

THE ROLE OF WOMAN IN THE EARLY HISTORY PLAYS  
OF SHAKESPEARE

Virginia Bowker

A THESIS  
In  
The Department  
of  
English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts at  
Sir George Williams University  
Montreal, Canada

August, 1974.

## ABSTRACT

Virginia Bowker

### THE ROLE OF WOMAN IN THE EARLY HISTORY PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE

In the following essay, I will examine the symbolic and literal political role of the female characters of the three parts of Henry VI, Richard III, and King John, in order to demonstrate the prominent and important part which woman plays in the early historical dramas of Shakespeare.

In her physical fruition or sterility--as mother and wife--woman, in these plays, figures metaphorically and determines actually, the normality or abnormality of the realm of England whose health is governed by natural inheritance and the continuity of the line of kings. As the subject of royal succession is the main concern of these early historical dramas, the dramatic participation of woman in them is thus immediately (at least partially) defined by the symbolic structure and political plots of the plays. The Elizabethan philosophy and its concept of hierarchies also limit the possibilities for woman's individualization by arbitrarily placing her in the subservient or passive position in the relationships in which she participates, her adherence to or rejection of said position again indicating a norm or abnormality in the realm.

While describing this confining representative role of woman--a role which admittedly determines her prominence and importance by integrating her into the symbolic structure and political plots of the plays --I will show that the female characters are, in spite of this confinement,

5

Individualized. It is in their exhibition of qualities which may be called human that these characters (who are generally psychologically undeveloped) are distinguished from one another, and it is in this manner that they move their audience. It is therefore both as representatives and individuals that the female characters will be considered in the following assessment of the total dramatic portrayal of woman in the early history plays of Shakespeare.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
I. JOAN LA PUCELLE . . . . .	17
II. ELEANOR, DUCHESS OF GLOUCESTER . . . . .	32
III. MARGARET . . . . .	42
IV. ELIZABETH . . . . .	79
V. ANNE . . . . .	104
VI. MARGARET IN <u>RICHARD III.</u> . . . . .	111
VII. ELINOR . . . . .	121
VIII. BLANCH . . . . .	134
IX. CONSTANCE . . . . .	139
CONCLUSION . . . . .	153
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	157

## INTRODUCTION

The following paper will examine the role of woman in the early history plays of Shakespeare: in the three parts of Henry VI, Richard III, and King John. Whereas in the later historical dramas the appearance of the female characters is somewhat isolated and sporadic,<sup>1</sup> in these five early histories women play an integral and prominent part. Voluble and verbose, resigned and rebellious, their dramatic presence is undeniably emphatic, and often moving.

In the second act of Richard II, in his speech listing the glories of England, John of Gaunt refers to his country as "this nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings."<sup>2</sup> Although Richard II is not included in the following study, this particular image of England, finding a similar context in the earlier history plays, can hence be usefully applied to them as well. In Gaunt's prophetic lament the image indicates the normal, ordered, opulent state of England, which, in this play, is soon to be

---

<sup>1</sup>except in Henry VIII, in which the portrait of Katharine is somewhat developed as a personal or private tragedy.

<sup>2</sup>William Shakespeare, The Complete Works of Shakespeare, ed. Hardin Craig, The Tragedy of King Richard II (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1961), II.i.51., p. 653. All further quotes from the plays of Shakespeare in this paper are from this edition and will be noted in the text.

overtly interrupted by civil war engendered by the prevailing unnatural avarice--"the rash fierce [blaze of riot" (11.1.33.)--of the king himself. As such it provides a metaphor basic to these early plays whose main concern is the state of the realm of England, which is determined by the state of the throne of England--that is, the succession of kings.

In 1 Henry VI, the death of a good strong king, Henry V, creates a chaotic state in the realm upon which Shakespeare causes his characters to dwell: in the opening lines of the play Bedford invokes a change in the heavens from light to darkness, from relative calm to chaos, to provide a universal setting to parallel the black and unnatural situation of the realm. The heir to the throne--a child, a hazard as a ruler at best--is not mentioned with any optimism or specific reference to his succession as "king" (1.1.169.) until the end of the scene.<sup>3</sup> In this scene an image is used to define the state of England which may be judged the converse of that used by Gaunt:

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.

(1 Henry VI, 1.1.48-51.)

The nurse of Gaunt, associated with the fruitful womb, is England as mother, providing the nourishment of milk for the child, her people and her king; the "nourish"--the nurse<sup>4</sup>--of Bedford, has no milk, no nourishment left for her children; the babes suck<sup>3</sup> at mothers' eyes not their breasts, to receive the fruitless salt tears, not life-giving, but "death-mourning".

<sup>3</sup>The child is referred to first by Winchester in the negative context of the Bishop's slander of Gloucester and his attested ambitions.

<sup>4</sup>Craig, p. 212, note to line 50: "nourish, nurse; early spelling 'nourice'."

Thus figuring the natural and unnatural states of the realm of England, these images can be said to complement each other in their opposition and to give a defining framework to the role of woman in the early history plays. By analogy to the metaphoric sphere of the plays, the fertile woman, the nourishing mother, represents a norm; the sterile weeping woman, a diversion from that norm, an aural figure of mourning, of lamentation, bewailing the chaos around her, around England. As one or both of these two figures, woman will enact her symbolic role.

Woman functions in the literal world of these plays as well; a key figure in the drama of the succession of kings. This drama, the "main concern" of the history plays, may now be designated more specifically as the monarch's "right of rule", for such right is determined by inheritance; hence women--royal women--as breeders of royal princes, play a prominent political role in the world of these plays. The right of the heir to the throne is qualified by his legitimate or illegitimate birth; that is, the suggestion of the mother-queen's sexual unfaithfulness casts doubt on the right of the said heir.

Logically, the emphasis on the mother-role implies a similar stress on the role of woman as wife. The legal union of marriage serves as a treaty or liaison between states or opposing families within one state; the personal affections of the parties involved in the union are, or should be, subservient to a political ploy. To reinforce political security, women are bartered for peace and/or control.<sup>4</sup> For example,

4  
to conclude a definite peace with France, Gloucester, proposes to King Henry VI a marriage between Henry and a French nobleman's daughter:

. . . the sooner to effect  
And surer bind this knot of amity,  
The Earl of Armagnac, near knit to Charles,  
A man of great authority in France,  
Proffers his only daughter to your grace  
In marriage, with a large and sumptuous dowry.

(I Henry VI, V. i. 15-20.)

Henry's response to his uncle, if betraying a certain disinterest, still exemplifies the necessary subservience of passion to reason:

Marriage, uncle! alas my years are young!  
And fitter is my study and my books  
Than wanton dalliance with a paramour.  
I shall be content with any choice  
Tends to God's glory and my country's weal.

(I Henry VI, V. i. 21-27.)

This marriage, though perhaps less a matter of personal attachment between the parties involved, would have been politically intelligent and profitable, unlike the marriage of Henry and Margaret of Anjou, which actually takes place. This latter union as well as that of King Edward IV and Elizabeth Grey is based on the personal desire of sexual passion and is without concern for public or political welfare; both unions historically engender and dramatically signify a chaos in the realm.

The continuity of the line of kings, then, perpetuated by the ever-teeming womb of the faithful mother-queen, the rationally selected wife, is essential to the maintenance of an ordered realm.

It can thus be noted that the symbolic and literal-political roles of woman in these history plays are congruent; they are mutually



reinforcing: the wailing women of Richard III are barren and stripped of their natural roles because of the chaotic and unnatural activity in the realm; they are symbolic of that chaos, embodying the central image of the inversion or obliteration of order: the weeping childless mother, the husbandless wife, the weeping throneless queen.

2

Possibilities for the individualization of female characters and for their development as dramatic persons are severely limited by the metaphoric structure of the plays which casts woman in the specific symbolic and political role which I have attempted to describe above. For that matter, the portrayal of all characters--male and female--is curtailed by the very nature of these plays; that is, historical: though Shakespeare is interested primarily in men, their minds and hearts, says John Palmer, "In the history plays the spectator is interested in [that is, his interest is directed toward] the political activity of the characters rather than the psychological effect of the activities on themselves."<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, if critical interpretation adheres to the theory that Shakespeare, in writing these plays, was "fully conscious of the moral scheme working through what Hall termed 'the great disorder',"<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> John Palmer, Political Characters of Shakespeare (London: MacMillan and Company, 1948), pp. vi-vii.

<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey Bullough, Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, 7 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 3: 15.

and that Shakespeare (though not following the chronology of history in the order of the composition of his plays) "employed" that concept of history which attributes the internal and external strife of England to the working out of retribution for the unnatural and unlawful deposition of Richard II--if this is true, then the potentiality for character growth and expansion is again lessened. M. M. Reese describes the effect of this theory on the development of character:

After this crime [the deposition of Richard II] everything was in a sense foredoomed. France must be lost and England suffer civil war; while within this scheme the fate of individuals would be determined by the ups and downs of Fortune's wheel with the added implication that Fortune itself was God's agent in demanding the expiation of a crime . . . the suffering in these plays can [also] be traced to direct human action. Personal wickedness is a part of the penalty that God inflicts, and so the erring individual is at once an agent of God's purpose and a man aware of his own evil and capable of at any rate an illusion of choice. The plays present an ominous cycle of sin and retribution, with every crime brought terribly home to its author and its consequences made evident in misery to himself and to those he loves. It is an arrangement which makes effective characterization impossible, as all the characters are victims of their own unruly natures and also of the disasters to which the whole country is fated.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, a super-structure is imposed upon these plays, the delineation of character being determined externally, not by motive so much as by design. The theme necessitates the perpetuation of a chaotic state in the plays until expiation is effected. The role of woman as defined above encourages acceptance of this theory.

Stated in more general terms, the "sin-retribution cycle" is an expression of a philosophy of history, of medieval origin, which is very much a part of Elizabethan intellectual life. The "keystone" of this

---

<sup>7</sup>M. M. Reese, The Cease of Majesty (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1961), p. 166.

7

philosophy is the concept of divine providence as the governing force in a well-organized universe, each element of which has a specific function. The "doctrine of degree" is an inherent part of this world view which stipulates that each man keep to his allotted station in life.<sup>8</sup>

The position assigned to woman can be expressed only in relation to man--that is, as daughter, wife, mother; and the role of wife, of woman in general, occupies a subservient place in that relation. Rebellion against this "allotted station" is a negation of natural function, a rejection of her "divinely ordained"<sup>9</sup> position; and by the doctrine of correspondences,<sup>10</sup> such rebellion is an indication or initiation of an abnormal state. Thus David Bevington, assuming a domineering quality in the women of 1 Henry VI, can say: "the theme of female supremacy echoes the larger theme of discord throughout 1 Henry VI and the tetralogy."<sup>11</sup>

The basic Elizabethan philosophy which underlies the plays of the tetralogy and King John, also forces the definition of woman to be made with reference to the mother-wife role, making her again representative. Perhaps woman is not meant to be understood or interpreted as an individual at all; such is the conclusion at which Robert Fitch arrives about the female character in Shakespeare in general:

---

<sup>8</sup>Irving Ribner, The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare (London: Methuen and Company, 1965), p. 103.

<sup>9</sup>Robert B. Pierce, Shakespeare's History Plays--The Family and the State (Ohio State University Press, 1971), p. 58.

<sup>10</sup>*ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>11</sup>David Bevington, "The Domineering Female in 1 Henry VI," in Shakespeare Studies II, ed. J. Leeds-Barroll (University of Cincinnati, 1966), p. 51.

the relation to a member of the opposite sex whether for good or evil and in whatever pattern of behaviour it may be expressed is the essence of a woman.<sup>12</sup>

3

So stringently confined to their roles then, in the giant metaphor of the symbolic sphere of the plays, in the plots of their political world, and in the ranks of their underlying philosophy, do these women exhibit any degree of humanity? Or, are they merely figurative? Have they any peculiarities of personality, or are they largely interchangeable, alternating imperceptibly behind a mask of invective and a veil of tears?

Robert Turner explains that the characters of the Henry VI plays fall between the moral abstractions of the Interludes and the "rounded" figures of later plays: the personae of the three parts of Henry VI, he suggests, remain static because their motive or cause of action is their very nature, their behaviour is determined by the quality they represent; no development of character is possible since they act as their character -- as their role -- dictates. Their definitive roles, however, need not encompass all of their behaviour; unlike morality figures, they may exhibit qualities which do not reflect their roles, but nonetheless do not negate them. In this way they, the characters, are still not rounded, but are indeed humanized.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Robert E. Fitch, The Perspective of Value (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), p. 212.

<sup>13</sup>Robert Turner, "Characterization in Shakespeare's Early History Plays," ELH, vol. 31, no. 3. (September 1964), pp. 242-49.

It is thus, as humanized figures, that they, and the characters from all the plays to be considered, move us; It is thus that we respond to them. This audience reaction takes primarily the form of pity which is necessarily preceded by admiration. A character's innocence, the unfairness or injustice of her sorrowful nemesis, is partially decided by her exhibition of such qualities as dignity, honesty, and humility which evoke this admiration. The degree of pity warranted by a character is determined by the extent of her victimization, by the extent to which her fate is dictated by the dramatic and symbolic structure of the play. Thus a woman of virtue and honour, such as Elizabeth, engenders maximal audience sympathy in her total victimization, whereas her predecessor, Margaret, although pitied in the loss of her lover Suffolk, does not move her audience in the event of her banishment because of a condemnable action or crime which denies her any pity and rightly allows the predominance of her symbolic role. If a character is indeed a victim of herself, of her own action, it is only in her recognition of her folly--as in the case of Eleanor--or in the advent of her true helplessness--as in the case of Constance--that she finally warrants sympathy. It is in the varying degrees of their humanity that the characters are distinguished; It is thus that they are individualized.

This "personalization" and the integration of the women into the several worlds or levels of their respective dramas inhibit discussion of characters by role--as wife, mother, as fertile or barren--and encourages critical analysis to remain within the confines of each individual play, or at least within the context of each reign. The very nature of the art as drama demands this.

The three Henry VI plays invite grouping as one, not simply because of their titular sameness, but because of the fact that their events don't seem to reach any satisfactory dramatic conclusion until the last scene of part three in which, in spite of the ominous presence of the ambitious Gloucester, the vignette of the joyful family with its imagery of growth and fruition embodied in the infant heir, gives at least a semblance of a reinstatement of order, and thus a fully completed action.

Arthur Sprague notes that whether or not one submits unreservedly to the tetralogical interpretation of the plays, their nature is such that one longs to witness a production in which they are performed in immediate succession; he includes Richard III in this, the "winter of our discontent" speech being the logical link between that play and the last part of Henry VI, most effectively used as such in Douglas Seale's production of these two last plays.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Arthur Sprague, Shakespeare's Histories: Plays for the Stage (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1966), pp. 140-41.

Richard III, however, has not the same anticipatory connection with its predecessor as parts three and two of the Henry VI plays have with theirs. The defeat of the French and the prospective royal marriage, are inadequate as completion of 1 Henry VI. The whole curious basis of the marriage to be--the sudden change in choice of bride, the emphasis on passion and enchantment--and the implied control of the wooer--emmissary Suffolk to whom Henry resigns the stage, bring the focus of attention on Margaret, and bring not the conclusion which would have been effected by the arrival of Armagnac's daughter. Indeed the scene of the introduction of Margaret at the end of this play is sometimes said to have been added specifically to provide a connective to part two.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, at the end of part two, there is no decisive closing event: the king and queen, members of the House of Lancaster, are in flight and the last lines of Warwick ensure the Yorkist pursuit of them. Part three then begins, as if a new act, in London at the end of said pursuit; without reference to circumstance or situation, Warwick begins, "I wonder how the king escaped our hands," an absolutely clear continuation of part two.

At the conclusion of part three, however, not only is a superficial state of order attained, but the deaths of Henry and his son have effected the total isolation of the banished Margaret; her lover, her husband, and her son have been executed, her throne has been "usurped". Forced to

---

<sup>15</sup>Thomas H. McNeal, "Margaret of Anjou: Romantic Princess and Troubled Queen," Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 9, no. 1. (Winter 1958), pp. 1-2. Other reasons for her introduction at this point will be noted later.

resign her role to Elizabeth--young wife, young mother, young queen-- Margaret stands alone as the stripped and barren figure of lamentation, ready to bewail the injustice and disorder of the realm of England in a new form and at a new dramatic level in Richard III. This alteration in her dramatic role marks one distinction between Richard III and 3 Henry VI (which are nonetheless connected by the presence of Margaret and other characters who appear in both plays), and indicates her important influence on the nature of the plays in which she participates.

The remaining two histories can be dealt with singly as individual plays. In Richard III the characters are strongly symbolic. Retribution will be concluded in this play; the height (or depth) of chaos must be reached, a total unnaturalness effected.

Shakespeare has imagined for us an evil nature rising out of a past of historical turbulence attaining a depth of moral degeneracy in which villainy is accepted as the ideal. Such ideal villainy is projected into a universe which in this one drama is presented as a complex providential order every element of which is some varied phase of retribution.<sup>16</sup>

Such a system necessitates the total disintegration of woman's identity through the negation, by destruction, of her defining relationships, her natural function. The play itself moves from a superficial norm described bitterly by Gloucester in the play's opening lines--

---

<sup>16</sup>Richard G. Moulton, The Moral System of Shakespeare (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1903), p. 43.



Now is the winter of our discontent  
 Made glorious summer by this sun of York;  
 And all the clouds that lour'd upon our house  
 In the deep bosom of the ocean buried.  
 Now are our brows bound with victorious wreaths;  
 Our bruised arms hung up for monuments;  
 Our stern alarums changed to merry meetings;  
 Our dreadful marches to delightful measures.

(Richard III, 1.1.1-8.)

--from this natural fruitfulness to the abnormal sterility represented by the salt tears; and (by act four, scene four), "none but women [are] left to wall the dead." As queen, Elizabeth is most representative of her country and the one most victimized by the destructive force of England's existing chaotic trauma. We accept Elizabeth's gradual isolation but do not witness the process with the satisfaction of Queen Margaret; Elizabeth's portrait is too human not to engender our sympathy. Like Margaret, whose reign she succeeds, Elizabeth is introduced in a wooing scene near the end of a play preceding the one in which she will participate most actively; like Margaret's, her marriage is based on the unreasonable and hence unnatural choice of a king; and her marriage, like Margaret because it is a weak political alliance, breeds dissension among the nobles at court. In spite of these similarities, the characters are definitely different, and exploration of this distinction will play an important part in the analysis of the characters of Richard III and the study of the development of Margaret.

The plot of King John is historically detached from that of the tetralogy which precedes it, but the play similarly represents a reign characterized by unnaturalness or chaos:

King John, like its source, is concerned with the right of succession to a throne, the right of a people to deprive a ruler of his crown, the right of subjects to rebel and the right of a king to be answerable for his sins to God alone.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, the dissension and disorder in the play are described in terms of the womb:

And you degenerate, you ingrate revolts,  
You bloody Nereoes, ripping up the womb  
Of your dear mother England, blush for shame.

(spoken by the bastard, V.ii.151-53.)

Again woman embodies the disorder in the realm, the image of the mother being basic to the play. Though a figurative aura is thus bestowed on the two mothers in King John, they are nonetheless portrayed most distinctly and, importantly, are presented more as literal than as symbolic characters; this particular emphasis distinguishes the women of this play from the female characters of the tetralogy.

