of a queen, the women they raise, Margaret and Elizabeth, by virtue of their places beside them, have, if not the power, then certainly the influence to raise others to higher "states", or to increase or legitimize their power. Through the agency of Margaret and Elizabeth, otherwise unimportant men come to the forefront of English political life. That various characters, among them Humphrey of Gloucester and York, refer to Suffolk's "insolence" (2*H6*, II.i.31; II.ii.69) points to their contempt for a man they consider an upstart. Likewise, Richard constantly sneers at the comparatively lowly birth of the Greys and Woodvilles. The queens' ability to promote the careers of "upstart" courtiers such as Suffolk and the Greys and Woodvilles is yet another aspect of their potentially subversive power and the cause of further anxiety for the patriarchy.

The traditional gender roles which place woman in subservience to man are completely reversed in courtly love, where the lady is exalted as the worthy and unobtainable object of her lover's adoration, devotion, and service. While he becomes her servant, she, possessed of the power to grant

or deny him the favours he craves, is, as Ruth Kelso puts it, "mistress of his fate" (208) -- and of her own as well, for

[She] tak[es] the initiative in providing herself with a lover -- the choice lies entirely in her own hands. She may be forced to accept a husband whatever law and humanity may say, but she chooses her lover or refuses to take any lover at all.

(Kelso, 208)

Suffolk's relationship with Margaret belongs in the tradition of courtly love. Like the relationship between the courtly lady and her suitor, theirs is adulterous. Suffolk, the lover, is completely at his lady's service: running tilts in honour of her love (2*H6*, I.iii.50-51) and "work[ing her] full content" (I.iii.67) -- though, admittedly, there is a complete coincidence of her "content" with his own in the matter of the fall of Humphrey of Gloucester and Eleanor, his wife. And while Suffolk believes that he "rules" Margaret, his language indicates quite the reverse, notably in Act V Scene iii of *1 Henry VI*, in which she is ostensibly his prisoner:

O stay! -- I have no power to let her pass;
 My hand would free her, but my heart says no.
 As plays the sun upon the glassy streams,
 Twinkling another counterfeited beam,
 So seems this gorgeous beauty to mine eyes.
 Fain would I woo her, yet I dare not speak:
 I'll call for pen and ink, and write my mind.
 Fie, de la Pole! disable not thyself;
 Hast not a tongue? Is she not prisoner here?
 Wilt thou be daunted at a woman's sight?
 Ay, beauty's princely majesty is such

Confounds the tongue and makes the senses rough.

(V.iii.60-71)

It is obvious that Suffolk, who hopes to "Solicit Henry with her wondrous praise" and "bereave him of his wits with wonder" (V.iii.190, 195), is himself completely bereft of wits at the sight of Margaret.

It is interesting to note that Joan la Pucelle has a similar effect on men. When he meets her, Talbot finds that "My thoughts are whirled like a potter's wheel;/ I know not where I am, nor what I do" (I.v.19-20). But while he sees Joan merely as an antagonist, not as a potential "paramour", the same is not true of the knight Joan "overcomes" earlier in the play:

Whoe'er helps thee, 'tis thou that must help me.

Impatiently I burn with thy desire;

My heart and hands thou hast at once subdu'd.

Excellent Pucelle, if thy name be so,

Let me thy servant and not sovereign be:

'Tis the French Dauphin sueth to thee thus.

(I.ii.107-112)

Three elements stand out in this speech of Charles, the Dauphin: sexual desire, male servitude (and, correspondingly, female power), and, implicitly, witchcraft. The only possible explanation -- at least from a patriarchal point of view -- for Charles, a man and thus "the image of God", "voluntarily" putting himself into the power of Joan, "the weaker vessel", is witchcraft. As Brabantio puts it in *Othello* :

It is a judgment maim'd, and most imperfect,

That will confess perfection so would err

Against all rules of nature, and must be driven

To find out practices of cunning hell,

Why this should be;

(I.iii.99-103)

This association of evil and sexual desire is also present in Suffolk's relationship with Margaret:

O, wert thou for myself! But, Suffolk, stay;

Thou may'st not wander in that labyrinth:

There Minotaurs and ugly treasons lurk.

(1H6, V.iii.187-189)

Indeed Margaret is closely associated with Joan, the witch. She comes onto stage as Suffolk's prisoner in Act V Scene iii of *1 Henry VI* just after Joan is led away by her captors. The two roles might well have been played by the same boy-actor in Elizabethan theatres, which would have given further emphasis to the connection between the characters. Moreover, in her final attempt to save herself from execution, Joan names Reignier, Margaret's father, as the father of the child she says she is carrying (V.iv.78). Margaret may thus be seen as a surrogate daughter of Joan. She certainly inherits Joan's ability to bereave men of their wits, and, in addition, succeeds her as "the English scourge".⁷

Suffolk's preoccupation with self-aggrandizement in the final scene of *1 Henry VI* and for most of *2 Henry VI* is not entirely incompatible with the tradition of courtly love. Philippa Berry observes that

Medieval courtly love was the site of certain closely interrelated intellectual and social processes. It emerged at a time of unprecedented social mobility in western Europe, when ... the lower aristocracy were seeking a means of articulating their own soon-to-be realized

⁷Joan describes herself as "the English scourge" on her first appearance (1H6, I.ii.129). The same epithet -- with the addition of the adjective "bloody" -- is applied to Margaret by York in the next play of the tetralogy (2H6, V.i.118). But, by contrast, Richmond, in his prayer on the eve of Bosworth, refers to his faction as "[God's] ministers of chastisement" (R3, V.iii.114). For although both the "scourge" and the "minister" are instruments of Divine wrath, the former is considered an evil being, the latter, a "good" one.

aspirations for higher social status.

(16)

Berry asserts that the contemplation of the beloved was often seen as a prelude to worldly success for the knight:⁸

... worldly power [was] attributed to the lady of courtly love. This figure was often addressed in troubadour verse as 'midons' or my lord, and both in troubadour lyrics and in courtly medieval romances such as those of Chretien de Troyes she was implicitly invested with the authority of a feudal lord (often her husband). Her service was most definitely associated with a potential improvement of social status for her lover, who deferred to her as her vassal and learned from her a code of courtly conduct.

(16-17)

In view of this, the inconsistency in Suffolk's motives for bringing Margaret to England as queen is more apparent than real. There can be little doubt that Margaret is the source of his political power. And with the addition of the power granted to the lady over her lover in courtly love, Margaret is thus dominant in her relationship with Suffolk.

Or is she? While Margaret's lover and allies, and Elizabeth's relatives derive their power from them, the queens are themselves in the hands of these men in as far as they depend on them to act on their behalf. For despite all their political manoeuvring, these women are defined -- even by themselves -- as "weaker vessels". Paradoxical as this may seem, the patriarchal prescription that men are active and women passive informs

⁸For a detailed discussion of the "mercenary" side of courtly love, see Chapter 1 of Berry's book, *Of Chastity and Power*.

their activities, including those of that "manly woman", Margaret. In 2 *Henry VI*, for instance, she takes all her complaints to Suffolk (I.iii.42ff): her disappointment in Henry, her husband, the unsatisfactory political situation in England in which "not the least of [the nobles]/ But can do more ... than the King" (I.iii.70-71) -- and we might add, the queen -- and the pride of Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester. For his part, Suffolk promises to "work [her] Grace's full content" (I.iii.67), assuring her that Eleanor shall "never mount to trouble [her] again" and that she herself "shall steer the happy helm" (I.iii.91, 100). This state of affairs does seem a little strange in that, as queen, Margaret might be expected to have more power to attend to such matters than Suffolk, a duke. But she is a woman in a patriarchal society, and gender politics makes him "bold to counsel" her while making her "list" to him (I.iii.93, 92). Thus it is that he "[rules] like a wandering planet over [her]" (IV.iv.16). Moreover, as demonstrated in the court's response to the news of the Irish revolt (III.i.282ff), it is men who act, not women. The issue is sorted out between Suffolk, York, and the Cardinal. Margaret's only contribution during the discussion is to keep the peace between York and Somerset.⁹ For war and murder are, to quote Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, "a man's office" (IV.i.265). Hence in 3 *Henry VI*, Lewis of France and Warwick take over direction of the war against the Yorkists. Lewis, upon deciding that he is not Edward's but Henry's friend after all, immediately declares that

[Warwick] and Oxford, with five thousand men,
Shall cross the seas and bid false Edward battle;
And, as occasion serves, this noble Queen

⁹Margaret's role in the council's discussion of the Irish revolt is much bigger in the Quarto than it is in the Folio on which most modern editions of 2 *Henry VI* are based. In the Quarto, the messenger addresses Margaret, not the lords, and it is she who decides that York shall go to Ireland, and instructs Buckingham to muster soldiers for York's army. See pages 231-232 (Appendix 2) of Michael Hattaway's New Cambridge edition of 2 *Henry VI*.

And Prince shall follow with a fresh supply.

(III.iii.234-237)

There is, apparently, no need to consult Margaret on the matter. She is merely a woman. Margaret is, of course, not in a position to raise objections of any sort but there is in any case no indication whatsoever in the text that she takes offence at Lewis's chauvinism -- if at all she regards it as such -- or that she would have preferred to organize the attack herself. While there are men who will perform "a man's office" for her, even a "manly woman" such as Margaret will leave the "office" to them and not perform it herself, for politics is not a woman's primary concern. In view of this, it is particularly noteworthy that Margaret's chief complaint to Suffolk in I.iii. of *2 Henry VI* is not about the barons: "Not all these lords do vex me half so much/ As that proud dame, the Lord Protector's wife" (I.iii.75-76). It is another woman's finery and boasts that are of greater concern to her than the ambitions of powerful barons. And *that*, to the patriarchy, is typical female behaviour.

That politics is considered a male preserve accounts for the fact that it is not Elizabeth herself but her relatives -- her sons, Grey and Dorset, and brother, Rivers -- who are a political force in *Richard III*. The third citizen fears the rule of "the Queen's sons and brothers" whom he considers "haught and proud" (II.iii.28). And it is those "sons and brothers" who are the enemies of Richard's faction. Hastings, for instance, gloats over their executions, believing that their deaths mark the end of all his troubles:

I tell thee, man, 'tis better with me now
 Than when I met thee last, where now we meet:
 Then was I going prisoner to the Tower,
 By the suggestion of the Queen's allies:
 But now I tell thee -- keep it to thyself --
 This day those enemies are put to death,

And I in better state than e'er I was!

(III.ii.96-102)

Like the third citizen, Hastings does not mention Elizabeth at all. He does not fear her. Nor, obviously, does Richard: he satisfies himself with executing her relatives. Although he declares that "Edward's wife, that monstrous witch" (III.iv.70) has used witchcraft to wither his arm, he makes no attempt on her life -- it is unnecessary. She depends on her brothers and sons to act on her behalf, to perform "a man's office" for her. Without them, she can do nothing and is no threat. Hence he concerns himself only with her kindred -- and would undoubtedly consider the practice in ancient China of annihilating a woman's family before making her empress very "politic" indeed.