Though Elinor and Constance are brought into direct dramatic conflict over the subject of the right to the throne, the prime significance of their verbal battle in the play as a whole is not metaphoric but literal: the argument demonstrates a consistency in the self-presentation of Elinor and an alteration in that of Constance which intimates the latter's eventual madness. As the play progresses, Constance becomes increasingly self-preoccupied and the actual subject over which the dispute arose is thus gradually obscured. Constance retreats into a world of her own creation, divorced from reality, a victim not so much of the

---

<sup>17</sup>Ribner, p. 20.

unnatural realm as of herself. Still, Constance, according to Reese, finds a notable representative place among the women of Shakespeare's canon:

She is the last, and significantly the last, of a long and vociferous sequence of women, who, in the early histories, have been the mouthpiece of conscience. In them all the countless victims have found a voice, for they have always spoken for more than personal suffering. Their own part in the action has seldom been guiltless, but when bereft of husbands and sons, they cry out against the unnatural violence of treachery and war; they protest for all humanity. 18

Though Reese's statement is useful as a summary comment on the role of all the women in the early history plays, his specific assessment of Constance requires some qualification because of the very nature of King John as a play of a less clearly defined metaphoric structure; it is only in the context of the early history plays as a group that Constance can be said to play such a symbolic role, to occupy such a symbolic position.

5

The women of these histories, then--Joan, Eleanor Duchess of Gloucester, Margaret, Elizabeth, the Duchess of York, Lady Anne, Queen Ellnor, Blanch, and Constance--will be dealt with in the context of their respective plays; and the plays will be studied in the order of their composition. The three parts of Henry VI will be combined in this analysis, and division between the parts will be interpreted according to the dictates

---

<sup>18</sup> Reese, pp. 283-84.

of character portrayal. (Acknowledgement of the actual "theatrical" divisions will, of course, be made.)

Each chapter in the essay will be devoted to one character, except in the case of the chapter on Elizabeth which will include discussion of the role of the Duchess of York. Because of her major importance and her special dramatic role in Richard III, Margaret will be given two chapters, the first concerning her development in the Henry VI plays, the second, her distinctive role in Richard III.

Characters will be interpreted and judged in the light of their adherence to the definition of the role of woman described above. As the criticism progresses, comparison of characters will be made, hopefully to give a coherence to that definition, and also to explore its variations. Finally, and most importantly, every attempt will be made to demonstrate an individualizing humanity in these female characters, and to judge the effectiveness of their total dramatic portrayals.

The paper will begin by considering the first woman encountered in these plays, that strange aberation of femaleness and humanity about whom nothing has yet been said: Joan La Pucelle.

## I. JOAN LA PUCELLE

In his "ungentle" treatment of Joan La Pucelle in Henry VI Shakespeare follows a tradition begun by Edward Hall whose negative portrait of her, says Geoffrey Bullough, made a legend not of the maid's virtue but of her depravity.<sup>19</sup> The hostility with which the dramatist evidently regards the young French woman, contrasted with his sensitive interpretation of the experiences of other female characters (for example Katharine of Aragon); causes Beverley Warner to doubt the ability of his particular genius to conceive such a creature as the Joan of Henry VI at all; Warner concludes that if indeed this Joan is his creation, Shakespeare must have "read his chronicles too closely."<sup>20</sup>

Undenably Shakespeare derives an attitude of prejudice from the Tudor chroniclers; the translation of this attitude into dramatic incident in Henry VI, however, often results in fictional scenic presentation. Chronology of events is often altered and historical

---

<sup>19</sup>Bullough, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup>Beverley Warner, English History in Shakespeare's Plays (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1899), p. 175.

and fanciful material is mingled at the dictate of the dramatist, notes Robert Law in his comparative exploration of "The Chronicles and the Three Parts of Henry VI".<sup>21</sup> Important events, such as the victory of Joan over Charles in personal combat (I.ii.), the disguised French entry into Rouen (III.ii.), the presence of Joan to "gloat" over the corpse of Talbot (IV.vii.), York's capture of Joan (V.iii.), and the details of her trial (V.iv.) find no basis in the historic records of the chronicles of Hall and Hollinshed.<sup>22</sup> The intensity of Joan's dramatic portrait is thus determined by the dramatist himself.

As a dominant or domineering woman Joan is allied with several of the women in these plays in exemplifying the inversion of the male-female relation symptomatic of the general disorder.<sup>23</sup> She is distinguished from these women, however, in the execution of that dominance which she exerts not from the position of wife, mother, or even daughter, but from outside the metaphoric framework of these history plays: as a strumpet. External to the social hierarchy and, in her very nature evil, she is not merely a representative of disorder, but a cause of that chaos. Her evil is not only physical, however; she is perverted in both body and spirit. She is a witch as well as a whore and, in Tillyard's view, is the scourge of God, who effects His punishment indirectly through the power of the

---

<sup>21</sup> Robert Adger Law, "The Chronicle and the Three Parts of Henry VI." Texas Studies in English, vol. 38 (1954), p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> ibid., pp. 16-18.

<sup>23</sup> David Bevington (quoted above, p. 7) elaborates on this sexual theme in Henry VI with explanation of the appropriateness of certain mythological and biblical allusions; his views will later be considered.

devil.<sup>24</sup>

2

Joan herself declares that she is "assign'd . . . to be the English scourge" (1 Henry VI, I.ii.129.), but attributes her strength specifically to the aid of the Virgin. The firm conviction of Joan's proud entry will serve as emphatic, ironic contrast to the utter baseness of her true patron and her true nature; the eventual overt demonstration of this baseness or evil (V.iii.) is portended throughout in the suggestive language of the play<sup>25</sup> and in the vicious epithets and accusations made by the English warriors.<sup>26</sup> Of her first appearance Warner says:

In her [Joan's] introduction to Charles of France she is made to assume an arrogant and boastful tone, even as regards her personal appearance, totally at variance with the modest faith of one who believed herself inspired by God to do her country service.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed Joan, recognizing the substitution of Reigner for Charles as a means to test her professed power of prophesy, immediately adopts an assured and condescending tone inappropriate for address to her social superiors, and particularly to her monarch. This attitude rightly undercuts her ensuing protestation of lowly status, an origin which she

<sup>24</sup>E. M. W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays (London: Chatto & Windus, 1956), p. 163.

<sup>25</sup>see for example, the latter part of this scene; II.i.49.; I,III.107.

<sup>26</sup>see for example, III.ii: witch, sorceress, foul fiend; I.v. devil or devil's dam, witch.

<sup>27</sup>Warner, p. 176.

will later deny in an echo of this first speech delivered just before she is sentenced to be burned at the stake. The latter exclamation (V.iv.) of the virtue and purity of her mission is no mere expression of irony, but an absolute mockery of Joan La Pucelle, an intensification of the initial subtle suggestion of the hollowness of her claims.

Having commanded the private audience of Charles, Joan describes her situation to him with extensive reference to herself and but vague mention of her purported task, "[to] free [her] country from calamity." (I.ii.81.) She concludes her explanation in offering the following proposition which, because of this self-emphasis, and because of her position on the stage--separated with Charles from the others--invites interpretation beyond the literal: "thou shalt be fortunate, / If thou receive me for thy warlike mate." (91-2) The battleground she proposes is not the fields of France. David Bevington comments:

In virtually every instance [of double entendre] the point is that sexual war is replacing military war. When Joan proposes to the Dauphin that she become his warlike mate she suggests . . . sexual companionship.<sup>28</sup>

The insinuation of sexual liaison and Joan's success--and the symbolic significance of that success--in the ensuing combat are most notable. The nature of their opposition is specifically sexual:

Charles. Then come, o' God's name; I fear no woman.  
Pucelle. And while I live I'll ne'er fly from a man.

(102-3)

Her victory as a woman effects a distortion of the social hierarchy

---

<sup>28</sup>Bevington, p. 53.



and reflects the unnaturalness of the world of the play. This distortion is projected to the political plane not only by implication, but by the actual verbal submission of Charles as sovereign to Joan as subject:

Excellent Pucelle, if thy name be so,  
Let me thy servant, not thy sovereign be:  
'Tis the French Dauphin sueth to thee thus.

(110-12)

Meantime, look gracious on thy prostrate thrall.

(117)

Her usurpation of established authority is still not fully effected however; it is to be felt at yet another level. Charles exalts Joan to the realm of the Gods:

Bright star of Venus, fall'n down on the earth,  
How may I reverently worship thee enough?

(144-45)

For his Christian God Charles substitutes Joan as the Goddess Venus whose significance is definitive of the role of the Maid.

. . . the allusion to Venus is laden with significant diabolical meaning in a pun familiar to the Renaissance: "Bright star of Venus fall'n down on the earth." In this Joan is both the goddess of love and the morning (or evening) star, bright Lucifer, whose description in Isaiah, xlv, 12, was taken to mean the fall of Satan after his disobedience: "How art thou fallen from heaven. O Lucifer, son of the morning!"<sup>29</sup>

She is thus the antithesis of "holy maid" (51) (as she is initially described by the bastard) and not opposed to the insinuating appeals of Charles (107-12) to which she responds:

---

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

I must not yield to any rites of love,  
 For my profession's sacred from above:  
 When I have chased all thy foes from hence,  
 Then will I think upon a recompence.

(113-16)

And, in spite of her professed affinity to and dependence on "Christ's mother" (105), she is rather the shrewd temptress (an expression suggested by Alencon, 123) bewitching Charles by physical seduction<sup>30</sup> and spiritual enchantment.<sup>31</sup>

Joan, replacing Charles as the ruler of France becomes the direct antagonist of England, the evil with which that country must contend. Her presence as such is reinforced by the words of the Duke of Exeter, who, despairing over the death of Henry V in the first scene of the play, questions the cause of the death of that great leader:

... shall we think the subtle-witted French  
 Conjurers and sorcerers, that afraid of him  
 By magic verses have contrived this end?

(1.1.25-27.)

It should be noted that the negotiation of peace with France (however inconclusive) hastened at the petition of the Pope, the Emperor and the Earl of Armagnac (V.i.), coincides with the condemnation of such a conjurer or sorcerer, whose exit is accompanied by the following:

<sup>30</sup> his response to which is indicated in the impassioned lines: "Impatiently I burn with thy desire; / My heart and hands thou hast at once subdued." (108-9)

<sup>31</sup> as indicated in his response of "astonishment" to her words (93) and in his "religious conversion."

Break thou in pieces and consume to ashes,  
Thou foul accursed minister of hell!

(V. iv. 92-93.)

This is the play's final judgment on Joan and the representation of La Pucelle which the play endeavors to convey.

3

It is appropriate that Talbot, who epitomizes English valour and honour, regards Joan La Pucelle with extreme disgust and disdain; his strong condemnation of her is voiced when she next appears (I.v.), and is juxtaposed in effective contrast to the extreme positive view, the virtual glorification of Joan by the French. (vi.) Talbot's epithets begin at the end of act one, scene four, in the play on "Pucelle" and "puzzel<sup>ed</sup>, meaning shut, and continue in scene five: "devil or devil's dam", "witch", "strumpet" and again "witch". He acknowledges the operation of hell through Joan, wondering at heaven's allowing evil to flourish to such an extent. (9)

Her brief skirmish with Talbot here, like her defeat of Charles, is indicative of an abnormality in the universe causing and caused by hell's predominance. There is no nobility in the valour of Joan for she "wins" not by innate ability but by external powers; she shows no dignity in this brief combat: she does not respect her renowned opponent but taunts him in a sarcastic tone which will be seen to be typical of her as the play progresses.

The dignity of Talbot, however, is exemplified in an encounter of

similar purpose between that warrior and another woman, the Countess of Auvergne. (II.iii.) The Countess attempts to trap Talbot in her castle; his image or "shadow" is already "thrall" to her; she wishes to capture his "substance" or person. (The use of "thrall" here evokes a parallel between Joan's domination of the Dauphin, her "prostrate thrall", and the attempted subjugation of Talbot by the Countess.) The Countess ridicules the stature and appearance of Talbot much as Joan mocked his helplessness. Talbot maintains composure however, and with a clever play on the Countess' word "substance" asserts himself through humility in acknowledging his attending troops as the substance--the body--of his power. A readjustment of roles is effected, and an apology and a new reverence for Talbot is expressed by the Countess; also, and importantly, a forgiveness and an equal respect for that woman is offered by Talbot who is now in the dominant position. The scene, then, far from being extraneous, as is sometimes assumed, is pertinent in its necessary demonstration of a natural human relationship based on the recognition of differences and the respect of honour and gentility for which Joan holds no awe.

Joan's taunting of the dying Bedford at Rouen (III.ii.5-51.) exemplifies this lack of respect; she has no veneration for his valour or his age, no sympathy for his infirmity. The context of this particular affront is, in fact, a ridicule of and insult to the whole English army, represented in the ignoble capture of Rouen effected by the sly infiltration of Joan and several soldiers, who, incognito, entered the gates of the city and determined for the Dauphin the safest entry. With

this victory Joan taunts the English:

Good morrow, gallants! want ye corn for bread?  
I think the Duke of Burgundy will fast  
Before he'll buy again at such a rate:  
'Twas full of danel; do you like the taste?

(41-44)

The costume of the spies had, of course, been that of corn sellers, and Rouen's purchase of corn the purchase in this case of the French entry.

She continues in mocking sarcasm to an exit with the following verbal

"coup": ". . . we came but to tell you/That we are here." (73-74) Talbot

encourages the French to come forth and fight for the city in an honest manner as soldiers should. When they decline, he asserts the lack of honour which they share with Joan: they "dare not take up arms like gentlemen" (70) and conclude a noble victory.

Joan is definitely not interested in honourable battle, but the young Talbot, like his father, is. John (encountering her in a conflict near Bordeaux) dismisses Joan as "unworthy fight", rejecting a combat with her seductive powers for a more noble and dangerous clash of swords. She is apparently not angered at his insult for she relays the encounter (IV.vii.) in a calm tone which seems to betray a disbelief or total lack of comprehension of the values the boy expresses.

It is left to Burgundy and Charles to acknowledge the military capability of the English: Charles muses, "had York and Somerset brought rescue in,/We should have had a bloody day of this" (33-34); Burgundy comments, "[Young Talbot] would have made a noble knight." (44) When the Bastard suggests that the bodies be destroyed, Charles cries, "O, no,

forbear! for that which we have fled/During the life, let us not wrong  
it dead." (49-50) To Joan, however, the two Talbots are just bodies;  
she says, in admittedly right criticism of Lucy's verbosity, "him that  
thou magnifiest with all these titles/Stinking and flyblown lies here  
at our feet" (75-76); and then near the end of the scene, "For God's  
sake, let him have 'em [the bodies]; to keep them here,/They would but  
stink, and putrefy the air." (89-90) Again she acknowledges no honour,  
and further, expresses no compassion for the deaths which were so movingly  
rendered for the audience but moments earlier. Joan has no respect for  
humanity, nor for the bonds of that humanity.

"The radically evil person," says Robert Fitch, "is one who  
rejects the whole web of human relationships, pours contempt on honour  
and love and duty, and stands as the solitary egoist."<sup>32</sup> Such is Joan  
of Arc. Her initial statement of identity is given in terms of the  
family: "I am by birth a shepherd's daughter" (I.ii.72.); it is this  
exact statement, however, which she will refute at the point of her  
demise. (V.iv.) This denial of parentage is taken by York to be accurate  
indication of her "wicked and vile" life (V.iv.16.), a life characterized  
by the physical and spiritual obscenity, revealed dramatically to the  
audience in act five, scene three, in the conjuration of Joan's devilish  
fiends.

---

<sup>32</sup>Fitch, p. 142.

In her attempt to secure their aid, she confesses her familiarity with these demons--"This speedy and quick appearance argues proof/Of your accustom'd diligence to me" (8-9); that which she has done for them and that which she is willing to do--"Where I was wont to feed you with my blood,/I'll lop a member off and give it to you/In earnest of a further benefit" (13-15); her devotion to the powers of evil is complete: "Cannot my body, nor blood nor blood-sacrifice/Entreat you, to your wanted furtherance?/Then take my soul, my body, soul and all." (20-22) But Joan can no longer solicit the powers of hell; and, lacking this supernatural support, she is powerless and hence captured.

Possession of these powers has endowed her with a confidence and virtual egoism evident in the emphasis (previously noted, pp. 19-20) which she places on her role from the beginning--

Assign'd am I to be the English scourge,  
 This night the siege assuredly I'll raise:  
 Expect Saint Martin's summer, halcyon days,  
 Since I have entered into these wars.  
 Glory is like a circle in the water,  
 Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself  
 Till by broad spreading it disperse to nought.  
 With Henry's death the English circle ends;  
 Dispersed are the glories it included.  
 Now am I like that proud insulting ship  
 Which Caesar and his fortune bare at once.

(I.ii.129-30.)

--and the attitude of superiority which she conveys for example, in the Rouen episode.

Joan's estimation of her French colleagues is little better than her regard for her English foe. She exploits patriotism in her conversion of Burgundy, at the same time showing, in her concluding aside--to the delight of an English audience--the very superficiality of that quality in her

fellow countrymen: "Done like a Frenchman: turn, and turn again! (III.III. 85.) It is with equal facility that she dismisses Charles when York suggests the Dauphin's importance to her: "A plaguing mischief light on Charles and thee!//And may you both be suddenly surprised/By bloody hands in sleeping on your beds!" (V.III.39-41.) She makes no distinction in their nationalities whatsoever.

From the time of their first encounter, a sexual relation between Charles and Joan is understood; it is here that his adoration of her begins. His exaltation of her effects not only an inversion of roles, but parallels the relationship which Joan holds with the devil through the fiends. She offers her body for the endowment of the power of evil; Charles gives himself to Joan for his pleasure and for the advantage of the operation of her evil force for the benefit of France.

The affair as such is not a human relationship. Her response to his veneration and to his passion is virtually non-existent, or at least unseen. To his initial desire she implies her eventual reciprocation (I.II.115-16.), but only once does she respond to him on any kind of human level: of a most indignant Charles who is angered by an English surprise attack, she asks, "wherefore is Charles impatient with his friend?" (II.I.54., Italics mine) The source of negligence engendering the attack is disputed, and Charles, in contrast to the concise assertions of his men, offers the vaguest and least convincing explanation of his "innocence". His actual "occupation" is implicit: he was with Joan. Burgundy's colourful description of their flight seems to offer conclusive evidence:



[1] Am sure I scared the Dauphin and his trull,  
 When arm in arm they both came swiftly running,  
 Like to a pair of turtle-doves  
 That could not live asunder day and night.

(II.ii.28-31.)

Only in this brief awkward incident are the two seen to have any kind of human contact. Their relationship lacks totally that mutual human passion or love which characterizes and ennobles the association of Margaret and Suffolk in 2 Henry VI.

Until the departure of her fiends Joan is in control; she exercises her powers through the employment of words which she uses to enchant and manipulate both Charles and Burgundy. The captivation of the latter, unlike that of Charles, is totally mental or spiritual; in this instance her intent is overtly stated:

. . . thus doth Joan devise:  
 By fair persuasions mix'd with sugar'd words  
 We will entice the Duke of Burgundy  
 To leave the Talbot and to follow us.

(III.III.17-20.)

This technique coupled with physical attraction brought about the astonishment of Charles; the bewitching of Burgundy is an open demonstration of the method used.

5

Joan's operation as God's scourge is terminated with the desertion of the fiends, and her capture by York. Her last appearance might be called an epilogue of mockery; void of power, her protestations are no longer considered, by audience or characters, expressions of ironic

double-entendre, but rather, ridiculous pretensions to a virtue which is non-existent. Her denial of her father affirms her abnormality and wickedness. Her two claims--"I never had to do with wicked spirits" (V.iv.42.), and "Joan of Arc hath been/A Virgin from her tender Infancy, /Chaste and immaculate In very thought" (49-51)--are blatant lies which, because of the knowledge about Joan that the play has just offered (V.iii.), are at once laughable and condemnable.

Joan's final attempt to secure her reprieve is a claim of pregnancy. The rigour with which she has just attested her virginity while drastically undercutting this later assertion, evokes blasphemous comparison with the Virgin birth. The response of Warwick and York to this announcement takes the form of derisive humour, at once ridiculing her self-contradiction and acknowledging the analogy:

York. Now Heaven forfend! the holy maid with child!  
Warwick. The greatest miracle that e'er ye wrought.

(65-66)

Joan, endeavoring to obtain the approval of her captors, proposes several possible fathers, thus sustaining the "outrageous travesty"<sup>33</sup> not only by denying immaculate conception but by implying, by analogy, the promiscuity of the Virgin.