Indeed it is the man (or men) behind the queen rather than the queen herself who is the political force to be feared. In *2 Henry VI*, for instance, it is Suffolk, not Margaret, who is said to "[rule] the roast" (I.i.108) and to be able to "do all in all" (II.iv.51). The nobles hold him, rather than her, responsible for the ills besetting England, particularly for the loss of the English territories in France. And the commons concur. The lieutenant speaks for them in IV.i. when he calls Suffolk the "kennel, puddle, sink, whose filth/Troubles the silver spring where England drinks", asserting that "reproach and beggary/ Is crept into the palace of our King,/ And all by thee" (IV.i.70-71, 100-102). He accuses Suffolk of everything from "affy[ing] a mighty lord/ Unto the daughter of a worthless king" (IV.i.79-80) and selling Anjou and Maine to France, to "swallowing the treasure of the realm" (IV.i.73) and "smil[ing] at good Duke Humphrey's death" (IV.i.75) -- even of responsibility for the revolts in Normandy, Picardy, and Kent, and the rebellion of York and the Nevilles. And while Suffolk may not consider himself guilty of all these charges, he does regard himself as a force -- if not

the force -- behind the throne: "Why, our authority is his [Henry's] consent,/ And what we do establish he confirms" (III.i.316-317).

It is not till after Suffolk's death that Margaret is blamed for England's troubles. The first direct reference to her responsibility is in Act V Scene i of *2 Henry VI* where York calls her "England's bloody scourge" (V.i.118). In the next play, his heir, Edward, claims that it is Margaret's "pride" that has "broach'd this tumult" (*3H6*, II.ii.159). And indeed in V.i. of *2 Henry VI*, York is prepared to call off his revolt -- at least for the moment -- until she arrives with Somerset, his old enemy. Yet her very act of freeing Somerset and taking him along to St. Albans testifies to her dependence upon male support.

As a woman and a foreigner, Margaret has no military resources of her own. The forces she raises in *3 Henry VI* to battle the Yorkists may be called "the Queen's army" but are really those of her male supporters, Young Clifford, Northumberland, Oxford, and later Warwick and France; as the dying Clifford observes, "My love and fear glu'd many friends to thee [Henry];/ And, now I fall, thy tough commixture melts" (II.vi.5-6). Margaret depends on "friends" such as Clifford not only to supply her with soldiers, but to lead them as well. Her command of the Lancastrian forces is purely honorary, as her oration to the soldiers on the eve of Tewkesbury indicates:

Say Warwick was our anchor; what of that?
 And Montague our top-mast; what of him?
 Our slaughter'd friends the tackles; what of these?
 Why, is not Oxford here another anchor?
 And Somerset another goodly mast?
 The friends of France our shrouds and tacklings?
 And, though unskilful, why not Ned and I

For once allow'd the skilful pilot's charge?

(V.iv.13-20)

"The Queen's army" is always led by one or more of the barons: Somerset and Old Clifford at First St. Albans (2*H6*, V), Young Clifford and Northumberland at Wakefield (3*H6*, I.iii & iv) and Towton (II.ii-vi), Warwick, Montague, Oxford, and Somerset at Barnet (V.ii), and the last two named at Tewkesbury (V.iv-v). That a queen has little military resources of her own and must depend upon those of her male supporters is underlined by the fate of Elizabeth Grey who flees into sanctuary after the death of her husband, Edward IV, and again after the arrests of her brother and son.

The importance to Margaret and Elizabeth of their allies within the court -- Suffolk to the former and her relatives to the latter -- cannot be underestimated. Both queens arrive as strangers to face the hostility of a court that considers them a poor match for the king. The dramatist makes this clear in the two "arrival" scenes, Act I Scene i of 2 *Henry VI* and Act IV Scene i of 3 *Henry VI*. While Margaret is greeted with a less than enthusiastic chorus of "Long live Queen Margaret, England's happiness!" (2*H6*, I.i.37) from the gathered nobles, Elizabeth finds open antagonism and feels compelled to defend herself:

My lords, before it pleas'd his Majesty
To raise my state to title of a queen,
Do me but right, and you must all confess
That I was not ignoble of descent;
And meaner than myself have had like fortune.
But as this title honours me and mine,
So your dislikes, to whom I would be pleasing,
Doth cloud my joys with danger and with sorrow.

(3*H6*, IV.i.66-73)

Despite being married to the king, both Margaret and Elizabeth need friends at court. Edward may assure Elizabeth that no danger or sorrow will befall her while he is her "constant friend" (IV.i.76) but there is no guarantee that he will continue to be so. Indeed there are suggestions in *Richard III* that her influence with him is not as strong as it once was. For Clarence and Richard claim that Mistress Shore, Edward's mistress, is instrumental in the release of Hastings, a bitter enemy of "the Queen's kindred", who is sent to the Tower through the machinations of Elizabeth and her brother (I.i.66-77). As for Margaret, she cannot seriously expect much support from Henry. Instead it is Suffolk who promises "to work [her] full content" (2H6, I.iii.67). Moreover, as he points out himself, "I was cause/ Your Highness came to England" (I.iii.65-66). He has made her Queen of England. If Warwick is "the king-maker", Suffolk is "the queen-maker". Margaret owes her status and authority to him, adding a further complication to the balance of power in their relationship.

Power, as Foucault observes, is "a complex strategical situation" (93). And it certainly is in the relationships examined above. While the men derive their power from the women, they provide them with a means of action. Both parties depend on each other in a symbiotic relationship.

Coda: "And if my father please, I am content"

Of the three principal kinds of gender relationships, father-daughter, husband-wife, and mother-son, it was in the first that a woman had the least power in the Renaissance. While she had important "levers of power" at her disposal in her relationship with her husband and the fifth commandment granted her authority over her son, she had no levers, licit or otherwise, to use against her father. Woman's role as daughter was one in which she could be safely contained.

Yet, in Shakespeare's first tetralogy in which the "dangers" of subversive wives and mothers abound, the father-daughter relationship is scarcely explored at all. Only two such relationships are presented (briefly): those of Margaret of Anjou and her father, Reignier, in Act V Scene iii of *1 Henry VI* and Joan la Pucelle and her father, the shepherd, in the following scene, V.iv. There are other fathers and daughters in the tetralogy, Warwick and Isabella and Anne, and Edward IV and Elizabeth of York, but they are never seen together. Warwick and Anne, for instance, appear in different plays; he, prominent in the *Henry VI* plays, dies in *3 Henry VI*;¹⁰ while Anne appears only in *Richard III*. As for Isabella, she never appears at all. Neither does Elizabeth, who fares even worse than Isabella. The latter's father does at least talk about her, but poor Elizabeth is never mentioned by hers. In fact, no one mentions her until after Edward's death. The father-son relationship, in contrast, receives far more attention. It is explored in the relationships of the Talbots, Cliffords, Yorks, and even in that of Henry and his son, Edward.¹¹

The presentation of the father-daughter relationship -- or the lack of it -- points to the "significance" of the relationship in the patriarchal world of the tetralogy. Historically, Elizabeth of York was the eldest of Edward IV's children.¹² But the impression given to the audience in *3 Henry VI* is that her brother, Edward V, is the eldest. For when their father is captured by the Lancastrians, Elizabeth, their mother, flees into sanctuary saying that

... fair hope must hinder life's decay,
And I the rather wean me from despair
For love of Edward's offspring in my womb:

¹⁰Shakespeare conflates two Earls of Warwick, Anne's father, Richard Neville, and her maternal grandfather, Richard Beauchamp. Cf. p.11, n.7

¹¹The father-son relationship in the first tetralogy is the subject of several studies including Ronald Berman's 'Fathers and Sons in the *Henry VI* plays' (SQ 13.4) and Robert B. Pierce's *Shakespeare's History Plays: The Family and the State*.

¹²Elizabeth of York was born in 1466 and Edward V in 1470. There were, moreover, two other children -- daughters -- born before Edward: Mary and Cecily.

...

King Edward's fruit, true heir to th' English crown.

(IV.iv.16-18, 24)

It is obviously the child Elizabeth is carrying in this scene whom Edward IV refers to after the Battle of Towton:

... let's away to London

And see our gentle Queen how well she fares:

By this, I hope, she hath a son for me.

(V.v.86-88)

This is the infant who is presented to the court in the last scene of the play: the future Edward V. There is no indication whatever of the existence of any older children. For all intents and purposes, Elizabeth of York does not exist -- until her uncle, Richard, and cousin, Henry, decide it would be a good idea to marry her.

In Shakespeare's first tetralogy, fathers -- with one exception -- appear with or talk about their daughters only to give them in marriage to "eligible" suitors. Reignier, Margaret's father, for instance, is on stage with her just once, when agreeing to her marriage to Henry VI in Act V Scene iii of *1 Henry VI*, while Warwick mentions his daughters, Anne and Isabella, only when arranging their marriages to Edward, Prince of Wales, and Clarence respectively.¹³ In each case, the marriage is to the father's advantage. Reignier gains two dukedoms from Margaret's marriage and Warwick cements alliances with his old enemy, Margaret, and Clarence through the marriages of his daughters. That he arranges a marriage for "my joy" (3H6, III.iii.242) as he calls Anne, without consulting her, testifies to her complete subordination to him. These daughters are important to their fathers only in as far as they are political tools.

¹³cf. 3H6, III.iii.240-243 and IV.ii.12.

But the daughters -- particularly Reignier's -- do not always serve such useful purposes. With both her husband and son dead, Margaret returns to France at the end of 3 *Henry VI*. After causing havoc in England -- or so the Yorkists would have it -- the troublesome daughter goes home to her father. Reignier ransoms her by pawning "the Sicils and Jerusalem" to the King of France (V.vii.38-40). Hence, while he gains two *dukedom*s through her, he loses two *kingdom*s for her sake.

And finally, we come to Joan and her father, the last father and daughter to appear on stage together in the tetralogy and the exception mentioned earlier, for this father's appearance does not mark a change in his daughter's marital status. Instead it marks her death and damnation. The shepherd -- the father whose love leads him to seek his daughter in "every country far and near" (1*H6*, V.iv.2) and to offer to die with her -- is, for his trouble, rejected by her and hence consigns her to eternal damnation. Her father's curse confirms the fact that Joan is beyond redemption. His cry, "O, burn her, burn her" (V.iv.33), signals not just her literal burning at the stake, but her eternal burning in hell. For in the Renaissance, most would have concurred with John Gaule who, in 1646, wrote in his *Select Cases of Conscience Touching Witches and Witchcrafts* that "[when] a parent ... curses his child, ... God says Amen to it" (Thomas, 506).

In the patriarchal world of Shakespeare's first tetralogy daughters are beneath notice -- except when it is time to get them suitably married or, more importantly, when they cause trouble: of the two daughters whose relationships with their fathers are presented in these plays, one causes the loss of her father's two kingdoms while the other denies their relationship. In the eyes of the patriarchy, daughters are really far more trouble than they are worth.

Chapter 5

"These women are shrewd tempters with their tongues"

Femininity and power; these, in the Renaissance, were incompatible concepts to the patriarchy, for woman was the "weaker vessel", femininity meant inferiority, physical, moral, and intellectual. Yet, as we have seen, the women in Shakespeare's first tetralogy do exercise power, power which stems chiefly from their use of two traditional "feminine weapons", the tongue and sexual favours. In the following chapters, I shall examine the use of these "weapons".