The very "word" which was the instrument of Joan's power, now, the sanction of God withdrawn, causes her final conviction:

---

<sup>33</sup>Bevington, p. 52.

Strumpet, thy words condemn thy brat and thee:  
Use no entreaty, for it is in vain.

(83-84)

Thus Joan, an aberration of femaleness and humanity, is sentenced as a whore and as a "foul accursed minister of hell." (92)

Though Margaret of Anjou possesses powers of astonishment similar to those of Joan, this affinity with the witch does not imply the sameness of that queen and Joan, nor necessarily the direct substitution of the former for the latter in the fulfillment of an identical role. Margaret is a woman; Joan is a witch. Margaret exerts her dominance primarily from her position as wife, mother, and queen; Joan exercises her power as a strumpet, the womanly expression of her essential depravity, and of course as a sorceress. She is thus estranged from that humanity, that society, in which she enforces her evil.

## II. ELEANOR, DUCHESS OF GLOUCESTER

In the first part of Henry VI the effects of internal dissension affected but were subservient to the working out of a conflict or disorder external to the realm, at war with the extraordinary Joan. In 2 Henry VI, however, the focus of attention is placed on the operation and effect of civil dissension within the confines of the isles of Britain. Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester, does not participate in the action of 1 Henry VI. She is, however, mentioned at the beginning of that play by a caustic Winchester who defines her as "proud": (1.1.39.) This uncommon pride in her person and station is expressed as an "Inordinate"<sup>34</sup> ambition in 2 Henry VI.

Eleanor is not in a position superior to her husband as is Queen Margaret to the king; that is, an inversion of roles, is not primarily that which makes the Duchess exemplary of the disorder in the realm. It is rather, more the inversion of values within herself, this dominance of vice over virtue, of the passion of

---

<sup>34</sup>Craig; 1 Henry VI, 1.1. footnote to line 39.

ambition over her reason, which is the symptomatic abnormality. A rejection of her allotted position in the social order is implicit in her desire for advancement, which advancement she endeavors to hasten with a knowledge of the future course of political events contained in the prophetic vision of evil fiends.

Eleanor's association with evil, unlike Joan's, is indirect; she engages a witch and a conjurer to intervene for her, a practice "not out of keeping with her age."<sup>35</sup> It is the interception of the conjuration, the "exorcizing" (1.111.4.) which takes place, that brings about the downfall of both Eleanor and her innocent husband.

In general when a Shakespearean woman who is close to the head of state or a great authority in the state is ambitious for herself alone, either she is instrumental in bringing about the ruin of those who are closest to her or she exhibits traits which the most obviously "good" Shakespearean characters do not have.<sup>36</sup>

Actually, it is the enemies of Gloucester, who, capitalizing on the intensity of his wife's desire for power, inspire Eleanor's recourse to witchcraft:

They [the Cardinal and Suffolk], knowing Dame Eleanor's aspiring  
 honour,  
 Have hired me [Hume] to undermine the Duchess  
 And buz these conjurations in her brain.

(1.11.97-99)

Whether or not she would have engaged in such an affair without outside suggestion is left to our supposition. At any rate, the evil "consultation"

---

<sup>35</sup> Warner, p. 188.

<sup>36</sup> Betty Bandel, "Shakespeare's Treatment of the Social Position of Women" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1951), p. 190.

serves to translate her own condemnable thoughts into a tangible, condemnable action. The fate of Eleanor is hence justified; the form of that fate, however--her penance--is still to an extent pitiable.

2

Without inferring her submission to an additional vice, it is not unfair to say that Eleanor's longing for the crown is "avaricious". The extent of the Duchess's ambition is such that she becomes the embodiment of that quality; she thus conforms to Turner's assessment of the characters of the Henry VI plays. (See above, p. 8.)

Unlike Joan, Eleanor has not even a pretension of noble purpose; she wants the splendour, wealth and power of majesty for herself at any cost:

Were I a man, a duke, and next of blood, [like Gloucester],  
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.

(1.1.63-67.)

A more emphatic statement of intent could not be made. In her very first speech Eleanor demonstrates immediately a preoccupation with the acquisition of the throne. Questioning the cause of her husband's depression, she gives symbolic interpretation of the very direction of his downcast glance, asserting its lack of accord with her proper aspirations. Given the possibility that he focuses on the glorious mental image of the crown, she then translates his contemplative mood into a

symbolic act in an elaborate almost metaphysical metaphor which, in its vivid graphic description, sees her physically reaching for the treasured diadem:

Put forth thy hand, reach at the glorious gold.  
 What, is't too short? I'll lengthen it with mine;  
 And, having both together heaved it up,  
 We'll both together lift our heads to heaven,  
 And never more abase our sight so low  
 As to vouchsafe one glance unto the ground.

(11-16)

Eleanor's positive interpretation of Gloucester's macabre dream (32-34), the briefness with which she dismisses it in hastening to relate her own, and the eagerness--the relish--with which she again most graphically indicates the direction of her desires, all serve to demonstrate the degree to which the "canker" ambition has infected her mind usurping the position of all other thoughts and desires, and thus dominating her reason.

In the very next scene Queen Margaret, in bemoaning her own (and the king's) practical lack of power, relates an incident which displays the arrogant pride of Eleanor in complete accord with the exhibition which the Duchess has made of herself in scene two. In spite of the queen's previous display of shrewish haughtiness in her dealing with the petitioners in this same scene (11), the correctness of her insight into the political situation of the realm which she has described with incisive fluency, encourages the assumption of an accuracy in the following account which she gives of Eleanor:

She sweeps it through the court with troops of ladies,  
 More like an empress than Duke Humphrey's wife;  
 Strangers in court do take her for the queen:  
 She bears a duke's revenues on her back,  
 And in her heart she scorns our poverty:  
 Shall I not live to be avenged on her?  
 Contemptuous base-born callet as she is,  
 She vaunted 'mongst her minions 'lother day,  
 The very train of her worst wearing gown  
 Was better worth than all my father's lands:  
 Till Suffolk gave two dukedoms for his daughter.

(I.iii.80-90.)

This is Eleanor playing queen, that part in the pageant of Fortune which she most desires. The significance of the "outer trappings", the wealth and opulence of majesty is evidently great to her; it perhaps defines that role for her. The extravagance of her apparel, mentioned here, is referred to again later in this scene by Somerset, in the context of an unwarranted criticism of Gloucester: "Thy sumptuous buildings and thy wife's attire/Have cost a mass of public treasure." (133-134) Eleanor's strong association of external adornment--be it ladies-in-waiting or gowns--with majesty is initially emphasized in her preoccupation with the physical symbol of royal authority, the "glorious" diadem; this preoccupation governs the vivid concreteness of her images. It is conversely the inconsequentiality of this adornment bereft of honour which is finally driven home to Eleanor as she departs in exile from England.



It is the figure of Gloucester which represents that "honour" which Fitch says is the most inclusive term for the masculine virtues and is hence most difficult to define.<sup>37</sup> The connotation of honour derived from the portrayal of Gloucester is applicable to both men and women; it is characterized by an humility in adherence to one's allotted place in society and a respect for the whole order of that society. The military expression of honour is of course valour, but valour, as seen in the case of Talbot, accompanied by an equal "adherence" and "respect". The term can further be qualified by "magnanimity",<sup>38</sup> a generosity in judgment and in the exercise of authority that is a practical expression of this elusive honour in political as distinct from military activity.

It is in Gloucester, as a representative of this honour, that Eleanor, as the epitome of ambition, finds her antithesis. The Duke and Duchess are contrasted not only in these ideals, but in both mood and temperament, when they are first seen together. Gloucester is depressed, sad, whereas Eleanor is full of joy in the contemplation of her aspirations; Gloucester has a gentleness, a mildness of manner, a restraint in accord with the authority of his reason, whereas his wife exudes an excessive enthusiasm which demonstrates the power that ambition and passion exercise over her mind.

---

<sup>37</sup>Fitch, p. 204.

<sup>38</sup>ibid.

This distinction of temper is again demonstrated in act one, scene three, in the public "calling down" of Gloucester: the Duke, incensed by the barrage of false accusation directed at him, exits to "walk . . . once about the quadrangle" (I.iii.156.) to contain his anger and to regain his composure. The box on the ear which Margaret gives Eleanor "by mistake" similarly incenses the Duchess who, however, cannot contain her choler which she expresses in admittedly just indignation.

It is the power of Eleanor's presence and her exemplary function which give her an importance countering the brevity of her stage appearance. Furthermore, she functions as a tool in the plot to disgrace or undermine the reputation of her husband, hence hastening his downfall. She figures in two more scenes before that of her penance, and although they concern her directly--in depicting the exorcising and the sentencing --her actual participation in them is virtually negligible, though her response to the king's judgment, "welcome is banishment; welcome were my death" (II.iii.14.), portends her final resignation.

The penance which Eleanor is compelled to endure is most appropriate: she is forced to discard the "defining" adornments of majesty and to walk the streets barefoot, clad only in a simple white sheet, to be ridiculed by the subjects who formerly regarded her with esteem; she is literally stripped of that which she values. She enters thus, a ghostly figure, bereft of her much loved splendour, carrying a

taper in her hand. Her stark appearance engenders the audience's pity as did the soft and loving lines spoken by the weeping Gloucester preparatory to her entrance.

From a certain horror against the vain, cold woman [says Warner] we grow under the spell of poetic genius to have a feeling of deepest pity and sorrow for her.<sup>39</sup>

Undeniably, the poignant references to the actual physical pain which Eleanor endures evoke an inevitable response of pity from the audience, as does her appearance. The indignity the Duchess suffers in the ordeal of her penance, however, does not engender an unqualified compassion. The depth of the pity for Eleanor is limited by the bitter undertone of her words to Gloucester which qualifies the completeness of her penance.

The painfulness of the scene is really due to the predicament of Gloucester. It is the Duke whom the audience pities when she, ignorant of his dismissal, speaks the following lines:

For whilst I think I am thy married wife  
And thou a prince, protector of this land,  
Methinks I should not thus be led along.

(II. iv. 28-30.)

Sometime I'll say, I am Duke Humphrey's wife,  
And he a prince and ruler of the land:  
Yet so he ruled and such a prince he was  
As he stood by whilst I, his forlorn duchess,  
Was made a wonder and pointing-stock  
To every idle rascal follower.

(42-47)

---

<sup>39</sup>Warner, p. 189.

Granted the interpretation of these lines in their context depends to an extent on delivery; nonetheless, each reference to Gloucester's former position must cut him as would a knife. Admittedly, the Duke made no intervention in his wife's unhappy state of affairs, made no attempt to alter her doom; indeed his first thought on receiving the news of her arrest was the defacing of his own honour. (II.i.190-99) This inaction and concern, however, is an expression of his strong belief in the right of the law and the order of his country,<sup>40</sup> the belief in honour which he upholds throughout the play. Eleanor's calm pronouncement of his fate (II.iv.48-57) he greets with incredulity, so strong is his conviction of the triumph of right:

All, Nell, forbear! thou aimest all awry:  
 I must offend before I be attained;  
 And had I twenty times so many foes,  
 And each of them had twenty times their power,  
 All these could not procure me any scathe,  
 So long as I am loyal, true and crimeless.

(58-63)

His firm faith blinds him to the reality of the corruption at court-- the strength of the antagonism toward him, the power of the prevalent ambition. Knowledge of this "reality" moves the audience again to pity for the honest Gloucester. His grief for Eleanor is intense: he is overcome at the sentencing, and in this scene must dry his tears to greet his wife; the tenderness of his words reveals his great pity for her. He weeps again at their parting, showing again his sorrow, and concern

<sup>40</sup>"Eleanor, the law, thou see'st, hath judged thee:  
 I cannot justify whom the law condemns."

(II.III.15-16)

for her:

Glou. Entreat her not the worse in that I pray  
 You use her well: the world may laugh again;  
 And I may live to do you kindness if  
 You do it her: and so, Sir John, farewell!

Duch. What, gone, my lord, and bid me not farewell!

Glou. Witness my tears, I cannot stay to speak.

(81-86)

With the exit of Gloucester, Eleanor does become the object of pity. She dwells no longer on her former glory, nor on the severity of her penance, and is totally resigned, calling herself the "odiment of disgrace or reproach."<sup>41</sup> Her final recognition of the meaninglessness of the adornment of majesty without honour, the futility of attire to cover shame, allows the forgiveness of what can now be judged--in the light of that recognition--her most human folly.

My shame will not be shifted with me sheet:  
 No, it will hang upon my richest robes  
 And show itself, attire me how I can.

(107-9)

Admittedly, incidents engendering a response to the characters as humans may be sporadic; such incidents are, however, nonetheless most definitely there; and this particular scene as a whole challenges a statement made by M. M. Reese who comments: "Henry VI is not a play that greatly moves us."<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Craig, footnote to line 96.

<sup>42</sup> Reese, p. 192.

### III. MARGARET

Among the enemies of the Duke of Gloucester the queen herself figures prominently. The opposition of the Duke and Margaret is initiated by the substitution of that French princess for the daughter of Armagnac as bride for Henry VI. The union of the earl's daughter and the English king, proposed by the French powers as a final certification of peace and endorsed by Gloucester as a marriage profitable to the realm, is replaced by a union which is politically disadvantageous and which is based merely on the unreasoned passions of the young English monarch and the equal but disguised desires of an ambitious English earl. The denial of the original betrothal is not only an insult to Armagnac and France but also to the judgment of Gloucester, to whom Margaret signifies "a broken promise and a stain on England's honour."<sup>43</sup>

Not only is the marriage ill-founded, the basis irregular, but the nature of the relationship of Henry VI and Margaret is also peculiar: she, though wife and queen, is dominant; he, though husband

---

<sup>43</sup>Reese, p. 176.

and king, is subservient. The strength of her position, in defiance of the natural order, increases from the time of the "courtship" to the occasion of her banishment.

The king's refusal or inability to assert the authority which he warrants as king is a source of frustration to his wife who resents the humble piety which usurps the place of valour in her husband. Early in her reign she complains bitterly to Suffolk of the lack of rightful superiority in the monarchy of England and the apparent control of the Protector of that country, asking,

My Lord of Suffolk, say, is this the guise,  
Is this the fashion in the court of England?  
Is this the government of Britain's isle,  
And this the royalty of Albion's king?

(2 Henry VI, I.iii.45-48.)

It is Henry's weakness and indecision and not the Protector's aggressiveness which allow the latter's governance; the removal of the Duke hence creates a power-vacancy to be filled by any one of a multitude of peers whose vice of ambition Eleanor epitomized. This common goal superficially unites the Cardinal, Buckingham, Somerset, Suffolk, Margaret and York (in the actual conspiracy, act three scene one) in opposition to the Duke.

Until act five, scene one, the dissenting factions of the court

are loosely formed, individuals' loyalties deceptive and self-serving.<sup>44</sup>  
The return of York, however, and the open rebellion of his family as the House of York give definition to the factions as the Wars of the Roses emerge with the Duke of York raising the white, and Margaret the red symbolic flower.

<sup>44</sup>The forming of factions is based on suspicion and self-interest. In I. i. Buckingham proposes an alliance of the Cardinal, himself, Somerset and the absent Suffolk; yet with the exit of the Cardinal, Somerset immediately expresses his distrust of the churchman and Buckingham offers the possibility of their own advancement. The union of Salisbury, Warwick and York is an honest gesture on the part of the Nevils but only a "show of love" in York's case, a calculated move in the attaining of his own ambitions. Similarly, Suffolk's compliance with the Cardinal in the proposed alliance is not genuine; he advises Margaret:

Although we fancy not the Cardinal  
Yet we must join with him and with the lords,  
Till we have brought Duke Humphrey in disgrace.  
.....  
So, one by one, we'll weed them out at last,  
And you yourself shall steer the happy helm.

(I.iii.97-103.)

Finally, York, revealing his true purpose to the Nevils, and assured of their support, counsels their dissemblance:

Wink at the Duke of Suffolk's insolence,  
At Beaufort's pride, at Somerset's ambition,  
At Buckingham and all the crew of them,  
Till they have snared the shepherd of the flock,  
That virtuous prince, the good Duke Humphrey:  
'Tis that they seek, and in seeking that  
Shall find their deaths. . .

(II.ii.70-76)

and hence remove York's opposition; it is thus that York conspires with the peers in act three, scene one.



Up to the time of Suffolk's death, Margaret's abnormally aggressive nature has exerted its energy in the acquisition of the power owing a king, power which Henry refuses to exercise, power which Margaret will enjoy with her lover William de la Pole. With Suffolk's death her aspirations lose direction or meaning; in the midst of the Cade rebellion she has no interest in the triumph of kingly power; she is resigned--

"My hope is gone, now Suffolk is deceased"

(2 Henry VI, IV.iv.56.)

--and finally, silent. (IV.ix.) When she returns to the stage in act five, scene one, however, she is the voluble champion of a new cause in support of Somerset and the House of Lancaster. Somerset and York were repeatedly opposed in 1 Henry VI, most importantly in the Temple Garden where Shakespeare "assigned" the white rose and the red, the latter of which Henry, a Lancaster, nonchalantly chose in an attempt to demonstrate --with extreme lack of foresight--the triviality of their dispute. It is hence appropriate that Somerset is the target and catalyst of York's anger and his house's separation here; it is again appropriate that Margaret, lover of Suffolk who was allied with Somerset against York in the original Garden scene, should provide the voice of the opposition. Her position as practical if not titular head of the Lancastrian government, in addition to her liaison with Suffolk, gives her this "right".

The event of war offers Margaret occasion for a more overt demonstration of her aggressive nature, on the battlefield as military leader. This implicit display of physical valour heightens the contrast

between the domineering queen and the "contemplating" Henry; vivifying the inversion of roles. Margaret does not reject her role as a woman however; she does not become "unsexed"<sup>45</sup> after the execution of Suffolk. No longer a lover, she fights as a domineering wife ("mothering" Henry, as Eleanor suggests [1.1.147-48.]) and finally, in 3 Henry VI, as a mother, striving to regain and maintain the rights of her son, and hence the House of Lancaster. She operates within the crumbling social sphere exemplifying its disorder in her rejection of the "divinely ordained subservience"<sup>46</sup> of her womanly roles, and of course, in her initial participation in a passion-dominated betrothal.

Her representation of unnaturalness is, however, particularized by a deed--or, more appropriately, her attitude toward a deed--which is discordant to that very role of mother to which she so strongly adheres: she comes to support exultantly the severance of the natural bond between parent and child, and thus, as mother or parent herself, becomes an Ironic representative of unnaturalness. Her ambivalent position--as upholder and defier of order--is, however, not maintained by the dramatist through all of the plays in which Margaret participates. The disorder in England, and hence in the universe, does not allow the fruition of natural inheritance or the fulfillment of natural role such as that which Margaret adopts in her defence of the Prince of Wales; thus, Margaret loses her son, her husband, and her kingdom, and is stripped of her identifying roles of mother, wife, and queen. Moreover, her deed or crime--her

---

<sup>45</sup>John C. Bromley, The Shakespearean Kings (Boulder, Colorado: Colorado Associated Press, 1971), p. 22.

<sup>46</sup>Pierce, p. 58.

approval of Rutland's death and her participation in the murder of York supports the resultant nemesis of Margaret: banished from her kingdom, a childless widow, she will return in Richard III as a wailing woman, no longer an ironic but a direct representative of the abnormal state of the realm, to bemoan her loss in haunting curses and to prophesy continued chaos in England.

2

The introduction of Margaret in Henry VI just after the apprehension of Joan has led some critics to assume that Shakespeare intended Reignier's daughter to act as Joan's successor as enchantress and scourge of England. Attributing Margaret's apparent harmlessness to a "feminine and courtly" manner, Bevington asserts that Margaret is definitely Joan's substitute as "femme fatale";<sup>47</sup> Reese and Tillyard make similar though less assured suggestions:

The suggestion is not made explicitly, but we feel that to her [Margaret] have passed the "familiar," "charming spells and periphrases," with whom Joan La Pucelle has already begun to work the doom of England.<sup>48</sup>

It is possible that we are meant to think that her [Joan's] evil spells are transferred to another French woman, Margaret of Anjou.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup>Bevington, p. 58.