The voice is closely associated with power. The human race's principal instrument of communication, it is used to instruct and teach, to order and command, to reprimand and to condemn. Moreover as Catherine Belsey observes, "to speak is to possess meaning, to have access to the language which defines, delimits and locates power" (191). Hence as a corollary of its denial of power to women, the Renaissance patriarchy demanded silence from them, maintaining that feminine silence was necessary since female speech caused the expulsion of *man* (it was of course his expulsion rather than hers that they were concerned about) from the Garden of Eden and was therefore evil. St. Paul, for instance, declares that

the woman [must] learn in silence with all subjection.
But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp
authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam
was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not

deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

(1 Tim. 2:11-14)

Indeed silence was one of the three traditional feminine virtues, the others being chastity and obedience. Henry Smith's claim in his *A Preparative to Marriage* of 1591 that "the ornament of a woman is silence" (Novy, 5) was not uncommon in the Renaissance. And since "good" women were always silent, voluble women were, by definition, "bad" women, "shrews", who attempted to overturn the "natural" order ordained by God through their incessant scolding and complaining. The shrew and her companion negative stereotype, the whore, were defined by their lack of the "feminine virtues" of silence and chastity respectively, i.e. by their extensive use of the two principal traditional "female weapons", the tongue and sexual favours.

The subversive power of the female tongue is referred to early in the tetralogy -- indeed in the first scene involving a female character, where the French general, Alençon, noting the length of Joan's discussion with Charles, the Dauphin, observes that "women are shrewd tempters with their tongues" (1H6, I.ii.123). Alençon's words recall the part played by Eve's tongue in the Fall. And Eve's daughter, Joan, certainly seems to have inherited her verbal facility. "Astonish[ing]" the initially sceptical French nobles with her "high terms" (I.ii.93), she persuades them to renew their abandoned attempt at raising the siege of Orleans. Her success with her tongue is, however, the result of not only "feminine guile" but witchcraft as well.¹ There are strong suggestions that the "fair persuasions" she uses to

¹John W. Blanpeid argues a contrary view, asserting that "'the art and baleful sorcery' by which [Joan] seduces the French and outwits the English ... is pre-eminently a superior use of language" (223). To Blanpeid, clever manipulation of "patriotic rhetoric" is the basis of Joan's "seductive performance" in persuading Burgundy to return to the French side. To my mind, however, the suggestion that it is witchcraft which ensures the success of her "fair pleadings" is too strong to be ignored, especially in view of the appearance of the "spirits" in V.iii.

"entice the Duke of Burgundy/ To leave the Talbot and to follow [the French]" are "mix'd" with more than just "sugar'd words" (III.iii.18-20), for Charles urges her to "enchant [Burgundy] with thy words" (III.iii.40) and Burgundy himself seems vaguely aware that he has been "enchanted":

Either she hath bewitch'd me with her words,
Or nature makes me suddenly relent.

...

I am vanquished; these haughty words of hers
Have batter'd me like roaring cannon-shot
And made me almost yield upon my knees. --

(III.iii.58-59, 78-80)

As a witch and a peasant, Joan stands apart from the other principal women characters in the plays, but her use of her tongue looks ahead to their use of theirs as weapons.

Lawrence Stone asserts that the ability to scold was an important "lever of power" for women in Renaissance England where women had few legal rights (1977, 199). But the efficacy of scolding varied, depending on the nature of a woman's relationship with her husband -- on his love for her.

"Raised" by their marriages and possessed of neither economic nor political "levers" to use against their husbands, both Margaret of Anjou and Eleanor Cobham resort to verbal aggressiveness; Eleanor, to encourage her husband to take the crown for himself, and Margaret, to urge the dismissal of the Protector, Gloucester -- in short, to realize their own ambitions. These attempts to overwhelm their husbands with words achieve varying success. For example, while Eleanor's brief show of "choler" has Gloucester anxious to be reconciled to her, he nevertheless continues to bear a "base and humble mind" (2H6, I.ii.62) despite her best efforts.

Similarly, Margaret's use of her tongue is not an unqualified success. Although her eloquence -- stunning examples of which we are treated to in

III.i. and III.ii. -- may well have contributed to Gloucester's dismissal from the office of Protector and his subsequent indictment for treason, she cannot take all the credit for engineering his fall. The jealousy, ambition, and malice of the other lords, Winchester, York, Suffolk, and Buckingham among others, are powerful forces that cannot be discounted. It is the lords who "lime" the "bush" (I.iii.88) in which Gloucester's wife, Eleanor -- and by implication, Gloucester himself -- are caught. Even the normally myopic Henry is aware that their animosity towards his uncle plays a large role in the latter's downfall. When "bewail[ing] good Gloucester's case" (III.i.217), Henry mentions "these great lords" before his queen:

What low'ring star now envies thy estate,
That these great lords, and Margaret our Queen,
Do seek subversion of thy harmless life?

(III.i.206-208)

And, significantly, it is to the lords, not Margaret, that Henry resigns his authority: "My lords, what to your wisdoms seemeth best,/ Do, or undo, as if ourself were here" (III.i.195-196). Hence, though Margaret gets what she wants, it is not without considerable aid, and, if this attempt at using her tongue as a weapon is a qualified success, the next is a failure. Anticipating allegations of her involvement in Gloucester's death and noting to her chagrin her husband's preoccupation with his uncle's death, she tries without success to focus Henry's attention on herself by adopting the role of "the spurned wife". But Henry only continues to mourn Gloucester with "Ah! woe is me for Gloucester, wretched man" (III.ii.71), and when Warwick arrives bearing the demands of the commons, Margaret is ignored totally.

Margaret uses her ability to scold to much greater effect in 3 *Henry VI*. That she is considered a "shameless callet" (II.ii.145), a "wrangling woman" (II.ii.176), a "scold" (V.v.29), and a "railer" (V.v.38) is established well before she says anything:

Exeter. Here comes the Queen, whose looks bewray her
anger:

I'll steal away.

King Henry. Exeter, so will I.

(I.i.218-219).

Indeed Margaret has Henry completely cowed by the force of her subsequent speech berating him for disinheriting their son, Edward. Her verbal dominance -- Henry hardly gets a word in anywhere in 3 *Henry VI* and is actually told to be quiet on several occasions! -- is the basis of her dominance in their relationship as Edward IV points out:

... the bloody minded Queen,
That led calm Henry, though he were a king,
As doth a sail, fill'd with a fretting gust,
Command an argosy to stem the waves.

(II.vi.33-36)

The "argosy"² in question is of course not only Henry but the ship of state, England, for in commanding the king, Margaret commands the kingdom as well.

Denied the use of "real" arms by social conventions, the women in the tetralogy often have no weapon but railing. Confronted by the man responsible for the deaths she mourns, Anne's only defence is to abuse him.³ In a later scene in *Richard III*, Elizabeth and the Duchess of York find themselves in a similar situation. The railing in these scenes -- as indeed in

²It is noteworthy that this imagery is picked up later. First, when Margaret visits the court of Lewis of France to "crave" his aid for her cause. Declining his invitation to "sit down with us" (3H6, III.iii.2), she says that "Margaret/ Must strike her sail, and learn awhile to serve/ Where kings command" (III.iii.4-6). The image also appears in her oration to her army on the eve of Tewkesbury (V.iv.1ff), though here, she is represented not as the sail but the pilot of the ship.

³Anne is unable to use Richard's sword when he offers it to her not only because she is well on the way to being "captive to his honey words" (R3, IV.i.79) but because, unlike Margaret, she finds it impossible to defy the social conventions which dictate that violence is, to quote Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, "a man's office" (IV.i.265).

most of the play -- is directed at Richard of Gloucester, but the women's attempts at overwhelming him with the force of their words fail. Anne is herself overwhelmed by Richard's words, as she recalls bitterly later:

Lo, ere I can repeat this curse again,
Within so small a time, my woman's heart
Grossly grew captive to his honey words,

(IV.i.77-79)

Seduced by Richard, Anne ceases railing and accepts his ring and his proposal. The Duchess and Elizabeth do not fare any better, for Richard refuses to listen to them, ordering the "trumpets" and "drums" in his train to "drown [their] exclamations" (IV.iv.154). The Duchess, his mother, does manage to obtain his permission to speak but is unable to make him heed her words, while Richard actually forces Elizabeth to listen to him. Although she appears to hold her own against him, first swiftly raising objections to all he says and then interrupting his sentences before he can finish them, Richard believes that she, like Anne before her, "grows captive to his honey words". Whether she has really been won over or only pretends to be so is debatable and an issue which may be settled only in performance. But while alternative interpretations of Elizabeth's attitude towards Richard's proposal are possible, there can be little doubt about his attitude towards her words: they simply do not dismay him at all.

The only woman whose railing has any effect on Richard is Margaret. Although he does not admit that she makes him uneasy, her words to him before beginning her railing -- "Ah, gentle villain! do not turn away" (R3, I.iii.163) -- suggest that, like Exeter and Henry in 3 *Henry VI* (I.i.219), he would "steal away" from her if he could. Richard tries to avoid her but Margaret stops him from leaving, declaring that she will "make" "repetition of what [he has] marr'd ... before [she] let[s him] go" (R3, I.iii.165-166). And she does just that while Richard listens to her. He may call her names and

try to twist her words, but he is unable to stop her from speaking. Indeed, if he is the centre of attention in his confrontations with the other women in the play, in his clash with Margaret, it is she who commands attention.

Although she appears in just two scenes, Margaret dominates *Richard III* with her curses. And like her, the other women in the play -- Anne, Elizabeth, and the Duchess of York -- also curse the party responsible for the deaths of husband, son[s] or father-in-law. Their curses stem from a combination of anger, frustration, and impotence for there is no alternative -- and practical -- means by which these women may be revenged upon those who have wronged them. They are widows in a patriarchal society, women bereft of the power and eminence they once enjoyed as wives of kings or would-be kings of England.

In Shakespeare's first tetralogy, as many men curse as women: the Shepherd, Joan's father, in *1 Henry VI*, Suffolk in *2 Henry VI*, Northumberland, Clifford, Rutland, and York in *3 Henry VI*. While their gender is obviously not something these men have in common with the wailing queens of *Richard III*, they do share their feeling of impotence. Joan's father, for instance, curses her after her denial of their relationship (*1H6*, V.iv.26-31) while Suffolk wishes all manner of calamity upon Henry and the nobles responsible for his banishment (*2H6*, III.ii.308-327). Henry is also cursed by Northumberland and Clifford, who feel betrayed by his compromise with York (*3H6*, I.i.191-194), while York is himself later reduced to imprecations, when like his son, Rutland, he is captured by the Lancastrians. Before they are put to death, both father and son curse their killers,⁴ though interestingly, York "honours" only one of his two killers, Margaret, in this fashion. She does of course taunt him with Rutland's death while Clifford does not. But even had she not done so, in York's eyes

⁴cf. *3H6*, I.iv.164-166, I.iii.47.

-- and those of the patriarchy -- she would, as a murderous *woman*, nevertheless be guilty of a greater crime than Clifford, a murderous man.