<sup>48</sup>Reese, p. 176.

<sup>49</sup>Tillyard, p. 168.

Undeniably, the juxtaposition of scenes serves to indicate that the defeat of Joan does not effect a defeat of chaos, or bring about a conclusive peace. The immediate introduction of Margaret as a possible alternate and unsuitable bride for Henry prohibits the success of peace by denying its proposed "ratification"--a marriage between Henry and Armagnac's daughter.

In the English histories Shakespeare follows Holinshed in emphasizing the importance of marriages in settling and unsettling the troubled affairs of those family estates which also happen to be kingdoms. When Suffolk, infatuated by the penniless Margaret, daughter of Reignier, King of Naples, arranges a marriage between Margaret and King Henry the Sixth, it is the fact the Suffolk has ceded Anjou and Maine to Reignier as Margaret's marriage portion that causes the English nobles to call the agreement "shameful".<sup>50</sup>

The loss of these provinces, her lack of dowry, and the tax imposed for her voyage to England cause the marriage to act as a catalyst in hastening division of the peers, and hence to perpetuate the unnatural chaos in the realm.

The power which Joan purportedly passes to Margaret is that of astonishment. Indeed Margaret, like Joan, has a capacity to enchant, but in the exercise of that power she differs markedly from the witch. This power resides initially in the beauty of the princess, which beauty dazzles or captivates Suffolk when he first sees her.

---

<sup>50</sup>Bandel, pp. 280-81.

Suff. . . . 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 no 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 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.

(1 Henry VI, V.iii.60-71.)

The impact which the physical beauty of Margaret has on Suffolk and later on Henry, is not effected purposely by her. The passivity of this influence distinguishes Margaret's "power" from Joan's. The witch intentionally employs language to effect her enchantment; this calculated influence is most obvious in the case of Burgundy, which has been termed an example of her method. (See above, p. 29.)

Margaret, of course, also has a good command of the English language; she is always ready with pertinent and incisive comment.<sup>51</sup> In this scene her comments are intelligent and appropriately formal. Here I am disagreeing with David Bevington who feels that her conversation is part of the "hypocrisy she practices" in playing "the game", presumably that of flirtation or seduction:

---

<sup>51</sup>She will in fact become notorious for her use of words; when her young son makes a bold comment in the parley with the Yorks (3 Henry VI, II.ii.131-32.) Richard retorts, "Whoever got thee, there thy mother stands; For, well I wot, thou hast thy mother's tongue." (133-34)

She represents herself to Suffolk, and to the absent King Henry, as "a maid, / A virgin, and his servant" (V.ii.177-178). She presumes upon her situation as an innocent, defenseless, maiden in captivity (II.101-102), while at the same time she is brazenly self-aware and able to see her plight in humorous perspective: "Tush, women have been captivate ere now" (I.107). She is sardonic, adroit in witty conversation, fond of the double entendre, able to give "quid pro quo" (I.109), in her duel of wits with Suffolk. Men do not faze her, though she knows how to appeal to their sense of masculinity and possessiveness.<sup>52</sup>

This interpretation depends to a large extent on the intonation or delivery of her lines: her humble self-identification (177-78) is not couched in the ironic egoism of Joan's first speech and need not be doubted; her dependence on Suffolk's honour (101-2) does not clash with her self-reassurance (107); her prompt response to Suffolk (in that part of the conversation contained in lines 112-19) may be said to reveal her knowledge of and adherence to the social hierarchy; and finally, the humility ("I am unworthy to be Henry's wife," 122) and obedience ("An if my father please, I am content." 127) consequent to this adherence, may be said to appeal to Suffolk's "masculinity and possessiveness". This analysis is not presented to "whitewash" the youth of Margaret, but rather to show an alternative--and it seems to me more probably legitimate--interpretation of her presentation in this scene. Her use of language is thus "direct". She does not overpower Suffolk with "high terms" (I.ii.93.), nor does she make sexual insinuation in statements of double-entendre. The "words y-clad with wisdom's majesty" (2 Henry VI, I.1.33.) which move Henry to "weeping joys" (34) are merely

<sup>52</sup> Bevington, p. 56.

an expression of formal eloquence:

Great King of England and my gracious Lord,  
 The mutual conference that my mind hath had,  
 By day, by night, waking and in my dreams,  
 In courtly company or at my beads,  
 With you my alder-lieftest sovereign,  
 Makes me the bolder to salute my king  
 With ruder terms, such as my wit affords  
 And over-joy of heart doth minister.

(2 Henry VI, I.i.24-31.)

Furthermore, Henry's initial astonishment is effected not by the words of Margaret, but by those of Suffolk, which are calculated to affect the young monarch, to "bereave him of his wits with wonder." (1 Henry VI, V.iii.195.)

A transfer of the power of astonishment to Margaret is not indicated in the presentation of that woman in the scene following Joan's capture. What is intimated is the ineffectuality of the proposed agreement of peace and the continuation of disorder, formerly without, and now within the realm. The juxtaposition of the scenes suggests the immediacy of this continuation.

3

The similar origins of the relationships of Joan and Charles and Margaret and Henry, and the element of role-reversal in those relationships, encourage comparison of them. The formation of each relationship is determined initially by the astonishing of the man which arouses his passion and causes the dominance of that passion over his reason; the man's attitude to the woman is characterized by

desire and awe which hence assure her domination of him.

It has been noted that while Joan is active in the seduction of the Dauphin, Margaret does not participate actively in the astonishing of Henry; acting as Henry's uncommissioned proxy in the "courting" of Margaret, Suffolk also acts as Margaret's emissary in exciting Henry's desire for her. Margaret remains aloof in her sexual relation with Henry; she responds to his "kind kiss" (2 Henry VI, I.i.19.) of welcome --which he terms the natural expression of his love (18)--with apology for her rudeness or disrespect in returning his gesture of affection, giving her contemplation of him as a husband (24-31) as excuse for her familiarity. Actually she regards Henry, from the first, not as a husband, but as a king; to Suffolk's kiss earlier, which he suggested she return by him as a "loving token" to the king (1 Henry VI, V.iii.181.), she responded, "That for thyself: I will not so presume/To send such peevish tokens to a king." (185-86) The formality, or restraint of her attitude is reflected in the political flavour of the language of her "apology" to Henry on the occasion of their first meeting: "mutual conference", "salute my king", "terms", "affords", "minister". Joan's words, in contrast, had specific sexual import indicating that the region of her dominance would extend beyond the bounds of the political and military arena.

Unlike Charles, the ardour of Henry's passion is soon absorbed by his excessive religiosity, and this devotion also replaces in importance his political concerns. Pacific by nature, since childhood, he cannot tolerate turmoil and has not the decisiveness to handle it. Even



the confusion within himself, generated by the newness of his passion, is a source of grief to him, and leads not to an assertion of kingly power as he claims (1 Henry VI, V.v.99.) but, in effect, to a resignation.

(83-91) Thus Margaret, readily aware of the role a prince should play--

To be a queen in bondage is more vile  
Than is a slave in base servility;  
For princes should be free.

(1 Henry VI, V.vii.112-14.)

--will easily express her influence over, her domination of, Henry in the parliament or governing of the realm; she will exert the power of a king from her position as queen.

Margaret soon becomes an avid participant in the debates and activities of the royal court. Now queen, she does not hesitate to make her presence felt. She soon finds in the Duke of Gloucester an obstruction to the free execution of the royal power which she indicated before her marriage she believed to be the prerogative of royal princes. (1 Henry VI, V.iii.112-14.) The chosen queen and wife of Henry, she is no longer "unworthy" (122) or "unassuming".<sup>53</sup> She reacts violently to the fact that the supplications of her husband's subjects are issued to the Lord Protector and not to Henry himself, by ripping such supplications to shreds and venting her anger on the petitioners in harsh words. (2 Henry VI, I.iii.) The weakness and ineffectuality of Henry frustrates her, and she lets the

---

<sup>53</sup>Sister M.J. Frances Hoey, "Shakespeare and Two Women: A Study of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Margaret of Anjou" (Ph.D. dissertation, St. John's University, May 6, 1950), p. viii.

fact be known early in her reign, first privately in her complaint to Suffolk (scene three), and then publicly, in the court.

Her domination first takes the form of interference at court. The first subject of "debate" after the forming of factions (l.i.) is the regency of France. (l.iii.) With typical irresolution, King Henry comments, "for my part, noble lords, I care not which; / Or Somerset or York, all's one to me!" (104-5) and hence encourages the queen to enter the discussion and speak for him several lines later:

Sal. Peace, son! and show some reason, Buckingham,  
Why Somerset should be preferr'd in this.

Queen. Because the king, forsooth will have it so.

Glou. Madam, the king is old enough himself  
To give his censure: these are no women's matters.

Queen. If he be old enough, what needs your grace  
To be protector of his excellence?

(116-22)

The attack on Gloucester which Margaret here initiates is continued by Suffolk, the Cardinal, Somerset and Buckingham, and again, the queen who is also of their "faction". As Gloucester exits, Margaret takes advantage of the heat and confusion of the moment and, dropping her fan, boxes the Duchess of Gloucester on the ear when the older woman does not hasten to retrieve her fan. Interpretation of Margaret's action in hitting Eleanor as intentional or accidental can be determined only in stage production; Margaret, however, has just vowed to avenge the Duchess for her pride and scorn of the queen (85), and what better way to offend Eleanor than by public embarrassment? Furthermore, the incident with the petitioners has shown that Margaret is not incapable of such aggressive action.

The castigation of Gloucester is continued even at "play"; again Margaret participates with incisive comment and again is opposed in this to the passivity of the king:

Glou. Why, Suffolk, England knows thine insolence.

Queen. And thy ambition Gloucester.

King. I prithee, peace, good Queen,  
And whet not on these furious peers;  
For blessed are the peacemakers on earth.

(11.1.31-35.)

Moreover Margaret's presence at court is not characterized by criticism and bitter complaint alone; she makes other pertinent and prompt remarks which indicate her attentiveness to and interest in all the affairs of the court: the hawking (11.1.1-4.), the Saunder Simcox episode (87-88; 155), the duel of Peter and Horner (11.iii.52-53.) These comments, though few, all convey a personal curiosity and self-expression which contrast with the general philosophy of Henry's words in these same scenes, and put Margaret in more immediate contact with the situation at hand. This contrast in the quality of their comments is shown again in their response to the news of Eleanor's apprehension, which also gives Margaret a chance for another stab at the Lord Protector:

King. O God, what mischief work the wicked ones,  
Heaping confusion on their own head thereby!

Queen. Gloucester, see here the tainture of thy nest,  
And look thyself be faultless, thou wert best.

(11.1.188-89.)

Margaret's final "interference" comes with the dismissal of the Duke of Gloucester; here she unnecessarily repeats the suggestion of the

Protector's resignation which her husband makes to the Duke. Gloucester's attendant grief gives an edge of cruelty to Margaret's words; her comment is a vaguely sarcastic matter-of-fact command and is hence brutally contrasted with the gentle persuasion of the king. Her final exultation over Henry's repossession of the staff is most incongruous to the sadness of the moment. (See II.iii.22-44.)

With this acquisition of absolute or sole power, "Henry is king and Margaret queen" (II.iii.39.); the monarchy has attained the status which Margaret feels is proper and desirable. Hence the motive for Margaret's continued campaign against Gloucester--personal ambition or achievement of monarchical right--is difficult to determine. Her important immediate response to Suffolk's specific suggestion of her own rule in his promise "one by one, we'll weed them all at last, / And you yourself shall steer the happy realm" (I.iii.102-3.) is not verbal; it cannot be learned from the written page. Shakespeare thus leaves her motive ambiguous. What is obvious, however, is Margaret's augmented exertion of the authority of her (or the king's) position, after the dismissal of Gloucester. The opinions which she voiced publicly in the fragmented form of isolated comment are now correlated into persuasive oration.

In a speech of eloquent pause and phrasing (III.i.4-41.), Margaret attempts to breed suspicion in the mind of Henry about the attested ambition of Gloucester. Her deceitful speech is then substantiated by the false accusations of Suffolk, York and Buckingham--but to no avail; the king is not moved. To his personal estimation of

the virtues of Gloucester (68-73), Margaret replies with immediate scorn:

Ah, what's more dangerous than this fond alliance!  
 Seems he a dove? his feathers are but borrow'd,  
 For he's disposed as the hateful raven:  
 Is he a lamb? his skin is surely lent him,  
 For he's inclined as is the ravenous wolf.  
 Who cannot steal a shape that means deceit?  
 Take heed, my lord; the welfare of us all  
 Hangs on the cutting short that fraudulent man.

(74-81)

The force of the antagonism to Gloucester of the lords and Margaret is more than the king can bear; in spite of his personal conviction of Gloucester's innocence and the truth of the Duke's assessment of the situation of the realm (142-71), he cannot counter their ensuing charge of treason, and, therefore, resigns his position to Margaret politically and dramatically, leaving the parliament and hence the stage. Henry expresses the political impotence he feels here in a comparison of himself to a weeping mother dam whose calf has been taken for slaughter by butchers; by analogy then, to a helpless woman. This comparison contrasted to Margaret's easy unemotional assumption of her new height of "masculine" domination intensifies this drastic inversion of male and female roles.

Recognizing the extent of the influence which Gloucester has over Henry (though she distorts the quality of that influence) Margaret immediately suggests the permanent removal of the Duke. It is thus she who initiates the conspiracy to do the deed which her "partner" Suffolk will effect. It was Suffolk's intention to join with Margaret politically

as well as personally from the start: "Margaret shall now be queen, and rule the king; But I will rule both her, the king and realm." (1 Henry VI, V.v.106-7.) It was he in whom Margaret confided her frustrations, and he in turn who offered her comfort in the promise of her success; their accord is everywhere indicated:

Well hath your highness seen into this duke;  
And had I first been put to speak my mind,  
I think I should have told your grace's tale.

(Suffolk to Margaret: 2 Henry VI, III.1.42-44.)

And now, her latest increase in power brings an equal presumption of authority in Suffolk:

York. I will go to Ireland my lord, so please his majesty.

Suff. Why, our authority is his consent,  
And what we do establish he confirms.

(315-17)

Though affirming a decision of the Cardinal, the assertion of power is given to Suffolk.

The conspirators miscalculate the extent of the devotion of Henry to Gloucester; for that matter, the king's sudden uncommon assertion of his will is utterly unpredictable. Henry sentences Suffolk—who has been accused by the commons of Gloucester's murder—with banishment, and, so doing, temporarily terminates his wife's practice of domination and even her interest in royal power.

It is Suffolk who brings the news of Gloucester's death at which all feign concern and shock. (III.11.) When Henry chides Suffolk bitterly

for being but the "baleful messenger" of these bad tidings, Margaret immediately "attacks" Henry for his unreasonable (but justified) rating of Suffolk. In likening Suffolk's unfavourable relation with Gloucester to her own association with the deceased Duke, she indicates how she, as an enemy of Gloucester, might be blamed for his death. She hopes that Henry's affection for her will encourage him to pity her and to allay her fears with explanation of her freedom from suspicion of guilt in this matter; again, likening her position to that of Suffolk, she will hence imply that Duke's innocence. She thus conducts a premature defence of Suffolk's crime (56-71)--but to no avail; Henry does not hear her.

Her ensuing speech, engendered by her anger at his neglect and perhaps by fear for Suffolk (because of Henry's hostility to him), is a strange outpouring of emotion. (III.ii.73-121.) If Margaret was not Henry's joy, she asks, why did he bring her to England? She builds question upon question in this speech, to a pitch which reaches the height of rant. She then recalls in excessive detail her voyage from France to England and depicts a difficult battle with the elements, a struggle which she had to overcome to reach Henry. Saying that she has endured all she can, she concludes that she must die. (120) This little piece of theatricality is totally out of character for Margaret. Though she finds Henry's neglect of her person annoying (I.iii.53-67), it would not disturb her to this extent; and the excuse of hysteria brought about by fear for Suffolk conflicts with the relative containment with which she responds to the challenges of Warwick (186-87, 195-96, 204-6) later in the scene. If her intention in directing suspicion of guilt onto herself in the lines

preceding this long tale of woe is to "direct notice from Suffolk,"<sup>54</sup> it seems reasonable to assume that this same purpose prompts her second speech. This explanation at least puts the speech in harmony with her normally rational nature.

It is the commons who, citing Suffolk as murderer of Gloucester, insist on his banishment. (243-53) Henry is firm in his compliance to their wishes; and it is ironic but appropriate, that this command of banishment should be the one assertion of his royal power which the monarch makes in his reign. It was suggested that in the selection of his bride the execution of Henry's will was, in fact, a resignation to the confusion of his passion (see above, p. 52-53) which was excited by Margaret and Suffolk through the latter's description of that beautiful princess. While that "choice" was detrimental to the realm, this present assertion (of banishment) is made with consideration to the state.

With the banishment of her lover, Margaret resigns her dominant position. She does not contest her husband's decision with eloquent argument but rather begs him to alter his doom: "O Henry, let me plead for gentle Suffolk." (289; italics mine) She might kneel as she entreats him to effect visually this inversion and correction of roles and hence emphasize dramatically the importance of the moment. After this reversal of Margaret and Henry, attention is focused on the relation of Margaret and Suffolk which, for the first time, is revealed openly, in the portrayal of their parting. After the departure and death of Suffolk

---

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p. 69.



Margaret will remain politically inactive until, with the rebellion of the House of York, the House of Lancaster requires an able leader to espouse its cause and to defend its right.

5

Whereas the relationship of Joan La Pucelle and Charles is treated openly as a sexual liaison and is the subject of public derision and mockery, the affair of Margaret and Suffolk is handled with extreme discretion which, when the closeness of the queen and the Duke is finally revealed, allows their relationship to elude total condemnation. The origin of their relationship, that is their first meeting, differs from that of the witch and the Dauphin, firstly in the nature of the infatuation. The Dauphin, though conscious of his astonishment, does not possess that degree of awareness which allows Suffolk to maintain an equality with his enchantress. Suffolk chides himself for succumbing to the power of "beauty's princely majesty" (1 Henry VI, V.iii.67-69.) and, though he cannot extinguish his desire, is as much the captor as the captivated or captured. Charles, on the other hand, is totally dominated by Joan and allows her supremacy in the social/physical, political and religious spheres. Joan takes the offensive in this earlier encounter; it is she who challenges Charles to the symbolic sexual duel and in so doing enthralls the Dauphin. Suffolk, however, is the aggressor in the later meeting: he leads Margaret in by the hand, which he boldly kisses and places by her side; he promises "reverent" treatment of her (47), but, at the end of the scene, cleverly steals a kiss--forward and ardent in the context of the

marital negotiation and Margaret's formal speech--from the princess as a token of her affection to his king.

In opposing Bevington's assessment of Margaret's presentation of herself in this scene (see above, p. 50), I noted that the interpretation of her lines was determined by their delivery. Margaret's response to Suffolk's kiss, "That for thyself: I will not so presume/To send such peevish tokens to a king" (185-86), is also affected by the intonation of her words. Viewed retrospectively, from the parting scene, some interest must be shown by Margaret here to give plausibility to the latter event.<sup>55</sup>

The framework of physical contact (created by their first and last scenes together) gives the relationship of Margaret and Suffolk a humanness when contrasted to the "metaphoric" relation of Charles and Joan. There is an intensity of passion in the meeting of the Dauphin and La Pucelle, but the distance between them effected by Charles' elevation of her to a supernatural sphere causes the scene to operate on a different level; their metaphoric contact allows the physical and spiritual devotion required in the devil worship displayed in act five, scene two. It is this element of worship which marks a second distinction in the two relationships.

With the exception of their conference in act one, scene three (2 Henry VI), Margaret and Suffolk are never alone together on the stage from the time of their first encounter until their parting scene. Hence,

---

<sup>55</sup> This presumes, of course, consecutive presentation of these two plays--a production of 2 Henry VI alone, must give some other visual indication of Margaret and Suffolk's closeness, for the parting scene to have verity.

as suggested, their relationship must be intimated from a glance or a smile, a nearness on the stage where their agreement or mutual support is normally obscured by the general accord of the peers against Gloucester; these actions are of course determined by the director and players of a particular production.

Reference to the Queen's complaint in act one, scene three (2 Henry VI) has been made in other contexts more than once. The very fact that Margaret confides in Suffolk at all is of some import to the definition of their relationship; what is most notable, however, is her admission of a dissatisfaction with her husband and a subtle indication of her desire or preference for the Duke:

I tell thee, Pole, when in the City Tours  
Thou ran'st a tilt in honour of my love  
And stolest away the ladies' hearts of France,  
I thought King Henry had resembled thee  
In courage, courtship and proportion:  
But all his mind is bent to holiness.

I would the college of the cardinals  
Would choose him pope and carry him to Rome,  
And set the triple crown upon his head:  
That were a state fit for his holiness.

(I.iii.53-57., 64-67.)

In addition, her non-verbal response to his promise of power (mentioned above, p. 56)--power which they would achieve together (102)--could give indication of intimacy.

The importance of her love to Margaret is of course emphasized in the drastic gesture of her plea to Henry which totally contradicts her former domineering nature. The final sequence of Margaret and Suffolk alone on stage follows this plea. Though it begins with the awkward and

contrived curse of Suffolk, the scene gradually betrays a tenderness and profundity of passion which dispels the initial artificiality of their postures, and which is certainly moving. Margaret and Suffolk slowly become each other's world: she states that she is banished (from her actual kingdom) if she is away from him (III.ii.351.); and he replies similarly:

A wilderness is populous enough,  
 So Suffolk had thy heavenly company:  
 For where thou art, there is the world itself,  
 With every several pleasure in the world,  
 And where thou art not, desolation.

(360-64)

They renew their former physical contact as Margaret cries,

O, go not yet! Even thus two friends condemn'd  
 Embrace and kiss and take ten thousand leaves,  
 Loather a hundred times to part than die.  
 Yet now farewell; and farewell life with thee.

(353-56)

The images of Suffolk's last long speech are powerful, and strongly sexual:

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 its lips:  
 Where, from thy sight, I should be raging mad  
 And cry out, for thee to close up mine eyes,  
 To have thee with thy lips to stop my mouth;  
 So shouldst thou either turn my flying soul,  
 Or I should breathe it so into thy body,  
 And then it lived in sweet Elysium.  
 To die by thee were but to die in jest;  
 From thee to die were torture more than death:  
 O, let me stay, befall what may befall!

(388-402)

Thus at their parting, Margaret and Suffolk are almost fused physically and spiritually--body and soul--by the force of his words. This is a mutual transcendence, however, and totally distinct from the "spiritual" relation of Joan and Charles, which is definitely a form of devil worship. Margaret poignantly compares their parting to the physically painful image of a ripping wound which, if allowed to "knit" in this "body" of circumstances, is fatal anyway. Their short phrases lengthen the final division of the lovers and increases this pain or tension:

Suff. I go.

Queen. And take my heart with thee.

Suff. A jewel, lock'd into the wofull'st cask  
That ever did contain a thing of worth.  
Even as a splitted bark, so sunder we:  
This way fall I to death.

Queen. This way for me.

(407-13)

Curiously, she gives him that jewel--herself--which Suffolk asked her father to cherish carefully at the lovers' first parting.<sup>56</sup>

Reference to the "affair" is finally and bitterly made by both the Captain and the Master's Mate of Suffolk's ship of banishment, in the context of the promise and effecting of the Duke's execution.

<sup>56</sup> Suff. "So farewell, Reigner: set this diamond safe  
golden palaces, as it becomes."

(1 Henry VI, V.111, 169-70)

Now will I dam up this thy yawning mouth  
 For swallowing the treasure of the realm:  
 Thy lips that kiss'd the queen shall sweep the ground:

(IV.1.73-75)

There let his head and lifeless body lie,  
 Until the queen his mistress bury it.

(142-43)

The words of the First Gentleman, however, are more gentle:

His body will I bear unto the king;  
 If he revenge it not, yet will his friends;  
 So will the queen, that living held him dear.

(145-47)

There is an undeniable and inexcusable grotesqueness in the scene of the queen's mourning (IV.iv.): she caresses the head of her lover in the presence of her husband, quietly grieving her loss, and uttering an occasional phrase in praise of Suffolk's power and bravery. Important here is Margaret's pre-occupation with the Duke and her final reference to him: "My hope is gone now Suffolk is deceased." (56) Though perhaps a director's skill is required to develop the relationship between the aggressive queen and the aspiring Duke, and to counter this grotesqueness, their love as portrayed in the lines of Shakespeare's parting scene provides nonetheless a moving and human spectacle, which demonstrates mutual human passion easily distinguishing their relationship from that of Joan and Charles.

The revival of Margaret's dominance in act five occurs in her sudden and bolsterous entry with the Duke of Somerset (whom she has boldly released from prison); her aggressiveness is once again contrasted to her husband's returned timidity:

King. See, Buckingham, Somerset comes with the queen:  
Go, bid her hide him quickly from the duke.

Queen. For thousand Yorks he shall not hide his head,  
But boldly stand and front him to his face.

(2 Henry VI, V.i.83-86.)

The freedom of his enemy Somerset and the strong Lancastrian support of that Duke offered by the queen prompt the Duke of York's immediate rebellion. Margaret easily assumes a commanding position (114-16), allegiances are rapidly stated, and the war is in progress. The play concludes with the Lancastrians in flight, Margaret urging the reluctant Henry on.

The action of the war is carried directly into the third part of Henry VI. The importance or dominance of Margaret's position in the realm is indicated in the very first scene of this new play, in York's line, "The queen this day here holds her parliament." (35, italics mine) With the king's entry an argument develops over the Lancastrian and Yorkist claims to the throne. King Henry's attempt to demonstrate his right by inheritance proves his title weak; and, Yorkist soldiers appearing, the fearful monarch offers a compromise which effects the disinheriting of his son:

King. . . . .  
Let me for this, my life-time reign as king.

York. Confirm the crown to me and to mine heirs,  
And thou shalt reign in quiet while thou livest.

King. I am content: Richard Plantagenet  
Enjoy the kingdom after my decease.

(171-75)

Henry realizes the abnormality of this deed which drives his followers to the aid of his wife; but typically, he is resigned to the situation at hand:

War. Why should you sigh, my lord?

King. Not for myself, Lord Warwick, but my son,  
Whom I unnaturally shall disinheret,  
But be it as it may. . .

(192-95)

His reaction to the approach of the queen resembles his attitude to her arrival with Somerset; he wants to avoid confrontation, to evade the issue. But Margaret apprehends him, and prevents his departure with a command which echoes in tone the authority of her entry in 2 Henry VI, act five: "Nay, go not from me; I will follow thee." (213) The justified and eloquent attack she then directs at Henry at once defines the stance she will take--the role she will enact--in this play:

Ah, wretched man! would I had died a maid,  
And never seen thee, never borne thee son,  
Seeing thou hast proved so unnatural a father!  
Hath he deserved to lose his birthright thus?  
Hadst thou but loved him half so well as I,  
Or felt that pain that I did for him once,  
Or nourish'd him as I did with my blood,  
Thou wouldst have left thy dearest heart-blood there,  
Rather than have made that savage duke thine heir  
And disinherited thine only son.

(215-25)



She identifies herself as mother in natural opposition to Henry as father. In detailing her role she shows the strength of the bond between herself and her son--between parent and child--and thus emphasizes the extreme lightness with which Henry dismisses his responsibility to his son. In her second speech Margaret describes the stand she--a mere woman (243)--would have taken against the Yorkist demands. (244-45) She points, in deprecation and with incredulity, to her husband's continued weakness and political ignorance (229-42), to his inability to exert the power which is by right a king's. Margaret denies her position as wife (247-48) to this "timorous wretch" (231) and departs, resolving upon immediate military action for the reacquisition of her son's inheritance. (251-55) Her assumption of military authority sorely accentuates the renewal of the inversion of roles by extending the reign of her dominance.<sup>57</sup> This gesture of masculine valour, however, remains importantly in the context of her role as mother.

It is this context and the complete resignation of Henry which give Margaret's endeavors a certain nobility of purpose. This nobility, however, is undercut drastically by her participation in the slaughter of York. This participation is similar in its qualification of the rightness of her actions, to Margaret's earlier involvement in the conspiracy against Gloucester, which also cast suspicion on the context of her ambitions. Her brilliance, her determination, and her valour,

---

<sup>57</sup>As Henry's withdrawal from the parliament gave Margaret direction of the government interrupted only by the period of her mourning, his present inaction now prompts her control of the field.

the nobility of her cause, are undercut by a flaw of cruelty first revealed in the incisive character of her political comments. It is this very element of cruelty which "justifies" Margaret's fate or nemesis which determines her role in Richard III.

The occasion of York's murder is marked by a mock coronation over which Margaret presides. The indignity served upon York in the placing of the paper crown does not offer substantial gratification to what is here revealed to be the sadistic nature of Margaret. She must make him grieve--therein lies her merriment (I.iv.86.); she must make him mad--therein lies her sport (90-92): thus, before she "crowns" the leader of the House of York she must taunt him with the blood of his own child:

... where is your darling Rutland?  
 Look, York! I stain'd this napkin with the blood  
 That valiant Clifford, with his rapier's point,  
 Made issue from the bosom of the boy;  
 And if thine eyes can water for his death,  
 I give thee this to dry thy cheeks withal.

(78-83)

She prolongs his emotional torture by preventing his death until after his lamentation:

O tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide!  
 How could'st thou drain the life-blood of the child,  
 To bid the father wipe his eyes withal,  
 And yet be seen to bear a woman's face?  
 Women are soft, mild, pitiful and flexible;  
 Thou stern, obdurate, flinty, rough, remorseless.

(York, 137-42)

That face of his the hungry cannibals  
 Would not have touch'd, would not have stain'd with blood:  
 But you are more inhuman, more inexorable,  
 O, ten times more, than tigers in Hyrcania.

(York, 153-56)

Her bitter exultation over York's misery and loss parallels the joy she expressed on the occasion of Gloucester's dismissal; the earlier event also effected an enhancement of power for Margaret and Henry, and a personal, though perhaps less tragic loss on the part of the Protector. In the former instance, the acquisition of power was the issue dwelt upon; in the torture of York, however, it is the loss of the child and the effect of that loss on the father which is stressed. A change in Margaret's "prominent" role (from queen to mother) accords with this change in emphasis; however, her strong declaration of herself as mother--her accentuation of childbirth, nourishment and love--and her castigation of Henry's rejection of the father-son bond as unnatural, make her attitude to the severance of this Yorkist bond equally unnatural.

Her inordinate cruelty here does not result from a logical development or intensification of the trait of cruelty in the character of Margaret; it is not determined then by an erasure of all compassion. Her attitude is decided, paradoxically, by her very role as mother--specifically in the chaotic realm of Henry VI. Representative of the natural bond between parent and child, and, as child-bearer and nourisher exemplary of natural growth, her denial of a natural bond and her exultation in such a severance of parent and child epitomize the disorder and frustration of growth, the unnatural situation in the realm.

Henry witnesses a formalized "presentation" of such a breaking of bonds, which (on a more literal level) is effected also by civil disorder. (II.v.) The spectacle which Henry observes is the discovery by a son that he has killed his father, and the discovery by a father that he has killed his son, in battle. The import of the tableau or presentation is augmented by its juxtaposition to Henry's lengthy praise of the natural peace, regularity and growth of the shepherd's life, and is expressed succinctly in the lines of the father:

O, pity, God, this miserable age!  
 What stratagems, how fell, how butcherly,  
 Erroneous, mutinous and unnatural,  
 This deadly quarrel daily doth beget!

(II.v.88-91.)

Henry longs for the termination of this disorder, which he believes will be effected by the cessation of civil strife, by the triumph of one House over the other. The ascension to power of the House of York, however, will not bring about the peace that Henry desires; the white rose of York has an inherent canker of unnatural ambition in Richard Duke of Gloucester which will perpetuate that disorder and will prey upon and destroy that flower itself. The definite assertion of Yorkist power occurs not with the premature and tenuous commencement of Edward IV's reign (II.vi.), but with the apprehension of the last pillars of the House of Lancaster, Margaret and her son. This capture and the imprisonment of the king causes Edward to echo ironically the opinion Henry voiced in his hope of peace: "Now here a period of tumultuous broils." (V.v.1.)

The nature of Margaret's deed dispels all pity for her in this scene (V.v.) of her nemesis. In spite of the original or essential rightness of her cause, Henry's expression of sorrow for the supposed futility of her efforts to secure aid from France (III.i.29-54.), the humility of her supplications to Lewis (III.iii.), and her final admirable display of valour (V.iv.), the sentence served upon her is justified. She endures proper penance for the taunting and murder of York in witnessing the death of her own son; and the perpetuation of her grief effected by the enforced continuation of her life, requites her own prolonging of the equal grief of York whose lament she ironically echoes:

. . . men ne'er spent their fury on a child.  
 What's worse than murderer, that I may name it?  
 No, no, my heart will burst, an if I speak:  
 And I will speak, that so my heart may burst.  
 Butchers and villains! Bloody cannibals!  
 How sweet a plant have you untimely cropp'd!  
 You have no children, butchers! if you had,  
 The thought of them would have stirr'd up remorse.

(57-64)

The thought of her son did not move Margaret to pity York in his loss of Rutland.

The severity of Margaret's retribution purges her of her crime and alters the way in which her representation of unnaturalness is understood. Her abnormality, which was formerly presented as a paradox of attitude, is now depicted in an aberration of the motherly role or state which aberration is effected by an actual severance of the bond between mother and child. Any sympathy for Margaret would reduce her

role in Richard III to that of mere revenger; there is no Yorkist Northumberland here, however, to weep for wrongs done to Margaret. (Her return to England will prompt only a hypocritical Richard to acknowledge any injustice done to her; see Richard III, I.iii.306-8.) Though she vows revenge (in Richard III), she acts primarily as representative of the unnatural state of Britain, a condition perpetuated by Richard Duke of Gloucester; Margaret thus defines the role and fate of the other female characters in that chaotic realm. The loss of her son, complemented by the loss of her husband and throne, leaves Margaret barren, and stripped of her identifying roles, and ripe only to bewail the tragedy of that chaos.

7

Exploration of Margaret's important representative or metaphoric role has caused me to neglect her participation in the central part of the dramatic action of 3 Henry VI; this activity does not alter the assessment of her role but is nonetheless necessary to her total evaluation.

The gentility or graciousness with which she displays her conquest of York to her husband contrasts with the violence of her last "gesture" --the stabbing of York--and with the incisive callousness of her last remark on the stage: "Off with his head, and set it on York gates;/So York may overlook the town of York." (I.iv.179-80.) Her joy (In II.ii.) is still evident, but her tone is complacent or casual, her part in the killing having little affected her. (1-4) Her success has apparently

expiated the 'choler which she displayed in her first entry in the play; she now encourages Henry to "cheek up [his] spirits" (56) and to knight "our" son. (58, *italics mine*) The attitude of the prince reflects that of his mother from the outset of the play; he demonstrates the courage which his mother does and his father should possess, and, in his ready alliance with Margaret (I.I.), the prince underlines the strength of the mother-child bond.

The whole scene (II.ii.) portrays the continued dominance of Margaret and the insufferable resignation of Henry. Her control is displayed particularly in Clarence's statement, "You, that are king, thou he do wear the crown" (90), and in the total parley with the Yorks, wherein Henry, though notably his son is allowed to speak, is effectively silenced. The reflection on and condemnation of the circumstances of Henry's marriage is included perhaps for viewers of an individual performance of Henry VI. The direction of blame toward Margaret stresses the abnormality of her aggressive nature but is not wholly accurate:

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.

(159-62)

She as partner in the marriage was the admitted catalyst of the formation of factions and the rise of rebellion; sedition had, however, been brewing from the time of Henry's infancy.

Margaret's plea to the French king for aid during the time of Edward's first usurpation (III.iii.) is a more elaborate but less intense parallel of her concise and emphatic plea to Henry for Suffolk's reprieve. Adopting an uncommon subservient position, she addresses Lewis with humility and tears bringing to life the portrait of "poor Margaret" painted by Henry in his exile. (III.i.) Only when a situation renders her powerless to help those she loves does she take this stance. When in her own position of authority she exerts a warranted dominance. She does, however, respect rightful authority in others; this is indicated in her present appeal to Lewis. The French King requests that she sit, as he does; she replies:

No, mighty king of France: now Margaret  
 Must strike her sail and learn awhile to serve  
 Where kings command. I was, I must confess,  
 Great Albion's queen in former golden days:  
 But now mischance hath trod my title down,  
 And with dishonour laid me on the ground;  
 Where I must take like seat unto my fortune,  
 And to my humble seat conform myself.

(III.iii.4-11.)

Her profession of love for Henry (24) in spite of her recent gentle handling of him is rather emphatic in contrast to her initial "divorce" from him. Her cry in the stabbing of York--"And here's to fight our gentlehearted king" (I.iv.176.)--has some effect on this judgment, however. She has from the start attempted to secure and enforce the kingly power which Henry refuses to accept, and her dominance, symbolically determined by chaos in the realm, was literally occasioned by her husband's weakness and Suffolk's encouragement.



When French aid is finally acquired she states, "my mourning weeds are laid aside, / And I am ready to put armour on" (III.iii.229-30.), and she resumes her military leadership. Of Margaret's military competence Bandel says:

Queen Margaret eventually goes down to defeat but she is the most successful woman warrior in Shakespeare, and on the plains near Tewksbury [sic] before her last battle she makes the same kind of personal exhortation to her soldiery that Shakespeare's great warrior-kings like Henry V make.<sup>58</sup>

She becomes finally, with her son, the pilot of the Lancastrian ship, ready to "steer the [now unhappy] helm" as Suffolk in a more joyous time promised her she would. (2 Henry VI, I.iii.103.) The ship is now her army, however, which must challenge the dangerous elements of the House of York. (3 Henry VI, V.iv.1-38.) The valour expressed in Margaret's exhortation is applauded by her son (39-42), and the courage of both of these pillars of Lancaster is in turn extolled by Oxford. (50-54) What makes Margaret's bravery or valour the more admirable here is her present lack of arrogance; the gentleness of tone and the quiet emotion displayed in the interlude of her "second" mourning (III.iii.), is here, in her return to military activity, continued. Her final words are moving:

Lords, knights, and gentlemen, what I should say  
My tears gainsay; for every word I speak,  
Ye see, I drink the water of mine eyes:  
Therefore, no more but this: Henry, your sovereign,  
Is prisoner to the foe; his state usurp'd,  
His realm a slaughter-house, his subjects slain,  
His statutes cancell'd and his treasure spent;  
And yonder is the wolf that makes the spoil.  
You fight in justice: then, in God's name, lords,  
Be valiant and give signal to the fight.

(73-82)

<sup>58</sup>Bandel, p. 288.

A gradual softening in the presentation of Margaret; that is, a development of the quality of gentleness in the woman over these three scenes (Henry VI, II.ii.; III.iii.; V.iv.) of which this image (of the weeping valiant queen) is a product, makes her a more human figure to watch, but does not alter the play's judgment of her, in spite of the juxtaposition of this scene of valour or courage to that of her capture and severe punishment. It is too late to pity Margaret.