All the imprecations in the plays issue from injured parties in positions of disadvantage: bereaved mothers and widows, prisoners facing execution, a banished man, a rejected father and allies who feel betrayed.⁵ Curses are employed as a last resort. Indeed they are a mark of powerlessness, not power. As the historian, Keith Thomas, puts it, "Curses [are] employed by the weak against the strong, never the other way around" (509) or as R. Younge wrote even more succinctly in *The Cause and Cure of Ignorance* (1648), "They curse us because they cannot be suffered to kill us" (*ibid.*, 509).

Yet, as Thomas observes,

substitute action though it was, the formal imprecation could be a powerful weapon. It exploited the universally held belief in the possibility of divine vengeance upon human evil-doers, and it could strike terror into the hearts of the credulous and the guilty.

(510)

In the plays of the first tetralogy, and especially in *Richard III*, the *possibility* of curses taking effect is accepted by most. To the Yorkists, Margaret's misfortunes are the result of York's curse on her:

The curse my noble father laid on thee
When thou didst crown his warlike brows with paper,
And with thy scorns drew'st rivers from his eyes,
And then to dry them, gav'st the Duke a clout
Steep'd in the faultless blood of pretty Rutland --
His curses then, from bitterness of soul

⁵It is noteworthy that most of the curses in the tetralogy are found in the last two plays, when England is at her most disordered: in 3 *Henry VI*, war rages between the houses of Lancaster and York while in *Richard III*, the throne is usurped by Richard of Gloucester.

Denounc'd against thee, are fall'n upon thee,
And God, not we, hath plagu'd thy bloody deed.

(I.iii.174-181)

Moreover, Margaret herself begins to curse because if York's curses "prevail[ed] so much with heaven" (I.iii.191), hers might too. And her imprecations do cause uneasiness among the Yorkists as the four attempts to stop them indicate:

Richard. Have done thy charm, thou hateful wither'd
hag.

(I.iii.215)

Hastings. False-boding woman, end thy frantic curse,

(I.iii.247)

Buckingham. Peace, peace, for shame, if not for charity.

...

Have done, have done!

(I.iii.273, 279)

After Margaret leaves, some of the subjects of her curses even admit to being troubled by them:

Buckingham. My hair doth stand on end to hear her
curses.

Rivers. And so doth mine;

(I.iii.304-305)

With the exception of Richard, all those cursed by Margaret -- Rivers, Grey, Vaughan, Hastings, Buckingham, and Elizabeth -- associate their fate with her curses on them:

Grey. Now Margaret's curse is fall'n upon our heads,
When she exclaim'd on Hastings, you, and I,
For standing by when Richard stabb'd her son.

Rivers. Then curs'd she Richard, then curs'd she
Buckingham,

Then curs'd she Hastings. O remember, God,
To hear her prayer for them, as now for us;

(III.iii.15-20)

Hastings. O Margaret, Margaret, now thy heavy curse
Is lighted upon poor Hastings' wretched head.

(III.iv.92-93)

Elizabeth. Go: hie thee [Dorset], hie thee from this
slaughter-house

Lest thou increase the number of the dead,
And make me die the thrall of Margaret's curse:
Nor mother, wife, nor England's counted Queen.

(IV.i.43-46)

Buckingham. Thus Margaret's curse falls heavy on my
neck:

'When he', quoth she, 'shall split thy heart with
sorrow,

Remember Margaret was a prophetess!"

(V.i.25-27)

But, as we have seen, "real" belief in and fear of the power of curses come only with hindsight in these plays. For while being cursed may cause them some uneasiness, those in power do not change their ways for fear of a curse "falling upon their heads". Margaret's presence in the court unsettles Richard to begin with but her curses do not trouble him much -- alone among those cursed by her in I.iii, he does not recall her words before his death. Indeed the curses laid on him by Margaret and the other women do not deter him in any way. He makes no changes to his plans, calmly wooing Anne after being cursed by her and simply ignoring his mother and her

imprecations. For like Margaret in her moment of triumph over Humphrey of Gloucester, he, too, "can give the loser leave to chide" (2H6, III.i.182).

While most of the curses in the tetralogy (and notably those of Margaret) come to pass, they do not have any immediate and practical effect. Cursing cannot resurrect the dead sons and husbands of the grieving women in *Richard III*, neither can it save the lives of those facing execution, as Clifford sneeringly reminds the captive York:

So cowards fight when they can fly no further;
 So doves do peck the falcon's piercing talons;
 So desperate thieves, all hopeless of their lives,
 Breathe out invectives 'gainst the officers.

(3H6, I.iv.40-43)

Nor do all curses take effect. Despite being "well skill'd in curses" (R3, IV.iv.116), Margaret does not have things all her way: Dorset survives and Elizabeth, though she will die neither wife nor England's queen, remains a mother.

Although the curses of the women may, arguably, have the power to call down divine vengeance on those who have wronged them, it cannot prevent or undo the evil that has been done. Indeed those who curse often recognize the limitations of their "weapon". Hence Margaret and Suffolk acknowledge, even as they curse, that they do so in vain, Suffolk observing that curses cannot kill:

... Wherefore should I curse them?
 Would curses kill, as doth the mandrake's groan,
 I would invent ... bitter searching terms,

(2H6, III.ii.308-310)

and Margaret, that curses affect only the curser:

... dread curses, like the sun 'gainst glass,
 Or like an overcharged gun, recoil

And turn the force of them upon thyself.

(III.ii.329-331)

Margaret's observation is not inaccurate, as Anne, who finds herself "the subject of mine own soul's curse" (R3, IV.i.80), discovers.

But if words are no more than "windy attorneys to their clients' woes", "Airy succeders of intestate joys", and "Poor breathing orators of miseries" (IV.iv.127-129), why, we might ask, with the Duchess of York, "should calamity be full of words" (IV.iv.126)? Elizabeth's answer is that "though what [words] will impart/ Help nothing else, yet do they ease the heart" (IV.iv.130-131). Jane Donawerth cautions against interpreting such comments in Renaissance writing in the light of the modern idea of speech as an emotional release (58). For in the Renaissance, speech was believed to be part of the physiological process. Most physicians of the age accepted the view of their classical predecessors, such as Hippocrates, that speech relieves the heart of excess heat and wasted humours caused by disease and overwrought emotions.⁶ Thus, Thomas Elyot writes in *The Castel of Helth* (1541) that

Vociferation, whiche is syngynge, redynge, or crienge
[has] the propertie, that it purgeth naturall heate, and
maketh it also subtyll and stable.... By high crieng and
loude redinge, are expelled superfluous humors.

(Donawerth, 58)

while in his *Positions [on] the Training up of Children* of 1581, Richard Mulcaster maintains that the mad, the melancholy, and the phlegmatic "receiue comfort from speeche, which makes roome for health, where reume kept residence" (ibid., 59). In view of this, the railing and cursing of

⁶For a discussion of the function of speech as a purge, see Chapter 2 of Donawerth's *Shakespeare and the Sixteenth Century Study of Language*, particularly pages 57-61; and for further references to the concept in both Renaissance and classical literature, see p.98, n.4.

the women in Shakespeare's first tetralogy function as more than just "weapons".

Whatever their efficacy, the twin "feminine" weapons of scolding and cursing were "illicit" in the Renaissance, for the patriarchy expected women to be silent, obedient, and submissive. Moreover, as Thomas points out, cursing was considered a blasphemy, for it implied "a magical manipulation of the Almighty's powers which no human being should attempt" (503). In prophecy, however, the female voice achieved a measure of legitimacy and authenticity. For while the female voice was, to the patriarchy, at best irrational and at worst evil, when a woman prophesied, her words were no longer her own but ostensibly those of God. The "voice" of the female prophet was thus not "female" as such but rather divine and "masculine", and therefore legitimate and "safe".

The tradition of the female prophet was an old one. While the principal biblical prophets were men, a number of the major prophets of antiquity were women, notably the Sibyls and Cassandra. And in the Renaissance, women were prominent among the "steady procession of would-be prophets" (Thomas, 133). Thomas attributes the phenomenon to the fact that as "women at this time were denied access to any of the normal means of expression afforded by Church, State or University", "the best hope of gaining an ear for female utterances was to represent them as the result of divine revelation" (138).

But, with the exception of Margaret and perhaps Joan, the principal women of the tetralogy do not prophesy or even claim to do so. And even Margaret, who calls herself a "prophetess" (R3, I.iii.301), largely confines herself to the articulation of her own desire for revenge, her only prophecies being, arguably, her predictions that Elizabeth will wish for her aid in cursing Richard (I.iii.245-246) and that Richard will "split [Buckingham's]

very heart with sorrow" (I.iii.300). As for Joan, Margaret's predecessor as "the English scourge", although the Bastard of Orleans says that she has "the spirit of deep prophecy/ ... Exceeding the nine sibyls of old Rome" (1H6, I.ii.55-56), she does not prophesy on stage at all. Even so, that she is introduced as a "prophetess", as the person "*Ordained* ... to raise this tedious siege/ And drive the English forth the bounds of France" (I.ii.53-54; my emphasis), is significant. It is her reputation for descrying "what's past and what's to come" (I.ii.57) that brings her to the notice of the Bastard of Orleans and subsequently that of the Dauphin himself, for she has as yet performed no "wondrous feats" (I.ii.64). It is her "prophetic" voice that gives her a voice in the masculine world of military endeavour.

A third woman is associated with prophecy although she does not make any prophecies herself. Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester, secures the services of a witch and a conjurer to discover the course of future events. For Eleanor, prophecy is "a substitute action":

Follow I must; I cannot go before,
 While Gloucester bears this base and humble mind.
 Were I a man, a duke, and next of blood,
 I would remove these tedious stumbling-blocks
 And smooth my way upon their headless necks;
 And, being a woman, I will not be slack
 To play my part in Fortune's pageant.

(2H6, I.ii.61-67)

Eleanor's part in "Fortune's pageant" begins with an attempt to descry the future because, being neither "a man, a duke, [nor] next of blood", she cannot remove those who stand between her and her ambitions. She resorts to prophecy as it gives her the illusion of playing an active part in "Fortune's pageant". Her desire to know the fates of Henry and his peers underlines her inability to "smooth [her] way upon their headless necks",

her impotence to effect her wishes. Indeed, most of the "prophets" in the plays are persons in states of disadvantage or distress: Margaret who has "outlive[d her] glory" (*R3*, I.iii.203) as mother, wife and England's queen, Joan the shepherdess, and the doomed Henry⁷ and Hastings.⁸

Prophecy, like scolding and cursing, is largely a resort of the impotent in the plays. But the dramatist is careful to limit its use by women. For, by its very nature, prophecy sanctions the voice of the "prophet". And while the Renaissance patriarchy would have had no trouble accepting authoritative pronouncements about the future from such figures as Henry V, "the mirror of all Christian kings" (*1H6*, V.i.30-33), and his saintly son, Henry VI (*3H6*, IV.vi.69-76), such pronouncements from women would have been less palatable.

In the tetralogy, the freedom to speak is closely associated with power, particularly in the last two plays, in which the struggle for the throne of England is at its fiercest. Prisoners such as Henry, Oxford, Somerset, and Buckingham are routinely denied the freedom to speak,⁹ and the only prisoner who is actually urged to give voice is York, for Margaret, in her exultation over his defeat, would hear him "grieve" (*3H6*, I.iv.86). But York is the exception. Nor is it only prisoners who wish to be heard. *3 Henry VI* is full of appeals of this kind. Indeed the phrase "Hear me speak" runs like a refrain through the play. Using variations of it, Warwick and Northumberland, supporters of the two rival "kings", urge the gathered nobles to listen to their respective choices for the kingship:

Northumberland. Peace thou, and give King Henry
leave to speak.