#### IV. ELIZABETH

With the death of the great Clifford and the flights of the Lancastrian king and queen to Scotland and France, respectively, plans for a premature installation of Edward as England's king are begun. Security for the maintenance of the power seized is sought not through agreement made with the opponent (as was the case in the peace concluded between England and France in Henry VI) but rather, by negotiation with a third party foreign to the quarrel to ensure domination of that opponent. Into this position of third party France now falls, and, once more, an alliance is attempted in a proposition of marriage between the English king and a French noblewoman, this time the sister of the French monarch. (3 Henry VI, II.vi.89-91.) The union is concomitant with the assumption of power; the suggestion of Warwick is as immediate as the offer made by the Earl of Armagnac to "surer bind [the] knot of amity" between France and England (1 Henry VI, V.i.16.) And, to further this comparison, the denial of the earlier betrothal follows its proposal as swiftly as does the disavowal of the later agreement. Each of these disruptions is effected by the satisfaction of the desire of a passionate king for another woman.

in the earlier instance of course, Margaret of Anjou, and in the later, Elizabeth Lady Grey.

Elizabeth, like Margaret, is introduced somewhat arbitrarily in a scene apparently but incidental to the plot shortly after the declaration of the king's betrothal. The diversionary quality of each woman's presence is soon altered to central importance as the Earl of Suffolk and king determine to have these politically insignificant and unbeneficial women, and hence to deny the promises made to the two "princesses" of France.

This initial similarity between the political roles of Elizabeth and Margaret encourages comparison of the two women which soon reveals important differences between their fulfillment of the wife and motherly roles consequent to their marriages. Whereas Margaret's abnormality extends beyond the circumstances of her introduction in the expression of her dominance as wife and aggressiveness as mother, Elizabeth's is confined to her participation in the politically unsuitable union with Edward; as wife and mother she adheres to the natural subservience and passivity of these womanly roles; she keeps her place.

It is not only in her literal action and attitude that Elizabeth contrasts with Margaret; the Yorkist queen's representation of naturalness --like Margaret's of unnaturalness--also encompasses her symbolic role. The fertility signified by Elizabeth's pregnancy, and the flourishing of her natural bonds causes her, as England's queen, to represent the naturalness attendant upon the apparent restoration of order by Edward IV and, as well, to act as the antithesis of Margaret whose identifying

bonds have been severed and have left her--by the end of 3 Henry VI--a sterile wailing woman.

The import of this contrast is strengthened by the fact that Elizabeth immediately succeeds Margaret as queen. When evil and disorder begin their gradual pervasion of the realm in Richard III, it is thus Elizabeth, as Margaret's substitute, who must figure or embody the growing unnaturalness of England. Her resultant losses and sorrow in the breaking of her natural bonds are determined by the literal actions of the ambitious Gloucester and by the symbolic demands of the play. Whereas Margaret's crime partially determined her nemesis, or at least its justification, Elizabeth's actions in the play involve no evil deed which warrants such expiation; this innocence, her conduct as wife and mother, and the dignity and humanness of her portrait, engender a pity for Elizabeth such as Margaret does not receive.

Even in Elizabeth's introductory scene (3 Henry VI, III.ii.) where similarities between the positions of these two characters are most evident, differences are already apparent. Lady Grey is not a prisoner, as Margaret was of Suffolk, but rather a petitioner to the new King Edward. She comes to court to claim for her children her deceased husband's lands which were seized by the House of York when Richard Grey was slain in battle. The encounter (3 Henry VI, III.ii.) has none of the aura of enchantment that the meeting of Margaret and Suffolk had, nor does Edward suffer from the desperately impassioned astonishment or infatuation of the young King Henry. In trying the "widow's wit" (33) Edward is merely testing Elizabeth's moral inclinations.

her willingness to lie with him. Until he finally reflects on her attitudes (84-89) he bears none of the admiration for her that might be called love. He bargains crudely for her favour using her love for her children to move her to the gratification of his unembellished lust. The humorous asides of his brothers who immediately understand his intentions underline that quality of his desire:

King Ed. [it were dishonour to deny her suit]; but yet I'll make  
a pause.

Glou. [aside to Clar.] Yea, is it so?  
I see the lady hath a thing to grant,  
Before the king will grant her humble suit.

Clar. [aside to Glou.] He knows the game: how true he keeps  
the wind!

(III.ii.10-14.)

He employs none of Suffolk's tender words (see 1 Henry VI, V.ii.69-70.), and proves, as Gloucester says, "the bluntest wooer in Christendom" (83); "to tell thee plain," Edward says to Elizabeth, "I aim to lie with thee."

(69)

There is a directness and honesty in Elizabeth's approach to her aggressive monarch, qualities which recall those of the princess Margaret; the widow, however, is more forward in her self-presentation, perhaps because she, unlike Margaret, is the suppliant.<sup>59</sup> She comes to the king

<sup>59</sup>To Edward's suggestion that she return another time Elizabeth replies:

"Right gracious lord, I cannot brook delay:  
May it please your highness to resolve me now;  
And what your pleasure is shall satisfy me."

(18-20)

To his comment that it would be a pity her children lose their father's lands she responds, "Be pitiful dread lord, and grant it then." (32)

as a loving mother--it is for her children, inheritors of her late husband's lands that she appeals to her monarch, and for them that she says she would attain some harm (35-41); she comes as a devoted subject who speaks reverently and respectfully to her king, offering him the love and duty required of her as such (42-49; 52-56); she comes also, however, as a virtuous and intelligent woman who will not compromise herself to fill either of these roles--she will not demean herself to serve her children or her monarch. Her misapprehension of the king's intent reveals not ignorance or false naivety<sup>60</sup> but rather her suggested honesty and her purity of mind. To the king's explanation of his intentions she replies boldly, "to tell you plain, I would rather lie in prison." (70) Says Betty Bandel of this response:

The right of any woman to refuse the advances even of a king is never questioned in the plays. In Henry the Sixth, Part Three, when Lady Grey discovers what it is that King Edward the Fourth is proposing, she speaks to him as she might to any man in England.<sup>61</sup>

She engenders admiration even in the lusty Edward who is moved to take her as queen:

Her looks do argue her replete with modesty;  
 Her words do show her wit incomparable;  
 All her perfections challenge sovereignty:  
 One way or other she is for a king;  
 And she shall be my love, or else my queen.

(84-88)

<sup>60</sup> Such misapprehension must be expressed in the intonation of her lines.

<sup>61</sup> Bandel, p. 228.

Elizabeth, reflecting the knowledge of the position of a subject demonstrated in Margaret's reply to Suffolk's proposition ("I am unworthy to be Henry's wife" Henry VI, V.iii.122.), maintains a balance of humility and dignity in the following response to King Edward's proposal that she be queen:-

I know I am too mean to be your queen,  
And yet too good to be your concubine.

(97-98).

Elizabeth is an ideal realized on the stage in completely human terms; she possesses the honour "sometimes equated with honesty"<sup>62</sup> and is hence devoid of ambition. She is not a mere caricature of that honour, she is here a rounded figure upholding her belief with emotion, and wit. It is as such that Edward finally chooses her. His choice, however, though more "reasoned" than that of Henry, also lacks political wisdom and provokes the immediate and eventual turmoil of dissension.

The nobility in the character of Elizabeth does not compensate for her political in consequence--she is a mere subject. The great foreign alliance attendant to the marriage of Boha and Edward is not part of the "dowry" of Lady Grey. The need for such alliance is explained, with some prejudice, by Margaret:

... [Warwick's] demand  
Springs not from Edward's well-meant honest love,  
But from deceit bred by necessity;  
For how can tyrants safely govern home,  
Unless abroad they purchase great alliance?

(III.iii.66-70.)

---

<sup>62</sup>Fitch, p. 206.



The rejection of Bona is an insult not only to that princess, but also to the negotiator of the marriage, the Yorkist ambassador Warwick, and of course, the French king. "Edward's mockery" (265) warrants revenge, which finds logical expression in a transfer of loyalties from the House of York to that House's opponents, the Lancasters, whose cause Margaret is concurrently pleading at the French court. With French aid, Lancaster becomes a revived and puissant contender to the throne of England and so effects a temporary removal of Edward from power.

Response to the marriage at the English court is similarly negative. The union is regarded bitterly by the king's brothers who make sarcastic reference to its lustful basis and conjecture with Montague on its political ramifications. (IV.i.) Clarence and Gloucester are further disturbed by the advancement of the queen's relatives in expedient marriages arranged by the king. This implied favouritism and negligence by the king of his own kin compounds the brothers' displeasure which, with the validation of their fearful conjectures in the arrival of a messenger from France, is amplified or extended in the open rebellion of the Duke of Somerset and the king's own brother Clarence.

Whereas foreign aid through marital alliance could have arrested England's civil turmoil, the "home-bred" (IV.i:38.) marriage of Edward and Lady Grey perpetuates the unnatural disorder which disorder now pervades at the foreign, domestic and familial levels. Marriages proliferate with the vacillation of loyalties; unions are effected for financial-political

security or advancement,<sup>63</sup> and for the certification of allegiance.<sup>64</sup>

2

Though politically abnormal, the marriage of Edward and Lady Grey is natural within itself. Edward's self-assertion renders unnecessary any aggressiveness on Elizabeth's part. She conforms to her subservient role and hence contrasts with the domineering Margaret. Edward, unlike Henry, does not elude his antagonists but meets them head on; having determined the extent of the allegiance to him he cries:

... then am I sure of victory.  
Now therefore let us hence; and lose no hour,  
Till we meet Warwick with his foreign power.

(IV.1.147-49.)

Thus Elizabeth as queen, unlike Margaret, has no need to exercise the power of king. Although conscious of her position as monarch, her presence at court and hence on the stage differs from that of Henry's wife, whose incisive comments are not paralleled in the verbal expression of Elizabeth; Edward's queen is not silent but rather temperate in tone in the defence of her dignity:

---

<sup>63</sup>The daughter of Lord Hungerford and Lord Hastings; the daughter of Lord Scales and Lord Rivers, brother of Elizabeth; daughter of Lord Bolville and Elizabeth's son.

<sup>64</sup>Warwick's daughter Anne and Margaret's son Edward, to confirm Warwick's allegiance; Warwick's younger daughter and Clarence, to seal the bond between the ambassador and the king's brother.

My lords, before it pleased 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 dislike, to whom I would be pleasing,  
 Doth cloud my joys with danger and with sorrow.

(67-74)

This is her sole comment in this scene; she does not interfere in King Edward's political discussion. Her stance here is not due to inhibition bred by unfamiliarity with her new and heightened position; Shakespeare is casting her in a definite role which will soon become evident.

She next appears with her brother Rivers at the palace after Edward's apprehension in battle. (IV.iv.) Because she feels that the release of profound emotion will harm her unborn child, she attempts to contain her grief for her husband. This radical precaution, whether an absurdity<sup>65</sup> or not, provides an antithesis to Margaret's activity as a mother. Each woman strives to protect her child and to maintain the inheritance of her House. Whereas Margaret unnaturally espouses "masculine" battle, Elizabeth adopts the passivity of the traditional female role. In the manner in which she fulfills her womanly roles of queen, wife and mother, then, in her passivity and adherence to the subservient position in the relationships in which she participates, Elizabeth contrasts with the aggressive and dominant Margaret.

It is Margaret's position, however, which Elizabeth will "fill"

---

<sup>65</sup>Reese, p. 195.

after that queen's deposition and banishment. The usurpation by the House of York marks not only the conclusion of Margaret's reign, but also the termination of her wife and motherhood in the event of the deaths of her husband and son. In Elizabeth's final appearance in 3 Henry VI (V.vii.), she demonstrates conversely the maximum fulfillment of these roles. This final representation is anticipated in the portrait of the pregnant Elizabeth which emphasizes the fertility which contrasts with Margaret's eventual sterility and barrenness. In her ability to perpetuate growth, in her "conformity" to her natural role or function, Elizabeth epitomizes or represents the apparent return of natural order to the realm of England. Margaret, however, in her aberrant quality, represents the abnormality or unnaturalness extant and embodied in the person of Gloucester by whom a frustration of growth, of the fruition or continuation of Edward's line, will be effected. As queen, the literal determinant of the flourishing of that line, and symbolic representative of the condition of the realm, the triumph (or near-triumph) of evil and unnaturalness signified in the success of this Duke necessitates an alteration of Elizabeth's role. Her representation of England must conform to that country's condition. Hence she must, like Margaret, be stripped of her identifying roles and, no longer the nourishing mother, become the wailing woman. This arbitrary aberration, this enforced inability to fulfill her natural functions, is, unlike that of Margaret, undeserved and hence pitiable; Elizabeth is a victim of that unnatural realm which she, in Richard III, must represent.

The first impression given of Queen Elizabeth in Richard III is of a dominant aggressive monarch who uses her influence over the king to advance her own family at the expense of her husband's (I.i.62-83; 106), an impression alien to that conveyed to the viewer of 3 Henry VI. It must be immediately noted, however, that the slanderous comment is made for the most part by the great dissembler, Gloucester, a professed villain (28-31) whose specific evil intentions are revealed before anything else in the play. (32-41) His part in the apprehension of Clarence already intimated, the audience need not take his words literally. Furthermore, when the queen does enter in act one, scene three, she betrays no assured arrogance but rather fearful apprehension of what she understands--more than her brother and son--is her perilous position. Aware of the hatred of Gloucester she correctly asserts that the loss of King Edward would include "all harm." (I.iii.8.)

It is soon evident that the impulsive marriage of Edward and Elizabeth, like that of Margaret and Henry, has generated enmity among the peers which Edward desires to atone. (17-41) The entrance of Gloucester provokes argument; his accusations of the injustice of Elizabeth's advancement and her abuse of the privilege of her position prompt her justified and vehement defense of her honesty. Because of the overt demonstration of the evil dissemblance of Gloucester presented thus far in the play, his charges can be acknowledged by the audience as blatant lies; the viewers support Queen Elizabeth when she denies having

"incensed" Edward against Clarence, and says:

My Lord of Gloucester, I have too long borne  
Your blunt upbraidings and your bitter scoffs:  
By heaven, I will acquaint his majesty  
With those gross taunts I often have endured.  
I had rather be a country servant-maid  
Than a great queen, with this condition,  
To be thus taunted, scorn'd, and baited at:

(I.iii.103-9.)

Just before Elizabeth concludes her speech, the former queen importantly appears, at the back of the stage; to the audience alone is she visible, her presence temporarily unknown to the characters on stage. The past and present queen become one for the audience as Elizabeth states "small joy have I in being England's queen." (110) The substitution of the Yorkist for the Lancastrian queen is emphasized in this visual demonstration; the return of Margaret from her banishment in this ghost-like manner and her visual alignment with the present queen, stresses her loss of identity and implies subtly a similar fate for her substitute, a fate Margaret will soon reveal in her prophetic curse:

If not by war by surfeit die your king,  
As ours by murder, to make him a king!  
Edward thy son, which now is Prince of Wales,  
For Edward my son, which was Prince of Wales,  
Die in his youth by like untimely violence!  
Thyself a queen, for me that was a queen,  
Outlive thy glory like my wretched self!  
Long mayst thou live to wail thy children's loss;  
And see another, as I see thee now,  
Deck'd in thy rights, as thou art stall'd in mine!  
Long die thy happy days before thy death;  
And after many lengthen'd hours of grief,  
Die neither mother, wife, nor England's queen!

(497-209)

She wishes Elizabeth to endure the same trauma which she herself has suffered. There is little response to the content of Margaret's curse; there are only pleas for her silence. Elizabeth's participation in the scene is minimal; her comment "I never did [Margaret] any [wrong] to my knowledge" (309) is sadly true; but it does not change the fact that she is Margaret's substitute and must succumb to the same fate as that queen.

Elizabeth's isolation, through the severance of her identifying bonds, occurs in stages; her suffering is prolonged and hence intensified; and the loss of her representation of naturalness logically parallels the simultaneous rise of Gloucester and the "diffusion" of unnaturalness throughout the realm. The first misfortune which Elizabeth encounters is the loss of her husband. The death of the king relieves her of the role of wife and provokes her first lamentation. She enters in hysterical grief (II.ii.), "with her hair about her ears", totally preoccupied with this specific deprivation. In her expression of sorrow she is accompanied by the daughter and son of the deceased Clarence, and her mother-in-law, the Duchess of York; her grief hence becomes part of a chorus of lamentation which compounds the unnaturalness which the deaths cause by the enumeration of the various bonds severed, and which anticipates the later important scene of mourning (IV.iv.) which effects the complete transfer of Margaret's sorrow to Elizabeth. The central chant-like lines of repetition give the present event a ritual-like quality. This quality in turn gives a symbolic aura to this wailing which again anticipates the weeping of the later scene. Elizabeth's suffering is made bitter and

hence more pitiable by the children's lack of empathy; bewitched by Gloucester, the two, blaming the queen for their father's imprisonment and presuming (without warrant, see 11.1.75-76.) her lack of love or grief for him, refuse to weep for her sorrow. Elizabeth replies however,

Give me no help in lamentation;  
I am not barren to bring forth complaints:  
All springs reduce their currents to mine eyes,  
That I, being govern'd by the watery moon,  
May send forth plenteous tears to drown the world!

(11.1i.66-70.)

That fertility in Elizabeth which gave the Yorkist House an heir now produces not nourishment but the fruitless salt tears of mourning. Elizabeth's words begin to effect the transformation of her role to a representation of unnaturalness and sterility which transformation is commenced in the severance of the natural bond between herself and Edward.

The participation of the Duchess of York in this scene is significant: not only does she stress that the king's death constitutes but the first stage in Elizabeth's "decline", but, furthermore, the Duchess then takes on a symbolic "task" which gives direction to Elizabeth's destiny by illustrating the final stage or completion of the young queen's transformation. Bereft of husband and children (she has a child left, but Gloucester is but a "false glass" of his parents [11.11.53.]); the Duchess identifies herself as the "mother of . . . moans" (80) and "sorrow's nurse" (87), echoing the words which formed the images which I said gave a defining framework to the role of woman in the early history plays (see above, p. 3): ordered England as



"[a] nurse, [a] teeming womb of royal kings"; and chaotic England as "a nourish [a nurse] of salt tears." The Duchess, this latter nurse, like Elizabeth, is "not barren to bring forth complaints"; her reference to these basic images encourages symbolic interpretation of the younger queen's remark which could be otherwise considered but incidental phrasing. The older woman, like Margaret, represents that unnaturalness of which Elizabeth is a victim and which she too will come to represent. However, unlike Margaret, as mother-England and mother of Gloucester, the force of unnatural evil, the Duchess figures not only the disordered state of England, but an England which engenders the chaos that destroys that country itself. Her womb is not merely barren, but the antithesis of that "teeming womb of royal kings," a producer of evil tyrants. She signifies an England of no particular house or reign, but an England so distorted it preys upon itself.

The cessation of the lament brings gentle chastisement from Dorset and Rivers of their mother and sister Elizabeth for dwelling on the loss of her husband when hope flourishes in the succession of Edward's son. (89-100) The language of growth or nourishment is now applied to the prospective succession not only by Elizabeth's relatives but also, ironically, by the Dukes of Gloucester and Buckingham, who are conspiring not for the young Edward's but for Gloucester's advancement. (Such words as "plant", "bear", "harvest", "reap", and "green" are used; see lines 100-139.)

The imprisonment of Elizabeth's brother and her son Lord Grey causes a renewal of her temporarily allayed apprehension; she predicts, "ay me, I see the downfall of our house!" (II.iv.49.); and by the time she returns to the stage (IV.i.), her relatives have been executed; Richard of Gloucester has secured a following of peers and commoners and is ready to be installed as king; and Elizabeth's two young sons are virtually imprisoned in the Tower.

This confinement of her sons effects an estrangement between Elizabeth and her children which weakens her position as mother. Concurrent to the straining of this bond is the enforced forfeiture by Elizabeth of her crown; this loss of her position as queen denotes the second step in her isolation. The significance of the scene before the Tower, however, lies largely in the identification of the Duchess and Lady Anne with Elizabeth. News of the deprivation of the rights of visitation unites the three women in protestation:

Q. Eliz. I am their mother; who should keep me from them?

Duch. I am their father's mother; I will see them.

Anne. Their aunt I am in law, in love their mother:  
Then bring me to their sights;

(IV.i.22-25.)