⁷cf. *3H6*, V.vi.37-43.

⁸cf. *R3*, III.iv.104-105

⁹cf. *3H6*, IV.viii.57, V.v.4; *R3*, V.i.1-2

Warwick. Plantagenet shall speak first: hear him, lords;

(I.i.120-121)

In this instance, the struggle for the crown has become a competition for the attention of those present. Henry, the anointed king, is forced not only to compete for the attention of his subjects, but to beg permission to speak first from one of his peers -- "My Lord of Warwick, hear me but one word" (I.i.174) -- and then from his wife: "Stay, gentle Margaret, and hear me speak" (I.i.264). The phrase, "hear me speak" recurs in the following scene when Richard appeals for his father's attention, asserting that he will prove that York may claim the crown by "open war" and not be forsworn "if you'll hear me speak" (I.ii.20); and again in the next when Rutland begs "Sweet Clifford" to "hear me speak before I die" (I.iii.18). And in II.ii, the hapless Henry begs once more:

King Henry. Have done with words, my lords, and hear
me speak.

Queen Margaret. Defy them then, or else hold close thy
lips.

King Henry. I prithee give no limits to my tongue:
I am a king, and privileg'd to speak.

Clifford. My liege, the wound that bred this meeting
here

Cannot be cur'd by words; therefore be still.

(II.ii.117-122)

But Margaret, on this occasion the person who denies another permission to speak, soon finds herself in the role of the suppliant on her visit to Lewis of France: "King Lewis and Lady Bona, hear me speak/ Before you answer Warwick" (III.iii.65-66).

More appeals for attention are found in *Richard III*, most of them made by the Duchess of York. In IV.iv, she asks Richard to "patiently hear my

impatience", then begs him to "let me speak" and again to "hear me speak" (IV.iv.157, 160, 180). But it is only when she says that she "shall never speak to [him] again", that he consents to "Hear ... a word" (IV.iv.182, 181).

Margaret, now the sole surviving member of the house of Lancaster, also asks -- or perhaps one should say "demands" -- to be heard. She interrupts the Yorkists' quarrel with "Hear me, you wrangling pirates" (I.iii.158) and curses them all. When she curses Richard, she does not ask him to "hear" her but states peremptorily that "thou *shalt* hear me" (I.iii.216; my emphasis).

Despite the association between the freedom to speak and power, "words" are often seen in opposition to "deeds" and specifically, to war. The peace-loving Henry, for instance, sees words as an alternative to arms: "frowns, words, and threats,/ Shall be the war that Henry means to use" to make the "factionous Duke of York descend [his] throne" (3H6, I.i.72-73, 74). To Henry's uncles, however, "blows" speak louder than words; Humphrey of Gloucester warns Winchester that "I will not answer thee with words, but blows" (1H6, I.iii.69), while Bedford, taunted by the victorious French at Orleans, urges his fellow English generals to "let no words, but deeds, revenge this treason!" (III.ii.49). Other knights, too, consider "blows" more effective than words. Stafford's brother urges him to "Assail [Cade's rebels] with the army of the King" "seeing gentle words will not prevail" (2H6, IV.ii.167-168); and Alexander Iden tells Cade that "[his] sword [will] report what speech forbears" (IV.x.53); while Richard asserts that "if words will not [serve as York's surety], then our weapons shall" (V.i.140). Their view is shared by Young Clifford who warns Warwick to

Urge it no more; lest that, instead of words,
I send thee, Warwick, such a messenger
As shall revenge his death before I stir.

(3H6, I.i.98-100)

and later declares to York that "I will not bandy with thee word for word,/ But buckle with thee blows twice two for one" (I.iv.49-50). "Words", as we see, are considered a poor substitute for "blows". Indeed accusations of cowardice often refer to the substitution of words for "blows", as when Margaret sneers at "long-tongu'd Warwick" (II.ii.102) and Richard alleges that "Clifford's manhood lies upon his tongue" (II.ii.125).

What we seem to have in Shakespeare's first tetralogy are two contrary views of the power of words: for if words are ineffectual compared to "blows", yet "the cities [Warwick] got with wounds,/ [are] Deliver'd up again with peaceful words" (2H6, I.i.120-121). And while feminist critics assert that verbal facility is a mark of impotence -- to Margaret Loftus Ranald, for instance, "the only men ... who reach similar heights of loquacity, even eloquence [as the women], are those who either lack or have lost power" (1987, 173) -- others, such as Michael Hattaway, maintain that "eloquence, like prowess in battle, is always seen as a means to power" (Introduction to 3 *Henry VI*, 22; seen in manuscript).

Which of these views is "correct" -- or are they both? The answer, to my mind, is to be found in Margaret's embassy to France and Henry's observations on it. Speaking presumably from experience, he predicts that

Her sighs will make a battery in his [Lewis's] breast;
Her tears will pierce into a marble heart;
The tiger will be mild whiles she doth mourn;
And Nero will be tainted with remorse,
To hear and see her complaints, her brinish tears.

(3H6, III.i.37-41)¹⁰

Despite Margaret's best efforts, Lewis first stalls, refusing to act immediately:

¹⁰When considered in light of York's famous reference to Margaret as a "tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide" (3H6, I.iv.137), "the tiger" in this passage may well be within, as without, Margaret; the implication being that when mourning, she is at her least "tigerish", i.e. her most "feminine".

King Lewis. Renowned Queen, with patience calm the
storm,

While we bethink a means to break it off.

Queen Margaret. The more we stay, the stronger grows
our foe.

King Lewis. The more I stay, the more I'll succour thee.

(III.iii.38-41)

Then, after Warwick arrives with Edward's offer of alliance, Lewis changes his mind and decides not to help Margaret at all:

But if your title to the crown be weak,
As may appear by Edward's good success,
Then 'tis but reason that I be releas'd
From giving the aid which late I promised.

(III.iii.145-148)

Lewis magnanimously offers Margaret refugee status in France instead of the military aid she had come for: "Yet shall you have all kindness at my hand/ That your estate requires and mine can yield" (III.iii.149-150). The position is clear: while Margaret is undoubtedly as "subtle" an "orator" (III.i.33) as Warwick, what ensures the success of his oratory and the failure of hers is the difference in their situations, as Henry points out in a series of antitheses:

Ay, but she's come to beg, Warwick to give;
She on his left side craving aid for Henry:
He on his right, asking a wife for Edward.
She weeps, and says her Henry is depos'd:
He smiles, and says his Edward is install'd;

(III.i.42-46)

And while Lewis does ultimately give Margaret what she wants, it is not because her sighs have made a battery into his breast:

Bona. My quarrel and this English queen's are one.

Warwick. And mine, fair Lady Bona, joins with yours.

King Lewis. And mine with hers, and thine, and
Margaret's.

Therefore at last I firmly am resolv'd

You shall have aid.

(III.iii.216-220; my emphasis)

Margaret gets the aid she seeks only because aiding her is the most convenient way in which Lewis may avenge himself upon Edward "For mocking marriage with a dame of France" (III.iii.255). Her "fair persuasions" have nothing to do with his decision at all.

Words have no inherent power of their own. And that is the difference between having a "voice" and having the power of what Jonathan Goldberg calls "voicing", the ability to impose one's interpretation of events on others, to force them to accept what one tells them as "the truth" (119). Richard III, for instance, has that power, for as the Scrivener says of Richard's "devices",

... Who is so gross

That cannot see this palpable device?

Yet who's so bold but says he sees it not?

(R3, III.vi.10-12)

The women of Shakespeare's first tetralogy do have "voices"; we certainly hear them -- even Anne, the most docile of them all -- lamenting, scolding, and cursing. But their voices, though heard, are generally disregarded by the patriarchy. For as York puts it so succinctly, "I cannot give due action to my words,/ Except a sword or sceptre balance it" (2H6, V.i.8-9).

While the women, notably the widowed Margaret, often "fill the world with words" (3H6, V.v.43) because that is all they can do, their tongues are, on occasion, effective weapons -- when backed by sword, sceptre or love.

Chapter 6

"I see the lady hath a thing to grant"

In Act III Scene ii of 3 *Henry VI*, one of Edward IV's subjects comes before the new king with a "humble suit". She is the Lady Elizabeth Grey, widowed mother of three, whose late husband's lands have been "seiz'd on by the conqueror" (III.ii.3). A woman in a patriarchal society, left alone to fend for herself and her children, she is the epitome of the defenceless and destitute. Yet Richard says that "the lady hath a thing to grant,/ Before the King will grant her humble suit" (III.ii.12-13). A woman in Elizabeth's situation with something to grant a king? Surely Richard must be mistaken. But he is not. The lady does have something to grant the king: "the fruits of love" (III.ii.59) -- her sexual favours. Although Elizabeth may not have come into Edward's presence with the intention of using her sexual favours as a "lever of power", that she ultimately gets not just the lands for which she comes but a crown as well is proof of the potential power of this traditional "feminine" weapon.

Female sexuality was a force the patriarchy found particularly threatening in the Renaissance. For a woman's sexuality could give her the power to invert the "divinely ordained" order of male supremacy and female subservience, and even to destroy the line of inheritance upon which the patriarchy was built. And what could be more subversive in a society which placed such premium upon paternal descent than the bastard of an adulterous woman succeeding to her husband's title and estate?

But as a "weapon", female sexuality, by its very nature, was limited in scope, its use confined to situations involving husbands or lovers.

Moreover, while the sexual desire of both husbands and lovers might be manipulated, the twin horrors of cuckoldry and a broken line of succession affected men only in marital relationships.

The subject of feminine manipulation of male desire is introduced early in Shakespeare's first tetralogy, indeed with the appearance of the first woman, Joan la Pucelle, in the second scene of *1 Henry VI*. In her speech to the Dauphin, Charles, Joan urges him to "receive me for thy warlike mate" (I.ii.92), while he, in turn, insists that she must "buckle" with him to prove the truth of her words (I.ii.95-96) and declares, after his defeat, that

Impatiently I burn with thy desire;
My heart and hands thou hast at once subdu'd.
Excellent Pucelle, if thy name be so,
Let me thy servant and not sovereign be:
'Tis the French Dauphin sueth to thee thus.

(I.ii.108-112)

More sexual terms are found in Reignier and Alençon's commentary on the interview between Joan and Charles, and indeed throughout the play when Joan is mentioned.¹ Her association with sexuality not only reflects the Renaissance belief in the promiscuity of women who dress in men's clothes but also suggests that she owes much of her dominance over Charles -- "what she says [he'll] confirm" (I.ii.128) -- to her manipulation of his desire for her. And in "subduing" the "heart and hands" of the French prince (I.ii.109), Joan effectively subdues the French nation.

Margaret of Anjou, as observed in previous chapters, succeeds Joan as the "English scourge" (I.ii.129). She also succeeds her as "temptress", for Margaret's power, like Joan's, stems partially from her sexuality.² First

¹cf. I.iv.106; I.v.12; I.vi.6, 21-22; II.i.20-24; II.ii.28-31; III.ii.52-53; etc.