The unnaturalness of this severance is further emphasized visually, in Elizabeth's dramatic address to the Tower:

Stay, yet look back with me unto the Tower.  
Pity, you ancient stones, those tender babes  
Whom envy hath immured within your walls!  
Rough cradle for such little pretty ones!  
Rude ragged nurse, old sullen playfellow

For tender princes, use my babies well!  
So foolish sorrow bids your stones farewell.

(98-104)

"Fancy--how effective on the stage," says Stopford Augustus Brooke.<sup>66</sup> The specific employment of the image of the nurse effects Elizabeth's forced resignation of that position. The news of the succession of the new monarchs, Richard and Anne, has as its corollary the removal--that is the deaths--of the natural heirs to the throne. This understanding prompts Elizabeth to instruct her son Dorset:

O Dorset, speak not to me, get thee hence!  
Death and destruction dog thee at the heels;  
Thy mother's name is ominous to children.  
If thou wilt outstrip death, go cross the seas,  
And live with Richmond, from the reach of hell:  
Go, hie thee, 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 counter queen.

(39-47)

But Margaret's curse is already operative (Rivers, Grey, and Vaughan in act three, scene two, acknowledge fulfillment of her curse as they meet their execution, as does Hastings in act three, scene four); and the murder of the two young princes will be adequate significance for the aberration of Elizabeth's mother-role.

When she returns to the stage with the Duchess of York, the two children have been murdered. This final loss inflicted, Margaret returns to join in the lamentation of the two women. Elizabeth's transformation

---

<sup>66</sup>Stopford Augustus Brooke, "Richard III", New Shakespeare Society Publications, London, Series 1, no. 10, 1880-86., p. 518.

is completed; she now fills Margaret's position as husbandless wife, childless mother, and throneless queen. The Lancastrian queen's sorrow is hence fully passed onto her, in an image which effects a "visual" transfer of roles:

Thou didst usurp my place, and dost thou not  
 Usurp the just proportion of my sorrow?  
 Now thy proud neck bears half my burthen'd yoke;  
 From which even here I slip my weary neck,  
 And leave the burthen of it all on thee.

(IV. iv. 109-113.)

5

There is controversy over the artistic validity and psychological realism of the conclusion of this scene. (IV. iv.) Elizabeth, the representative victim of the realm's unnaturalness; bereaved queen, mother and widow, encounters the engenderer of that chaos, the wicked Richard III. In an encore to the seduction of Lady Anne (I. ii.), the new king attempts to woo Elizabeth for the hand of her daughter. The outrageous quality of this plan is not the contended issue of discredit however; it is rather the believability of the persuasion itself.

The incident follows the moving spectacle of the lamentation. The two women are hence in mourning; their grief is intense. The flippancy, with which Richard responds to his mother and the lightness of tone he employs are most incongruous to the gravity of the moment and the formality of the preceding ritual. The trauma which Elizabeth has undergone in this scene and indeed, throughout the whole play has brought her to a state of despair which, in spite of her plaintive cry to Richard

--"Where are my children" (144)--has rendered her, as she says, spiritless (196), void of energy, of emotional expression. Deprived of her former identity, and confronted by her destroyer, Elizabeth is a pitiful figure as she explains in this forcibly restrained sorrow, that he can take no more from her:

I have no more sons of the royal blood  
 For thee to murder: for my daughters, Richard,  
 They shall be praying nuns, not weeping queens;  
 And therefore level not to hit their lives.

(199-202)

Her contrast of queens and nuns gives that former role an implicit sexual connotation, that is, a natural inclusion of the mother-wife role in the identification of queen; she thus points to her own role and to the pain that she wants her daughters to avoid. The insinuating line of Richard-- "You have a daughter call'd Elizabeth, / Virtuous and fair, royal and gracious" (203-4)--prompts immediate frightened response from Elizabeth. (205-10). Her reviving strength takes an intellectual form, her defence or argument an increasing eloquence or wit which is conveyed in the acceleration of her responses to Richard. This acceleration in turn, creates a tension which betrays her fear and grief which at once subserve but also sustain her argument.

The intellectual quality of the interplay in this sequence is sometimes seen as overdone<sup>67</sup> or as detrimental to the emotional import

<sup>67</sup>Brooke, p. 516: "We admire Shakespeare's infinite variety and richness of thought in dramatic clash of talk, each sentence answering the last and accounting for the next; but we feel that, in the pleasure of the exercise of his intellect, Shakespeare has been carried away. . ."

of this confrontation;<sup>68</sup> the very length of the argument itself is often greeted by objection.<sup>69</sup> However, the maintenance and duration of this intellectual interplay are contributory to the impact and believability of the scene. In the first part of the argument, Richard attempts to persuade Elizabeth that he intends good to her family, but to no avail. He then tells her that this shall be effected by his marriage to her daughter who shall be queen. This proposal she greets with amazement, a response which is followed in the second part of the speech by his attempt to learn how to woo the young Elizabeth. Every word Elizabeth speaks is coloured with the pain and bitterness of her loss; this is felt especially in her reiteration of his deeds which deeds make his proposal so grotesque. (271-83) A weak hysterical laughter is kept just subservient to her utterance in her response of incredulity to Richard's proposition.

<sup>68</sup>Wolfgang A. Clemen, A Commentary on Shakespeare's Richard III, (London: Methuen and Company, 1968), p. 193: "... but Elizabeth's speeches are reasoned and logical. Elizabeth is never guilty of vehement outbursts and exaggerations; the result is a certain coldness and artificiality in some passages (e.g. 343-365)."

<sup>69</sup>Palmer, p. 86: "[scene iv] is in itself a variation [of I,ii] which repeats the earlier performance in a more formal and decorative style. It is more ingenious than convincing and it provokes a momentary impatience. We are tempted to exclaim with Polonius: 'This is too long'." Sprague, p. 138: "Richard's scene with Anne is very nearly actor-proof. Even a half-incredulous audience listens to it. His scene with Elizabeth is commonly distrusted, and heavily cut, by producers."

Rich. . . . .  
And mean to make her [Elizabeth's daughter] queen of England.

Eliz. Say then, who dost thou mean shall be her king?

Rich. Even he that makes her queen: who should be else?

Eliz. What, thou?

Rich. I. even I: what think you of it, madam?

Eliz. How canst thou woo her?

Rich. . . . . That would I learn of you,  
As one that are best acquainted with her humour.

Eliz. And wilt thou learn of me?

Rich. . . . . Madam, with all my heart.

(IV. iv. 263-70.)

But she retains control and wit even though the dialogue involves the exchange of many single lines and taxes her reason and emotion to its maximum:

(343-56; and the following;)

Rich. Be eloquent in my behalf to her.

Eliz. An honest tale speeds best being plainly told.

Rich. Then in plain terms tell her my loving tale.

Eliz. Plain and not honest is too harsh a style.

Rich. Your reasons are too shallow and too quick.

Eliz. O no, my reasons are too deep and dead;  
Too deep and dead, poor infants, in their grave.

Rich. Harp not on that string, madam; that is past.

Eliz. Harp on it still shall I till heartstrings break.

(357-65)

She continues in brilliant converse as the Interchange accelerates, surpassing his reputedly eloquent use of words in the interrupting of his individual lines, as she demonstrates the extent of the pervasion of his evil which has left nothing unwronged by which he can swear his sincerity. Thus forced to swear by himself, he, promising his repentance, makes a final endeavor to persuade Elizabeth. (397-417)

The height of Elizabeth's tension, which has been building throughout the scene, the point at which her restraint or control is most tenuous, is reached in her four final questioning lines (418, 420, 422, 426) which in their incredulity and tremulous hysteric tone determine the point of her emotional and intellectual exhaustion which in turn determines her final apparent acquiescence (428-29):

Eliz. Shall I be tempted of the devil thus?

Rich. Ay, if the devil tempt thee to do good.

Eliz. Shall I forget myself to be myself?

Rich. Ay, if yourself's remembrance wrong yourself.

Eliz. But thou didst kill my children.

Rich. But in your daughter's womb I bury them:  
Where in that nest of spicery they shall breed  
Selves of themselves, to your recomforture.

Eliz. Shall I go win my daughter to thy will?

Rich. And be a happy mother by the deed.

Eliz. I go. Write to me very shortly,  
And you shall understand from me her mind.

(418-29)



The fact that she lies in her last two lines, the fact that her inferred consent to Richard's proposition is nothing of the kind, is revealed by Derby in the very next scene; instructing Richmond's messenger, he states:

Tell him [Richmond] the queen hath heartily consented  
He shall espouse Elizabeth her daughter.

(IV.v.17-18.)

That Elizabeth consciously dissembles in her final lines is rendered improbable by her emotional state; more likely her response is due to the termination of the strain of her intellectual control--as suggested--in a kind of nervous collapse or mental exhaustion.<sup>70</sup> The important point is that Elizabeth, unlike Anne, does not succumb to Richard's persuasive powers;<sup>71</sup> acquiescence on her part--in spite of the effectiveness

---

<sup>70</sup>Furthermore, if Elizabeth consequently dupes Richard, his exuberant confidence is ironically undercut; this failure moreover, acts as a portent of his own altered conduct, his confusion and loss of some control, in the rest of this scene. See Sprague, below, footnote 71.

<sup>71</sup>Alice Lotvin Birney, Satiric Catharsis in Shakespeare (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 42: "Elizabeth has won-- she only pretends to succumb to this tempting devil."

Sprague, p. 139: "Elizabeth . . . is not Anne, and not what Richard took her for, a fool. . . Shakespeare, perhaps unwisely, left it to the actress to suggest that Richard's spell is cast in vain. But later in the same scene he shows him to have lost some of his old efficiency. The villain now forgets and flounders, and yielding to a sudden passion strikes the messenger who brings him, as it proves, good news at last. This is a Richard ripe for deception as well as defeat."

Warner, p. 235: "Elizabeth appears to yield to Richard's blandishments. We need not believe the poet intended it for more than seeming. He here means to indicate how Richard's intellectual cunning was beginning to overreach itself. The snare into which Anne had fallen he spread for Elizabeth and fell into himself. The Queen hoodwinked him and intended to. 'Relenting fool and shallow changing woman' as Richard thought her, she was then in correspondence with Richmond and destined once more to see happy days in the reign of her daughter as England's queen."

with which Richard presents his claims--would be a blot on her otherwise noble character.

6

Elizabeth's operation as a literal or human character has been discussed only with reference to her introduction (in 3 Henry VI), her first appearance as queen with Rivers and Grey (in Richard III, I.iii.), and her final participation in the persuasion scene. The scenes in which discussion of her literal function has been neglected, however, form an area of natural exclusion: they concern her fulfillment of Margaret's curse, and hence her symbolic role. The development of Elizabeth during her reign is a symbolic decline characterized by her gradual accumulation of the sorrow of Margaret and the aberration of her identifying roles which effect an alteration in her representation from that of naturalness to unnaturalness. Her development is determined externally rather than by an internal change in her character. Pity for Elizabeth is engendered by her position as victim; that is, by her innocence. Her only "crime" is her participation in a politically unwise marriage, a union which reflected, however, more the irrationality of Edward as monarch, than the lust or aggressiveness of Elizabeth herself. Accusations made against her and her family are unsubstantiated by evidence given in the play and are hence unjustified. Suspicion of ambition is cast upon her not because of her character but because she is unwealthy and a widow; the slanderous remarks made by Gloucester and Buckingham can be partially attributed to a cynical attitude toward such

women.<sup>72</sup>

Throughout the play Elizabeth demonstrates the balance of humility and dignity originally attributed to her. She is not timorous in defence of her rights (3 Henry VI, IV.1.67-74.), but does not presume authority beyond her place. Her apprehensions and fears are not cowardly but wise--she is not blind to the ambitions of Gloucester. (I.iii.; II.iv.49-54.; IV.i.39-47.) She is a tender woman (II.i.73-76.; IV.i., her words to Lady Anne), whose capacity for love is revealed in the depth of her obviously honest grief. This love combines with her wisdom in her brilliant defeat of King Richard in her final appearance in the play.

The qualities cited in this brief analysis of Elizabeth are perhaps more intimated than factual; in spite of Elizabeth's symbolic confinement, however, Shakespeare's portrait of this queen definitely does give a good basis for an actress's creative expression.

---

<sup>72</sup>Lu. Emily Pearson, "Elizabethan Widows", Stanford Studies in Language and Literature, ed. Hardin Craig (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1941), p. 132: Pearson uses Shakespeare's account of the "gossip" about the marriage of Edward and Elizabeth as an example of the slandering of the widow typical of the Elizabethan age. Quoting Buckingham's words in III.vii.174-91., she comments: "the injustice of his words is felt most keenly after reading Shakespeare's account of how the widow repulses the lustful advances of King Edward."

## V. ANNE

The participation of Lady Anne in Richard III is confined to two scenes. Her portrait is much less complete or detailed than Elizabeth's, her role more strictly emblematic or exemplary. Her widowhood is typical of the condition and fate of the women of this play's realm and is symptomatic of that realm's unnaturalness of which she is also a victim. Anne is introduced as an already wailing woman; her suffering in this play takes an altered and more specific form. Whereas Elizabeth's nemesis is determined by the general situation of unnaturalness incidentally embodied in Richard Duke of Gloucester, Anne falls prey directly to the villain himself, the signification of her particular trauma being the illustration of the power and preponderance of the evil incarnate in Richard.

His desire to win her is political not passionate, his "secret close intent" (I.I.158.) as Nathan describes it:

... Richard wanted to marry Anne because she was (in the play, if not in fact) the widow of the rightful inheritor to the throne, the son of Henry VI. In the eyes of the religious, Richard's marriage to Anne could make him appear to be the proper heir to the kingship since Edward IV and his children are not descendants of Henry VI. Edward IV

would emerge as a usurper until such time as Richard could secure the governance of the country.<sup>73</sup>

Although he later follows an alternate route in the attainment of the throne, it is thus that he originally determines to use Anne. The inclusion of his wooing and winning of her in act one, scene two, does little to effect a portrayal of the woman, but rather serves to demonstrate the persuasive power of the evil of this man, a power so intense as to overcome the following obstacles, to the amazement of even Richard himself:

What! I, that kill'd her husband and his father,  
To take her in her heart's extremest hate,  
With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,  
The bleeding witness of her hatred by;  
Having God, her conscience, and these bars against me,  
And I nothing to back my suit at all,  
But the plain devil and dissembling looks,  
And yet to win her, all the world to nothing!

(I.ii.231-38.)

Indeed, the prime purpose of this scene is "to show Richard's insolent virtuosity in persuasion and his delight in the exercise of his mind and will."<sup>74</sup> Anne does not present the same intellectual challenge or contention to Richard as does Elizabeth in his wooing of that queen; "for Richard, Anne is a mere object, not a real antagonist, and her function is largely to reveal his character."<sup>75</sup> The quality or tone of the whole scene differs from that of the later encounter. Whereas

---

<sup>73</sup>Norman Nathan, "The Marriage of Richard and Anne", Notes and Queries, v. 200 (Jan.-Dec.), February 1955, p. 56.

<sup>74</sup>Palmer, p. 81.

<sup>75</sup>Clemen, p. 22.

Elizabeth's despair, having rendered her spiritless in the depth of her misery, causes her emotion to subserve her utterance and her defence to take the form of intellectual strength, Anne's grief, equalled by her anger, is expended in bitter lament and powerful curses--that is, in an overt and voluminous expression of her emotions. The intensity of Elizabeth's sorrow is conveyed in the build up of tension created by the restraint of her very emotions and the draining of her intellectual capacity leading to mental exhaustion; the pattern of Anne's remorse, however, which remorse begins at its height and is eventually subdued, is paralleled in an equal waning of the original energy of her expression. Another explanation of the distinction in quality of the interchange in these two encounters is given by Clemen:

Anne's response to Richard's flattery and self-justification lies in taking up his words only to hurl them back as curses and accusations; Elizabeth, on the other hand, carries Richard's train of thought forward in directions he had not intended, wilfully misunderstanding him; so while her replies frequently sound like logical answers to what Richard is saying (see 241-2) and sometimes a deliberate 'confounding of his meaning' (261), they rob his remarks of all their force and actually disprove them. In I, ii, Richard's adroit use of maxims and the 'keen encounter of wit' enables him to put Anne at a disadvantage and drive her into a useless outburst of anger.<sup>76</sup>

The introduction of Anne is very much a "set-piece"; she presents herself somewhat arbitrarily to the audience as a mourner in a soliloquy which voices her curse upon Richard and his future wife and child. (1-32). The presence of King Henry's corpse gives a certain theatricality or even

---

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

a "dumb-show" quality to the entry and acts as a physical reminder of the wrongs done to Lancaster which Richard has, just previously, easily dismissed; "What though I kill'd her husband and her father?" (l.l.154.), he had asked. Anne addresses Richard in vicious epithets, venting her anger in an exclamatory tone which is not alleviated until he has begged her to kill him and she finds herself unable to do it. (184)<sup>77</sup>

Richard exalts the power of her beauty over him, naming it the cause of his repentant weeping and of his very crimes (121-24; 166-67; 180-83); thus appealing to her vanity he renders her condemnation of him impossible. To extend the power he attests she has over him, which, residing in her eyes, already "kill[s him] with a living death" (153), he gives her literal control over his life by giving her his sword and "lay[ing] his breast open" to her. Again extolling her beauty, he cleverly divides the blame for the murders of the Lancastrian king and prince between himself and Anne, by juxtaposing his confession with her guilt:

Nay, do not pause; for I did kill King Henry,  
 But 'twas thy beauty that provoked me.  
 Nay, now dispatch; 'twas I that stabbed young Edward,  
 But 'twas thy heavenly face that set me on.

(180-83)

The gesture with the sword is again theatrical: she points the weapon at the kneeling Richard's breast, depicting visually the ironic reversal of roles which leaves Anne in apparent control. She then lets the sword

---

<sup>77</sup>"Foul devil" (50); "O wonderful, when devils tell the truth!" (73); "In thy foul throat thou liest" (94); "Black night o'ershade thy day, and death thy life!" (131); "Never hung poison on a fouler toad./ Out of my sight! thou dost infect my eyes." (148-49)

fall in symbolic gesture of resignation. Her tone is now subdued and she accepts, at first partially, and then finally "with all [her] heart" (220), his penitence. Richard places a ring on her finger and again, visually, her approval of him is signified.

The overt intensity with which Anne displays her emotion, which could perhaps be termed (at least partially) aural, compounded with the ritual quality of the formal entry, the structured soliloquy and the visual gestures, gives this scene a theatricality or "largeness" which makes the "conversion" of Anne emblematic or exemplary of Richard's power. This element does not preclude the psychological credibility of Anne's persuasion, however. To quote at length again from Clemen's analysis:

Richard's breathless leap from dissimulation to open avowal of his own misdeeds causes Anne to accept his candour as genuine; and so she believes in his remorse, his contrition, his subsequent declaration of love, and finally his professed grief over the dead king (211). He exploits her vanity, her pride at the thought that she is reclaiming a contrite sinner; he exploits moreover the psychological distance which separates Anne's wish for his destruction and the actual performance of the deed.<sup>78</sup>

Thus her final acquiescence is not merely a "helpless bewilderment" effected by the conquering of her will,<sup>79</sup> but a logical persuasion which convinces her that he is truly penitent. It is her belief of Richard, which makes her situation pitiable and his exultation in the success of his deception so detestable:

---

<sup>78</sup>Clemen, p. 32.

<sup>79</sup>Palmer, p. 84.



Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?  
 Was ever woman in this humour won?  
 I'll have her; but I will not keep her long.

(228-30)

Anne does not reappear in the play until Richard has achieved the crown. She joins in the thwarted visitation to the young princes (IV.1.), on which occasion she is informed of her impending coronation. (32-33) She is united not only in law to the Yorkist women, but also in their attempt as women to maintain the natural bond of mother and child. Her despair at the news of her coronation, heightened by the painful image of the searing crown (59-64) and her prediction of her own death (86-87), again identifies her with these bereaved women who are also victims of the evil Richard III. Even Elizabeth, whose position Anne unwillingly usurps, is moved by her sorrow--"Go, go, poor soul, I envy not thy glory; / To feed my humour, wish thyself no harm." (64-65) The mutual compassion of the two queens emphasizes their common destiny:

Q. Eliz. Poor heart, adieu! I pity thy complaining.  
 Anne. No more than from my soul I mourn for yours.  
 Q. Eliz. Farewell, thou woful welcomer of glory!  
 Anne. Adieu, poor soul, that takest thy leave of it!