²Joan owes her power to witchcraft too, while Margaret's (especially in *3 Henry VI*) also stems from her verbal dominance and her husband's passivity.

Suffolk then Henry find themselves "attaint/ With ... passion of inflaming love" (V.v.81-82) for her. And the passion of these two men makes Margaret Queen of England, for while she derives her queenship from King Henry, her husband, it is Suffolk, her lover, who, to begin with, "Solicit[s] Henry with her wondrous praise" (V.iii.190) to make her his [Henry's] wife.

Like Margaret before her, Elizabeth becomes queen because the king would "enjoy [her] for [his] love" (3H6, III.ii.95). But the "succession" which Elizabeth continues may be traced beyond Margaret to Joan. Indeed, Elizabeth's audience with Edward in Act III Scene ii of 3 *Henry VI* has much in common with Joan's interview with Charles (1H6, I.ii.): a woman seeks an audience with a prince and gains ascendancy over him through his desire for her; and while she speaks to him in private, two of his friends draw our attention to the sexual overtones of the interview, cynically casting the man in the role of father confessor and the woman in that of penitent sinner:

Reignier. My lord, methinks, is very long in talk.

Alençon. Doubtless he shrives this woman to her smock;

Else ne'er could he so long protract his speech.

(1H6, I.ii.118-120)

Richard. [Aside to George] The ghostly father now hath done his shrift.

George. [Aside to Richard] When he was made a shriver, 'twas for shift.

(3H6, III.ii.107-108)

In the three instances discussed above, the woman is in a position of disadvantage: Joan is "a shepherd's daughter, ... untrained in any kind of art" (1H6, I.ii.72-73) trying to persuade a prince to allow her to lead his army against the enemy, while Margaret, a princess captured by a captain of the

forces invading her country, a woman -- to put it mildly -- in grave danger of suffering untold indignities, as she is well aware:

What though I be enthrall'd? He seems a knight,
And will not any way dishonour me.

...

Perhaps I shall be rescu'd by the French;
And then I need not crave his courtesy.

...

Tush, women have been captivate ere now.

(1H6, V.iii.101-102, 104-105, 107)

Elizabeth, for her part, comes before Edward with a petition for the return of the lands of her late husband -- a Lancastrian who had died fighting the Yorkists -- and finds herself being propositioned by the king. Yet, all three women come out "on top" -- Joan leads the French army against the English while Margaret and Elizabeth become queens.

Such is the power of their sexuality. That said, however, there is no indication in the text that either Elizabeth or Margaret consciously uses her sexuality to "persuade" the king to make her his queen. Elizabeth, for example, "knits her brows" (3H6, III.ii.82) when propositioned by Edward and continues to "[look] vex'd" (III.ii.110) even after he promises her she will be queen. It is, though, possible in performance, to *suggest* that the crown is what Elizabeth really wants, for instance by having her smile to herself when Edward declares that "thou shalt be my queen" (III.ii.106).

In the case of Margaret, there is certainly no textual evidence at all that the power she subsequently wields as queen derives from her manipulation of Henry's desire for her. On the contrary, there is a suggestion that he loses all romantic interest in her after their marriage, for she complains to Suffolk early in *2 Henry VI* that

I thought King Henry had resembled thee
 In courage, courtship, and proportion:
 But all his mind is bent to holiness,
 To number Ave-Maries on his beads;

(I.iii.53-56)

Yet, Margaret does maintain an emotional hold of some kind over Henry, for he cannot bear to be parted from her:

Nay, take me with thee, good sweet Exeter:
 Not that I fear to stay, but love to go
 Whither the Queen intends.

(3H6, II.v.137-139)

And later, when freed by Warwick and Clarence, Henry's first request is for Margaret's return to England with their son:

But with the first of all your chief affairs
 Let me entreat -- for I command no more --
 That Margaret your Queen and my son Edward
 Be sent for to return from France with speed;
 For till I see them here, by doubtful fear
 My joy of liberty is half eclips'd.

(IV.vi.58-63)

Are these indications of romantic love or of a form of emotional dependence, in particular that implied in Eleanor Cobham's warning to Henry that Margaret will "hamper thee and dandle thee *like a baby*" (2H6, I.iii.145; my emphasis)? Clearly the latter.

Henry's emotional dependence on Margaret and the reversal of the traditional balance of power in their relationship suggest that Eleanor's words have wider implications than Eleanor herself may be aware of, i.e. Margaret is able to dandle Henry like a baby because Henry is, in a sense, a baby, someone in need of parenting. This idea is reinforced by Gloucester's

last speech in *2 Henry VI*: "King Henry throws away his crutch/ Before his legs be firm to bear his body" (III.i.189-190). Henry's "crutch" in his minority is his uncle, Humphrey of Gloucester, who, as Protector, "command[s] the Prince and realm" (*1H6*, I.i.38). Indeed, as Henry himself says, "When Gloucester says the word, King Henry goes" (III.i.184): he goes to France to be crowned king (III.i.179-186) and is betrothed to the daughter of the Earl of Armagnac (V.i.1-27) on Gloucester's instructions. Although at his death, Gloucester is no longer Protector, nevertheless his passing -- as Henry's melodramatic response to the news indicates (*2H6*, III.ii.38ff) -- leaves a gap in Henry's life, a gap that Margaret fills in *3 Henry VI*. Like Gloucester, she not only tells Henry what to do but takes over the administration of the kingdom. Her power over him is therefore emotional, not sexual.

The inversion of conventional gender power relations through a man's desire for a woman is the central concept of courtly love; the lover dedicates himself to the service of the lady in hope of winning her favour(s). But only one relationship in Shakespeare's first tetralogy belongs to this tradition, that of Margaret and Suffolk; and, as we have seen in Chapter 4, her power over him is not absolute since she depends on him to act on her behalf. Moreover, power based on sexuality, such as that of Margaret over Suffolk or Elizabeth's over Edward, lasts only while desire does. Hence, Elizabeth -- who, as Richard always points out, is "well struck in years" (*R3*, I.i.92) -- finds her influence over Edward waning when he begins to tire of her and takes Shore's wife as his mistress. It is noteworthy in this connection that Lord Hastings, the man Elizabeth commits to the Tower, is freed through the intercession of Mistress Shore, "the other woman" (I.i.64-77).

In his *Autobiography* (1576), Thomas Wythorne complains that "A man's honesty and credit doth depend and lie in his wife's tail" (Stone 1977,

504). Indeed in Renaissance England, while a woman's honour depended on her chastity, a man's depended on his wife's. For a woman, the greatest insult was to be called a "whore", for a man, to be called a "cuckold". For, as Lawrence Stone observes, it was "a slur on both his virility and his capacity to rule his own household" (ibid., 503). A wife's adultery was, therefore, an act of betrayal, first in that she gave her love to another man, and second in that she dishonoured her husband's name and made him a laughing stock, for cuckoldry, as Leontes puts it in *The Winter's Tale*, is "so disgrac'd a part, whose issue/ Will hiss me to my grave: contempt and clamour/ Will be my knell" (I.ii.188-190). To be a cuckold was to lose one's standing in society. Thus Othello sees his whole world collapse with his wife's supposed infidelity:

... O now for ever
 Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content:
 Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars,
 That makes ambition virtue: O farewell,
 Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
 The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife;
 The royal banner, and all quality,
 Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
 And, O ye mortal engines, whose wide throats
 The immortal Jove's great clamour counterfeit;
 Farewell, Othello's occupation gone!

(*Oth.*, III.iii.353-363)

Leontes' and Othello's fears about the consequences of their wives' infidelity appear exaggerated to twentieth century audiences, but such would not have been the view of Shakespeare's contemporaries.

Adultery gave the Renaissance woman the power to destroy her husband's honour and perhaps even his career. But as a weapon, adultery

was double-edged, for in thus destroying her husband's honour, a woman would destroy her own. To say she had cuckolded her husband -- for he would have to be aware of her infidelity if it were to be used to gain power over him -- was to admit to being a "whore". And since a woman's chastity was the measure of her worth, the unchaste woman had no future. As the Courtesan tells Witgood in Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One*:

all your lands thrice racked, was never worth the jewel
which I prodigally gave you, my virginity;
Lands mortgaged may return and more esteemed,
But honesty, once pawned, is ne'er redeemed.

(I.i.33-37)

Moreover, a husband might well react as John Frankford -- who banishes his wife from their home for her infidelity -- does in Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* -- or as Henry VIII did. In Tudor England, adulterous queen consorts ran the risk of losing not just their marital rights but their heads, since adultery on their part constituted high treason, as Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard discovered to their cost.

It is perhaps not entirely unexpected, then, that adultery does not greatly influence the balance of power between the sexes in Shakespeare's first tetralogy. Neither Eleanor Cobham, Elizabeth Grey, the Duchess of York, nor Anne Neville break their marital vows.³ Indeed only one woman in the tetralogy is unfaithful to her husband, and even she does not use her infidelity as a weapon against him. Margaret has an affair with Suffolk simply to satisfy her emotional and sexual needs, for, as her complaints to Suffolk about Henry's shortcomings reveal (2*H6*, I.iii.50-64), she finds her relationship with her husband unfulfilling. And Suffolk fills the emptiness

³ Richard's story about Edward IV's illegitimacy (R3, III.v.85-91) is of course pure fabrication on his part.

in her life -- her passionate farewell to him (III.ii.338ff) bears testimony to this.

Although Margaret's relationship with Suffolk does bring her additional power, that power comes to her from Suffolk himself -- who provides her with a means of action⁴ -- not from Henry. On no occasion does Henry yield any power to her for fear that she may disgrace him. He is afraid of her verbal abuse, as the episode in which he tries to flee her wrath indicates (3*H6*, I.i.218-221), not of her dishonouring his name through adultery. Indeed, whether he is aware at all of her infidelity is open to debate. For instance, though it is possible to suggest in performance that Henry's animosity towards Suffolk in Act III Scene ii of 2 *Henry VI* (ll.38-54) goes beyond the latter's role as the bearer of ill-tidings, and that the Duke's exile without trial is more than a matter of "internal security" to Henry, there is no indication in the text that these actions are indeed prompted by an awareness of Suffolk's relationship with Margaret. And while Henry's comment on seeing his wife's grief for the dead Suffolk --

How, madam! Still lamenting Suffolk's death?

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

Thou wouldest not have mourn'd so much for me.

(IV.iv.21-23)

-- could point to his knowledge of their affair, it is also possible that he believes her when she protests that "I should not mourn, but die for thee" (IV.iv.24).

There is yet another reason why none of the women in the first tetralogy -- not even Margaret -- threaten their husbands with the dishonour of cuckoldry to force them to their will. In the Renaissance, the queen consort's most important duty was to produce heirs, *male* heirs. This, on the one hand, gave her enormous power over her husband, since the survival

⁴cf. pp.66-67

of his dynasty depended on her, but, on the other, it could be used against her -- Henry VIII was certainly not the first king to use his queen's "failure" to give him male heirs as an excuse to be rid of her. Her son was, therefore, important to the queen, for his very existence could secure her position. But, as a corollary of that, anything (and particularly his legitimacy) which affected his position would affect hers as a matter of course. Doubts about a prince's legitimacy could both cost him the succession -- such allegations are among the "tools" Richard employs to seize the crown from his nephew, Edward V, in *Richard III* (III.vii.176-190) -- and weaken his mother's position immeasurably.

Hence, though Margaret does not scruple to have an affair, she does not use her son's paternity as a weapon against his father. To begin with, she is fiercely protective of Edward and his rights. Henry, for instance, incurs her wrath when he disinherits Edward in favour of York and his sons. And when Richard slanders Edward with bastardy (3H6, II.ii.133-134), she is quick to attack him in her son's defence (II.ii.135-138). Moreover, much of her power, particularly in 3 *Henry VI*, is derived from the prince. Should he lose his power, she would lose a considerable amount of her own as well. Thus the evil Margaret would suffer as a result of implying that Edward, Henry's heir, is not his son far outweighs whatever power she might thereby hope to gain over her husband. It is hardly surprising in view of this that the allegations about Edward's birth do not come from her.

It is Richard who insinuates that Edward is not Henry's son: "Whoever got thee, there thy mother stands" (II.ii.133). And throughout the tetralogy, such charges of illegitimacy are made not by women but by men.⁵ During a heated exchange with Winchester, for example, Gloucester reminds the

⁵It is interesting to note that while men, such as Warwick and Suffolk in 2 *Henry VI*, insult each other with charges of illegitimacy, Eleanor and Constance, in *King John*, exchange allegations of adultery during their quarrel (cf. *King John*, II.i.).

latter that he is a "bastard of my grandfather" (1H6, III.i.42), while in another argument, Warwick and Suffolk trade allegations of illegitimacy:

Suffolk. If ever lady wrong'd her lord so much,
 Thy mother took into her blameful bed
 Some stern untutor'd churl, and noble stock
 Was graft with crab-tree slip, whose fruit thou art,
 And never of the Nevils' noble race.

...

Warwick. I would, false murd'rous coward, on thy
 knee
 Make thee beg pardon for thy passed speech,
 And say it was thy mother that thou mean'st;
 That thou thyself wast born in bastardy:

(2H6, III.ii.210-214, 219-222)

Inferring the bastardy of their children is far from being a favourite weapon of the women in Shakespeare's first tetralogy, for these mothers have more to lose than to gain from doing so. There is, however, an occasion on which one of them claims that her child is not her husband's:

[I'll] Slander myself as false to Edward's bed,
 Throw over her the veil of infamy;

...

I will confess she was not Edward's daughter.

(R3, IV.iv.208-209, 211)

That child is Elizabeth of York, daughter of Edward IV. Her two young brothers are dead because they stood between their uncle, Richard, and the crown. Now that he turns his attention to Elizabeth, the Queen, her mother, fearing for the princess's life, throws the "veil of infamy" over her "So she may live unscarr'd of bleeding slaughter" (IV.iv.210). Thus in the only instance in the tetralogy of a mother alleging the illegitimacy of her child,

the allegation is used, significantly, not as a weapon to attack but as a shield to defend.

While the Renaissance woman may have had the power to undermine a man through allegations of bastardy, she would generally be unable to use such allegations for her own aggrandizement since the patriarchy dictated that power and wealth descended to males through the male line. In Shakespeare's first tetralogy, the person who gains power through allegations of bastardy is a man, not a woman: Richard, who spreads rumours about the illegitimacy of his brother, Edward IV, and his nephews, Edward V and the Duke of York, to promote himself as the rightful heir to the throne of England.⁶

Adultery does not greatly influence the balance of power between husbands and wives in Shakespeare's first tetralogy. But to assert, as Phyllis Rackin does, that Margaret's adultery "has no real impact on the action of the *Henry VI* plays", and that it functions only to "underscore [her] characterization as [a threat] to masculine honour" (1990, 158), is to ignore the fact that her affair leads to the political ascendancy of her lover, Suffolk,⁷ a principal player in the fall and murder of Humphrey of Gloucester -- events which prove useful to York in his plot to seize the crown (2*H6*, II.ii.68-75). Hence Margaret's adultery does pose a threat to the security of the kingdom. Even so, as in Marlowe's *Edward II*, the threat comes not from a bastard who will break the royal line of succession in acceding to the throne of England -- in neither case is there a bastard⁸ -- but rather from the queen's ambitious lover who uses his relationship with her to further his political career. Though not nearly as powerful as young Mortimer in *Edward II* -- who does not have to contend with "the haught Protector, ... Beaufort/ The

⁶cf. *R3*, III.v.85-91; and III.vii.176-190.

⁷cf. pp.58-59.

⁸There is of course no truth in Richard's insinuation that Margaret's son, Edward, is a bastard (3*H6*, II.ii.133-134).

imperious churchman; Somerset, Buckingham,/ And grumbling York"
(2H6, I.iii.68-70) -- Suffolk, as Eleanor warns Humphrey, her husband, "can
do all in all/*With her* that hateth thee" (II.iv.51-52; my emphasis).

That, the adulterous or promiscuous Renaissance woman was demonized as the "whore" -- while her male counterpart, by contrast, was simply the "rake" -- testifies to the patriarchy's fear of the anarchic power it attributed to female sexuality. This power was often seen as supernatural, since the patriarchy, in its chauvinism, found "hellish charms" (R3, III.iv.62) the most acceptable explanation for man, the "superior" being, debasing himself to submit to woman, his "inferior". This connection between female power and sexuality is reflected in the belief, popular among Renaissance intellectuals and theologians, that the witch owed her power to a pact she made with the devil, a pact which involved, among other things, the exchange of her sexual favours for the powers which he could give her (Thomas, 438-441). While allegations of diabolical carnal union were not a feature of all English witch trials, they were common enough in cases initiated by the notorious witch-finder, Matthew Hopkins (*ibid.*, 444-445).

There was, then, an association between female sexuality and witchcraft. Indeed Sprenger and Kramer, the authors of the influential treatise, *Malleus Maleficarum*, insist that "All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which in women is insatiable" (47). Even Reginald Scot, who did not accept the theological explanations of witchcraft as devil-worship, believed in a connection between witchcraft and prostitution as the following passage from Booke XIII, Chapter X of *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* indicates:

The vertue conteined within the bodie of an harlot, or
rather the venome proceeding out of the same maie be
beheld with great admiration. For hir eie infecteth,
entiseth, and (if I maie so saie) bewitcheth them manie

times, which thinke themselves well armed against such maner of people. Hir toong, hir gesture, hir behaviour, hir beautie, and other allurements poison and intoxicate the mind: yea hir companie induceth impudencie, corrupteth virginitie, confoundeth and consumeth the bodies, goods, and the verie soules of men. And finallie hir bodie destroieth and rotteth the verie flesh and bones of mans bodie.

(256)

The notion of the diabolical nature of female sexuality is certainly present in Shakespeare's first tetralogy, particularly in *Joan la Pucelle*, whom her ally, Charles, hails as the "Bright star of Venus, fall'n down on the earth" (*1H6*, I.ii.144). In associating her, from the beginning of play, with a pagan goddess of erotic love and with Lucifer, the Morning Star which fell not to earth but to hell,⁹ the dramatist suggests that the sexual and diabolical aspects of Joan's power are inseparable. Indeed she is seen throughout the play as a "Foul fiend ... and hag of all despite,/ Encompass'd with ... lustful paramours" (III.ii.52-53).¹⁰ The representation of Joan as both witch and whore culminates in Act V, with the appearance, in Scene iii, of the "familiar spirits ... cull'd/ Out of the powerful regions under earth" (V.iii.10-11) to whom she offers her "body, soul, and all" (V.iii.22), and with her desperate claims of pregnancy in the following scene (V.iv.60ff). Joan thus embodies both sexuality and evil, or to put it another way, the evil of female sexuality.

The conjunction of witchcraft and female sexuality is also found in *Richard III*. In the first scene, Richard complains that England, under his

⁹That the planet Venus is also known as "the Morning Star" (when seen in the east before sunrise) strengthens the association between Venus and Lucifer.

¹⁰For references to Joan as a witch cf. *1H6*, I.v.5-7 & 21; II.i.18 & 25; III.ii.38-39, 64 & 122; V.iii.31-35, 42 & 93.

brother, Edward IV, is a kingdom in which "men are rul'd by women" (I.i.62). Indeed two women, Elizabeth and Mistress Shore -- the king's wife and mistress respectively -- are such "mighty gossips in our monarchy" (I.i.83) that they have the power to cause the arrest or release even of the Lord Chamberlain. Such power being totally incompatible with the patriarchal idea of femininity, it is scarcely surprising that Richard accuses both Elizabeth and Mistress Shore (after the death of Edward of course!) of witchcraft:

See how I am bewitch'd! Behold, mine arm
Is like a blasted sapling wither'd up!
And this is Edward's wife, that monstrous witch,
Consorted with that harlot, strumpet Shore,
That by their witchcraft thus have marked me.

(III.iv.68-72)

If, as Richard alleges, Elizabeth and Mistress Shore are witches who have the power to wither arms, witchcraft must, by extension, account for the marriage of the former, a "jealous o'er-worn widow" (I.i.81), to "a king;/ A bachelor, and a handsome stripling" (I.iii.100-101); and for the power of Mistress Shore over men such as Edward IV and Hastings. Indeed Buckingham tells the Mayor of London that he "never look'd for better at [Hastings's] hands/ After he once fell in with Mistress Shore" (III.v.49-50), suggesting that Hastings's "treachery" is in fact the result of the evil influence, the witchcraft, of "that harlot, strumpet Shore".

Admittedly, the claims that witchcraft lies behind the sexually-based power of Elizabeth and Mistress Shore come from Richard and Buckingham, who under the circumstances, are certainly far from reliable as witnesses. Nevertheless, that these two men resort to such allegations and, more importantly, that they achieve their aims through using them, testifies to

the plausibility of a connection between witchcraft and female sexuality in the patriarchal world of the plays.

Two kinds of sexual transgressions are found in Shakespeare's first tetralogy, one female and the other male. While female sexual transgression, such as that of Margaret, takes the form of adultery, men like Henry VI and Edward IV transgress in making "impolitic" marriages, in marrying women who bring neither dowry nor alliance. If these marriages, to a penniless princess and a widow of a knight, are not the principal cause of the disorder in England, they certainly contribute to it by causing discontent among the peers.¹¹ Hence, from a patriarchal point of view, female sexuality is involved in the troubles besetting the kingdom.

The first two kings in the tetralogy, Henry VI and Edward IV, succumb to their desires and marry for love, but the last two, Richard III and Richmond/Henry VII, do so for purely political reasons. Indeed Richard, who has nothing but contempt for men who, through desire, put themselves into the power of women, uses the tradition of courtly love for his own ends. Casting himself in the role of the love-lorn suitor totally besotted with his lady, he manipulates Anne into believing that she has the power to make him do anything, including reduce him to tears:

Those eyes of thine from mine have drawn salt tears,
 Sham'd their aspects with store of childish drops;
 These eyes, which never shed remorseful tear,
 No, when my father York and Edward wept
 To hear the piteous moan that Rutland made
 When black-fac'd Clifford shook his sword at him;
 Nor when thy warlike father, like a child
 Told the sad story of my father's death,

¹¹cf. pp.26-28.

And twenty times made pause to sob and weep,
 That all the standers-by had wet their cheeks
 Like trees bedash'd with rain. In that sad time
 My manly eyes did scorn an humble tear;
 And what these sorrows could not thence exhale,
 Thy beauty hath, and made them blind with weeping.
 I never sued to friend nor enemy:
 My tongue could never learn sweet smoothing word;
 But now thy beauty is propos'd my fee,
 My proud heart sues, and prompts my tongue to speak.

(R3, I.ii.157-174)

Anne even has, Richard says, the power to make him commit murder -- and suicide:

Speak it again, and even with the word,
 This hand, which for thy love did kill thy love,
 Shall for thy love kill a far truer love:
 To both their deaths shalt thou be accessary

(I.ii.192-195)

And if a lady has the power to make her lover do these things, may she not also have the power to make a penitent of him? Anne, Richard's first victim, certainly believes she does: "much it joys me too,/ To see you are become so penitent" (I.ii.223-224). Although it is impossible to determine exactly how Richard wins her, it is undeniable that he owes his success in part to the illusion he creates of her power over him.

Richard uses the same ploy when he woos Elizabeth for the hand of her daughter, though the element of emotional blackmail is stronger in this case:

In her consists my happiness and thine;
 Without her follows to myself, and thee,

Herself, the land, and many a Christian soul,
 Death, desolation, ruin, and decay.
 It cannot be avoided but by this;
 It will not be avoided but by this.

(IV.iv.406-411)

Richard is, however, less successful in this, his second, attempt than in his first, for even had he won Elizabeth's consent -- which is debatable -- he later loses it to his rival, Richmond. But Richard is nevertheless a victimizer rather than a victim when it comes to employing sexuality to gain power.

Richard, at least, pretends to be in love with Anne when he woos her. No concessions of the sort are made in the matter of Richmond's marriage to Elizabeth of York. Not only is his wooing of her not dramatized, but love is never mentioned in connection with their relationship. There are just three references to it; the first in Richard's soliloquy near the end of Act IV Scene iii: "the Breton Richmond aims/ At young Elizabeth, my brother's daughter,/ And by that knot looks proudly on the crown" (IV.iii.40-42). The strictly political motives Richard ascribes to Richmond might well be dismissed by an audience, since Richard is, after all, Richmond's rival for the crown. Moreover, since Richard himself "aims" at Elizabeth only because of the crown, he might well be unable to recognize any other motives for marrying her. But that said, Richard may not be far from the truth. For the next reference to that famous marriage of York and Lancaster -- which comes from Stanley -- is similarly devoid of all mention of love: "the Queen hath heartily consented/ He should espouse Elizabeth her daughter" (IV.v.7-8). Nor does Richmond, when he finally mentions his marriage himself, say anything about love:

O now let Richmond and Elizabeth,
 The true succeeders of each royal House,
 By God's fair ordinance conjoin together,

And let their heirs, God, if Thy will be so,
 Enrich the time to come with smooth-fac'd peace,
 With smiling plenty, and fair prosperous days.

(V.v.29-34)

Perhaps a battlefield is no place to talk about love, perhaps the battle-weary people of England would not be interested in their new king's protestations of love for his future wife. Nevertheless, that the marriage of Richmond and Elizabeth of York is described only in political, and never in personal, terms adds to the impression that the new king, Henry VII -- unlike his predecessors, Henry VI and Edward IV -- is not vulnerable to "feminine wiles", and, thus, with his accession, men will once more rule women as they were "ordained" to, and the days "when men [were] rul'd by women" (I.i.62) will be well and truly over.

It would be wrong to suggest that the power of female sexuality is only an illusion in Shakespeare's first tetralogy. It is certainly not. Given the right circumstances, Joan, Margaret, and Elizabeth turn male passion and desire into power. But though they could use the threat of infidelity to bend their husbands to their will, none of the women in these plays actually does so, for in the patriarchal social order in which they live, adultery, like curses or "an overcharged gun", "recoil[s]/ And turn[s] the force of [it]" (2H6, III.ii.330-331) upon her (the feminine pronoun is used advisedly) who employs it.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

"Follow I must; I cannot go before"

The principal theme of Shakespeare's first tetralogy is power. Set in the tumultuous period between the death of Henry V in 1422 and the accession of Henry VII in 1485, it depicts not only the struggle between Lancaster and York but also those between England and France, Humphrey of Gloucester and the Bishop of Winchester, and Richard of Gloucester and those who stand between him and the crown. But while powerful and ambitious men such as Humphrey, Winchester, York, Richard, Warwick, Suffolk, and Buckingham battle for ascendancy, the women -- notably Margaret of Anjou, Elizabeth Grey, and Eleanor Cobham -- "[are] not slack/ To play [their] part in Fortune's pageant" (2*H6*, I.ii.66-67). Suffolk's description of a woman who "with as humble lowliness of mind/ ... is content to be at [her husband's] command" (1*H6*, V.v.18-19) is, as we have seen, a description of the patriarchal ideal, not always to be exemplified in living reality.

In the course of this dissertation, I have identified various features of female power presented in the plays. Although this power is employed less to promote their own interests than that of the men in their lives -- Margaret, for instance, tries to protect the rights of her son, and Elizabeth, to help her relatives in their careers -- female power in the tetralogy is largely destructive. Its positive aspect, which in any case is considerably less effective than the negative, works only indirectly, through the manipulation of male power. If Elizabeth, for example, has the power both to advance her relatives and to destroy her daughter's birthright, it is only the destructive side of her power that she exercises in her own right: she

cannot promote anyone without the help of Edward. Moreover, even when used "positively" in the promotion of husbands or sons, female power ultimately leads to disaster, as with the attempts of Margaret to defend her son's interests and Eleanor to advance her husband.

These women exercise political power on behalf of their male relatives, whether husband or son, rather than in their own right. Or to put it another way, female power in the wider sphere of public life is a function of female power in interpersonal gender relationships, with women achieving ascendancy through their use of the two traditional "feminine weapons", the tongue and sexuality. But as the use of these "weapons" is forbidden by the patriarchy, the women resort to them at considerable risk to themselves, i.e. of being branded a "shrew" or a "whore". Hence, much of the danger the patriarchy fears from them remains potential rather than real. There are, notably, no bastards.

It is indeed power, not authority, that the women possess, for authority, as William Robinson wrote in *The Peoples Plea* (1646), is "a right or lawfulnessse to command, and to challenge obedience; such as all Governours and Magistrates have, more or lesse" (Tuck, 52); while power, to quote T.B., author of the sixteenth century *Observations Politicall and Civill*, is that which "renforce[s], and enlarge[s]" authority, "without which no Prince can ether defende his own; or take from others" (Tuck, 44). Power, then, implies ability, but not necessarily the right, to command, and authority, the reverse: right but not necessarily ability.

Only in the context of the mother-son relationship do the women exercise authority rather than power. But the fifth commandment's injunction to "honour" one's mother does not always translate into maternal authority over sons -- Richard and his mother, the Duchess of York, are a case in point.

I noted in Chapter 3 the reduction of the mother from the authoritative, assertive figure of 3 *Henry VI* to a grieving, impotence in *Richard III*. But this reduction of maternal power is part of a much larger pattern of diminution of female power in the tetralogy. Joan la Pucelle, the first woman in the cycle, is undoubtedly the most "martial" and "masculine" of them all. Clad in armour and wielding a sword, Joan leads armies into battle, "driving Englishmen before her" (1H6, I.v.0SD). She even engages in combat, first with Charles, the Dauphin, (I.ii.103SD) and then with the English champion, Talbot (I.v.8SD). But the next important female character, Margaret of Anjou, Queen of England, while actively involved in leading her political faction, does not -- unlike Joan -- actually do battle herself. Although present on the battlefield with her army, she leaves the more physical aspects of leadership to her generals, such as Young Clifford and Warwick. Female power is diminished further when Elizabeth Grey succeeds Margaret as Queen of England, for the former's power lies not in active participation in public life but in influence over her husband, Edward IV. And if Elizabeth's power is less "direct" than that of Margaret, Anne Neville, the next woman to occupy the "office" of "first woman in the realm", has no power at all, direct or indirect. As for the tetralogy's last queen, Elizabeth of York -- whose function is simply to marry Richmond and thereby strengthen his claim to the throne -- she does not appear at all! We have, thus, moved from Joan the Amazon-witch, to Margaret the "tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide" (3H6, I.iv.137), Elizabeth the "earnest advocate" (R3, I.iii.87), Anne, whose impotence culminates in her death, and finally to Elizabeth of York, the woman who consolidates her husband's power without intruding into his sphere. Here at last, in Elizabeth of York, is the patriarchy's ideal woman, she who "with as humble lowliness of mind/ ... is content to be at [its] command" (V.v.18-19).

In this context, it is noteworthy that while the lives of the principal male characters are traced to their deaths -- indeed no less than ten of them die on stage¹ -- the women, by contrast, recede quietly into the background. Joan may be considered the exception, since she is led off to execution in her last scene (*1H6*, V.iv.). But of the others, Eleanor and Margaret go into exile on the Isle of Man (*2H6*, II.iii.13) and in France (*3H6*, V.vii.37-41) respectively, Anne dies unceremoniously off-stage (*R3*, IV.iii.39), while Elizabeth and the Duchess of York simply disappear after their final appearance in Act IV Scene iv of *Richard III*. This state of affairs is of course dictated by the need for dramatic economy -- that is to say, by the fact that women are peripheral to patriarchal history. Once the parts they play in "fortune's pageant" -- or to be more accurate, "the patriarchy's pageant" -- are over, what happens to them is unimportant. Margaret, for example, has done her part in contributing to the destruction of the House of Lancaster (in the *Henry VI* plays) and in cursing the Yorkists (in *Richard III*): what she does on her return to France is hence irrelevant. Similarly, when the Duchess of York has lamented the lost princes of England and cursed Richard, the patriarchy (and the dramatist) have no further use for her.

In the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, Shakespeare presents women as not entirely powerless but, nonetheless, dependent upon men:

Follow I must; I cannot go before,
While Gloucester bears this base and humble mind.
Were I a man, a duke, and next of blood,
I would remove these tedious stumbling-blocks
And smooth my way upon their necks;

¹In order of their demise: Bedford (*1H6*, III.ii.), Talbot (IV.vii.), Gloucester (*2H6*, III.ii.), the Cardinal (III.iii.), York (*3H6*, II.iv.), Young Clifford (II.vi.), Warwick (V.ii.), Henry (V.vi.), Clarence (*R3*, I.iv.), and Richard (V.v.). A few others, due to the difficulties involved in staging beheadings, do not actually die on stage though they are seen on their way to their deaths, these include Suffolk (*2H6*, IV.i.) and Buckingham (*R3*, V.i.).

And being a woman, I will not be slack
To play my part in Fortune's pageant.

(2H6, I.ii.61-69)

Eleanor Cobham, the woman publicly shamed and exiled for her ambition, is not alone: her situation is shared by every woman in the tetralogy. Denying them any part in "Fortune's pageant" and punishing those who dare to find one for themselves, the patriarchy is not kind to women.

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