(IV.1.88-91.)

Anne chastises herself for succumbing to Richard's charms and, recalling her very words, acknowledges herself the subject of her own curse. (66-87) She has been a pawn of Richard and, no longer needed, will now be discarded.

In spite of her brief appearance on the stage, Anne's victimization and her gentle portrait in this scene engender pity for this quite undeveloped character.

## VI. MARGARET IN RICHARD III

From the audience's viewpoint, Margaret is alienated from the other characters on the stage from the time of her first appearance in Richard III; this estrangement is effected visually and aurally by her subtle yet ironically-obvious entry at the back of the stage (in act one, scene three) where she is seen by the audience but not by the other characters. Her special isolation allows the audience a private ear to Margaret's bitter comments about Gloucester, ironically counterpointing his recitation of the past glories of himself and his family, not only undercutting his praise of his military bravado and nobility, but also the position of the House of York, in offering as adjunct to his comments the Lancastrian estimate of these past affairs, and hence giving a total recollection of the events in 3 Henry VI.

Margaret is thus importantly opposed in political affiliation to these characters and most evidently resents what she considers their usurpation. Her particular "antagonism" to Elizabeth is emphasized by the placement of Margaret's entry at the specific moment of Elizabeth's self-identification in the line, "small joy have I in being England's queen" (1.iii.110.); the application of the remark to both women is

effected by this visual alignment which also presumes the substitution of Elizabeth for Margaret and, here, a unity in their opposition (see above, p. 90).

The peculiarity of her entrance has additional import: her "unheard" remarks act as the voice of conscience or, more accurately, the past, whose wrongs she here echoes. Operating on a different plane from the other characters in the play; she predicts but does not participate in the action of the drama.


With the entrance of Margaret--an almost mythical figure from a distant past--the play takes on a new dimension. The action no longer unfolds purely on the level of personal interplay, for historical and even supernatural overtones now make themselves felt. Shakespeare's dramas rarely contain mythological figures or allegorical abstractions, but characters occasionally embody some of the attributes of Ate and Nemesis in classical tragedy; in Margaret traces of such sources remain. She is not a "dramatic character" in the same sense as the others in the play, but rather a choric figure. Through her we see how the chorus's function may continue to be carried out even after the chorus itself has disappeared.<sup>80</sup>

As the plot unfolds and the prophesy of her curse is realized, her dramatic role or function is increasingly recognized and is indeed emphasized by her very absence from the stage:

Margaret's worn and wasted figure hovers over the play, and her curse broods in the air. One by one the guilty--Hastings, Rivers, Vaughan, Buckingham, and Richard; one by one the innocent--the innocent boys, the innocent Elizabeth--are made by Shakespeare to feel her presence in the hour of death and sorrow, and to recognize her, not so much as Margaret, as the impersonated moral vengeance for the wars that have defiled England with fraternal blood. Richard is himself her avenger

---

<sup>80</sup> Clemen, p. 48.



in his bloody passage to the crown; and having finished this work, he is himself destroyed by the evil he has done.<sup>81</sup>

The unearthly quality of her initial entry, then, intimates her role and characterizes the dramatic presence which distinguishes the Margaret of Richard III. from the queen of the three parts of Henry VI.

2

The abruptness with which Margaret reveals herself to the English court (1.1.111-158.) is appropriate to the unexpectedness of her return from banishment. The moment of her "advancement" parallels verbally the visible image of her initial entry and again identifies her with Queen Elizabeth who complains of the "joylessness" which accompanies her royal position:

Enter Queen Margaret, behind.

Q.Eliz. Small joy have I in being England's queen.

Q.Marg. And lessen'd be that small, God, I beseech thee!  
Thy honour, state and seat is due to me.

(110-12)

Q.Eliz. As little joy, my lord, as you suppose  
You would enjoy, were you this country's king,  
As little joy may you suppose in me,  
That I enjoy, being the queen thereof.

Q.Marg. A little joy enjoys the queen thereof;  
For I am she, and altogether joyless.  
I can no longer hold me patient. - [Advancing.]

(151-57)

---

<sup>81</sup>Brooke, p. 509.

The concurrent emphasis placed on Elizabeth's apparent usurpation or substitution and the comparative sorrow of the two queens portends the eventual necessary transmission of a "just proportion" (IV.iv.110.) of Margaret's grief to Elizabeth. In this realm, joylessness is a quality attendant to the female monarchical role which Elizabeth will later define as "weeping queen". (IV.iv.201.) Margaret, angered at Elizabeth's inaccurate presumption of extreme sorrow in this early scene, also regards Gloucester's complaints of injustice with contempt, and hence must, in her impatience (157), refute their claim directly in overt declaration of what she believes her own right.

The bitterness of her comments to the audience is now continued and amplified as Margaret at last reveals her presence. (158-63) Gloucester cleverly counters her claims (170-73), with a recollection of her crime--the taunting and killing of his father, the Duke of York; he thus effects a hypocritical union of the present Yorkist faction against Margaret. Although her guilt for this deed has long been expiated (by her deposition and the loss of her family), this purgation of Margaret still does not allow pity for the woman (see above, p. 73)--nor, admittedly does she ask for any. Because of the general assumption of the vileness of her crime (162-87), her cruel characterization of Rutland totally undermines her attempt to delineate the excessiveness of her own retribution:

Did York's dread curse prevail so much with heaven  
 That Henry's death; my lovely Edward's death,  
 Their kingdom's loss, my woful banishment,  
 Could all but answer for that peevish brat?

(191-94)

Margaret then levies, with great power and at great length, her heavy curse; exclamations punctuate her vociferous predictions, which resound in the mind throughout the play. The impact of the curse is thus largely aural; she maintains her initial intensity of tone and volume throughout the sequence to her exit--"Live each of you the subjects to his hate, / And he to yours, and all of you to God's!" (302-3) Richard attempts to alter the direction of her curse on himself by inserting "Margaret" (234) at the apparent conclusion of her words; there results but a momentary cessation to her declamation; her energy is at that point unspent.

The specificity of Margaret's "hopes" for Elizabeth (197-209) is decided not merely by the desire for personal revenge; the fate which she details for Elizabeth determines that queen's metaphoric integration into the changing world of the play, directs her symbolic development and literal losses which bring about her fulfillment of Margaret's role as representative of unnaturalness. As I suggested, however (see above, p. 88), the suffering of Elizabeth is unwarranted; her victimization distinguishes her from Margaret whose punishment was deserved. Margaret does not wait to witness the demise of Richard for whom she also encompasses in her curse; she returns only to exult in the total isolation and deprivation of Elizabeth, and to pass her sorrow formally on to that bereaved woman. She does this in order to demonstrate the completeness of Elizabeth's grief to her, in her fulfillment of Margaret's prophesy, in the event of her true joylessness. Thus Margaret's "choric" function does not obscure her symbolic role.

Margaret's second appearance in the play, in act four, scene four, is similar in dramatic effect to her first: she immediately estranges herself from the action of the play by aligning herself with the audience in observing "the waning of [her] adversaries." (IV.iv.4.) She enters alone; with the advent of the Duchess of York and Elizabeth, she has already determined to withdraw to her former point of observation. (8) The two Yorkist women enter in lament and, oblivious to Margaret's presence (wherever the director may place her), vent their cries of mourning to which Margaret (as in I.iii.) responds with Lancastrian-coloured comment.

Her remarks unheeded, her aural as well as her visual participation seems unnoticed by the Duchess and Elizabeth. Margaret makes no boisterous self-revelation this time; she joins the women quietly, almost imperceptibly. Because of stage spectacle, because the actors have seen<sup>82</sup> and heard Margaret along with the viewer from the moment of their entrance, their sudden acknowledgement of her presence as characters of the play gives an unearthly effect of abrupt substantiation, as Margaret sits among them. Margaret's haunting echo-like response to the two women's plaintive questioning establishes a regular alternation of tone and rhythm and thus initiates the ritual-quality of the lament. (see 9-25) The ceremony

---

<sup>82</sup>It seems essential to the full effectiveness of this scene that Margaret be visible to the entering actors. Furthermore, there is no stage direction to formally effect her withdrawal, nor any indication that she need "advance" to counter such a movement and allow her to join the other women.



formally) begins with the incantation of the Duchess (26-29) who, in short phrases, parallel structure, and alternating rhyme, appropriately casts a spell on the scene, whose three participants--as if in a trance--consecutively sit down.

Margaret is not moved by human empathy to join the two women; their identification in the context of this ritual is symbolic; each woman bemoans her own sorrow:

Indeed, all three participants in this antiphonal lament hardly seem to be individuals at all, but simply voices in a chorus. The mourners address not each other but the more keenly felt presence of the departed soul or God. The lament is like a canon: the theme is shared by several voices, now in counterpoint, now in unison.<sup>83</sup>

It is not personality but role which is important here.<sup>84</sup> The pity and pain which can be felt for the Duchess who longs to die and the queen who has just lost her children, subserve but reinforce the import and impact of England's unnaturalness. "The wailing women become typical of a whole nation and their tears mark the suffering of England under a curse."<sup>85</sup> When Margaret, in piercing words, attacks the womb of the Duchess, she shows not only the frustration of natural growth in this chaotic realm, but corruption in the very act of birth itself. Whereas Margaret and Elizabeth in their barrenness represent a temporal completion in the cycle

<sup>83</sup>Clemen, p. 180.

<sup>84</sup>Agnes Mure Mackenzie, The Women in Shakespeare's Plays (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1924), p. 72: "None of the widowed figures in Act IV, scene iv, has much personality as a woman and the play gains much by this omission."

<sup>85</sup>Pierce, p. 95.

of retribution, Elizabeth being "but a very prey to time" (IV. i. 106.), the Duchess in her sterility represents not only the obliteration of natural order in the realm, but the inherent perversion of a realm which is prey to itself (see above, p. 92-93).

The first recitation of the murders or wrongs (40-46) focused on the rampancy of Richard's evil in attributing losses of both houses to him; this emphasis appropriately precluded Margaret's verbal assault on the Duchess. Margaret similarly prepares her "address" to Elizabeth in a loose reiteration of these crimes by now accentuating the retributive quality of the Yorkist tragedy. Margaret centres again on Richard in her concluding wish for the tyrant's death. (75-78) (She employs the Duchess's incantative rhythm here and casts a spell similar to that woman's in style, her lines easily upholding the ritual quality desired.) Richard is now Elizabeth's antagonist however, and this focus on him brings response from that queen:

O, thou [Margaret] didst prophesy the time would come  
That I should wish for thee to help me curse  
That bottled spider, that foul bunched-back'd toad!

(79-81)

With specific reference to her earlier curse Margaret details for Elizabeth her fulfillment of Margaret's prophesy; the structural formality of her speech maintains the decorum of the ritual of the scene. Margaret addresses Elizabeth with the words "I call'd thee" (82), and the ensuing lines conclude this statement in a list of epithets which characterize Elizabeth's substitutional role (82-91); five parallel lines of question follow (92-96) in which Margaret demonstrates to Elizabeth the losses

which define what she has become; Margaret continues: "decline all this and see what now thou art" (97); her instruction engenders the required definition in another lengthy list of parallel lines which describe to Elizabeth the tragedy of her existence:

For happy wife, a most distressed widow;  
 For joyful mother, one that wails the name;  
 For queen, a very caitiff crown'd with care;  
 For one being sued to, one that humbly sues;  
 For one that scorn'd at me, now scorn'd of me;  
 For one being fear'd of all, now fearing one;  
 For one commanding all, obey'd of none.

(98-104)

The parallelism and consequent repetition cause the lines to flow quickly and give the exhortation the quality of a rehearsed liturgy, which determines the suggested ritual quality. In her juxtaposition of the antitheses of Elizabeth's former and present states Margaret analogizes the "defining metaphoric framework" of the world of the plays, in which woman, in her own varying condition, acts as barometer or indicator of the realm's natural or unnatural state. Margaret thus passes to Elizabeth the representation of unnaturalness and relinquishes her role as wailing woman with promise of a smile in France. (115)

Although the artificiality of this scene of the mourning queens prompts some directors to omit it entirely, it is in this very unreality with its structured and repetitious passages that the fuller meaning of the play lies.<sup>86</sup> "Reality," as Clemen notes, "is not a standard one can

---

<sup>86</sup>Sprague, p. 39-40, notes that Henry Irving, for example, at first omitted the scene.

usefully apply to Richard III."<sup>87</sup> The curious dramatic presence of Margaret possesses an inherent unreality; "Margaret has outlived humanity," says Brooke, "and passed into an elemental power."<sup>88</sup> Her longing for personal revenge is undeniable--

Bear with me; I am hungry for revenge,  
And now I cloy me with beholding it.

(61-62)

--as is her pleasure upon its receipt:

Farewell, York's wife, and queen of sad mischance:  
These English woes will make me smile in France.

(114-15)

But Margaret does not warrant vengeance; her losses are her own retribution. The gratification of her desire is justified by the operation of a larger force which is operative in her.

[Margaret's] vengeance is felt, like an actual presence in the air, by all who die. She is not only Margaret and hate to them, but the spirit in whom, for punishment, the Divine justice abides. And when she sees the end she passes away, still alive --departs in an awful joy, like one of the Immortals. . . . It is the most supernatural conception in Shakespeare.<sup>89</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup>Clemen, p. 49.

<sup>88</sup>Brooke, p. 513.

<sup>89</sup>ibid.

## VII. ELINOR

As mother of a usurping king, Queen Elinor plays a politically voluble role in the last play to be considered--King John. She finds direct opposition in the figure of Constance, mother of Elinor's grandson Arthur, the rightful heir to the throne of England; the mutual antagonism of the two women is expressed in a vehement verbal contention which provides one outlet for the disputation of the issue of right of rule which is basic to the play. Although this question of right--right to the throne of England--is encountered immediately in King John as the major concern prompting the hostile estrangement of England and France, the issue or theme (of right) itself does not pervade the metaphoric sphere or world of this play to the extent that it does that of the earlier dramas; consequently, the women of the play are not as strongly or strictly symbolic of the unnaturalness in the realm engendered by the denial of such natural right or inheritance.

Political and social abnormality are, of course, represented in Elinor's eager participation in affairs of state; the old queen, although the span of her stage-life is less than that of Queen Margaret, parallels Henry VI's wife in her political and military prominence. Elinor's

Intervention does not duplicate Margaret's, however, either in quality or extent, for her exertion of authority is not necessitated by the weakness and reluctance of a king to assert the power of his position; John, unlike Henry, is not resigned or subservient; he defies his opponents as vehemently as his mother does. The extent of his actual dependence on this forward and politic woman must be conjectured from or intimated by his actions ensuing her death.

It is also after her death, or more exactly, in her absence and with the gradual decline of John, that her particular symbolic function--her relation to the image of the mother and the concept of natural right--becomes more clearly defined. The initial political predominance she exerts in support of John, from the position of mother, becomes, in retrospect in the context of John's demise, not a social or hierarchical abnormality, but a symbolic expression of right:

Elinor makes her political presence felt at the very beginning of the play, wherein the suggestion of John's usurpation is at once made. (1.1.4.) She responds immediately to the mere innuendo of the French envoy: "A strange beginning: 'borrowed majesty'!" (5)--even before the accusation is elaborated upon. (7-15) Her evident anger is contained at the request of her son (6) as the proclamation of Arthur's right and the French challenge of war are delivered by Chatillon. Elinor does not hesitate to issue blame for the offensive attitude of France:

What now, my son! have I not ever said  
How that ambitious Constance would not cease  
Till she had kindl'd France and all the world,  
Upon the right and party of her son?  
This might have been prevented and made whole

With very easy arguments of love,  
Which now the manage of two kingdoms must  
With fearful bloody issue arbitrate.

(31-38)

The justness of Elinor's accusation cannot be determined here; her ready antagonism to Constance, however, prepares the audience for the fervour of their encounter in the ensuing scene, and furthermore "explains" Elinor's support of John whose right she does not even affirm--"your strong possession much more than your right," she tells John, "or else it must go wrong with you and me." (40-41) Her antagonism toward her daughter-in-law is noted in one of Shakespeare's chronicle sources, Holinshed:

Surely Queen Elinor, the king's mother, was sore against her nephew Arthur, rather moved thereto by envy conceived against his mother, than upon any just occasion given on behalf of the child. For that she saw, if he were king, how that his mother, Constance would look to bear most rule within the realm of England till her son should come to lawful age to govern of himself.<sup>90</sup>

Elinor's envy, however, is not coupled with ambition; though her aggressiveness is evident, it is not tainted with self-interest. She guides John but does not overtly dominate him--it is he not his mother who declares war; and, it is notably the king, not Elinor, who decides upon Arthur's death. Her first statement to Constance accords with Holinshed's explanation of Elinor's attitude: "Out, insolent! thy bastard shall be king,/ That thou mayst be a queen, and check the world!" (11.i.122-23.)

Her success in the dispute ensuing this remark is described by Sister Hoey:

---

<sup>90</sup>Holinshed, quoted in Warner, p. 52.

Despite Elinor's lacking the fluency of her rival, the fact that she takes the offensive in bold assertion and violent reproach makes her seem at times the victor.<sup>91</sup>

But Elinor, unlike Constance, does not even endeavor to employ subtle argument in defence of her right. The distinction between the two is finer. The slander of wifely fidelity in Elinor's comment is returned by Constance who claims that the bastardy of Arthur is much less likely than that of John or Geoffrey; Constance doesn't stop here; as the argument proceeds she expands upon the theme in placing blame for the difficulties of Arthur on the sins of his grandmother (employing, as Craig suggests [footnote to line 180, act two, scene one], the maxim, "the sins of parents shall be visited upon their children to the third and fourth generations"). She elaborates on this retributive suffering of Arthur in excessive double-entendre the resultant confusion of which can be resolved only with great effort. The rationale of her speech (184-90) thus virtually obscured, her argument loses credibility and she may be said to rant. Constance's emotional display here is totally incongruous with her initial gracious self-presentation (in II.ii.), and in this inconsistency of self-conduct she differs from Elinor whose comments here bewray the same sarcasm which she displayed in her first scene with John. Elinor's emotions are aroused as well as those of Constance; the old queen's choler is most evident; unlike Constance, however, Elinor maintains a rational control of her expression in this argument.

---

<sup>91</sup> Hoey, p. 28-29.



The women argue at the expense of Arthur:

. . . both Constance and Elinor reduce their son and grandson, Arthur, to tears of shame when the shrillness of their squabbling over him suggests that they are thinking more of their own quarrel than of the boy's feelings.<sup>92</sup>

But it is notably to his mother that Arthur cries "peace" (164); it is Constance who pursues the issue of injustice done to her son; and [although silence has been ordered of "women and fools" (150)], it is finally she whom both monarchs must endeavour to silence with their commands. Constance's continued protest here is a self-indulgent emotional outburst which portends the intemperance of her later speeches.

Elinor's first concern is the maintenance of her son's position. She early declares herself a soldier bound for France (I.i.150.) where she remains in charge (III.iii.1-2.) when John departs for England. The king is, furthermore, dependent on her ability in the field: news of the arrival of French troops in England brings the following cry from him:

0, where hath our intelligence been drunk?  
Where hath it slept? Where is my mother's care,  
That such an army could be drawn in France,  
And she not hear of it?

(IV.ii.116-19.)

and, upon learning of his mother's death:

. . . What! mother dead!  
How wildly then walks my estate in France!

(127-28)

---

<sup>92</sup>Bandel, p. 240.

Acceptance of Elinor's suggested military capability is encouraged by our awareness of her political participation, her acute power of political observation and policy, as manifested in her quick reaction to the suggested union of Blanch and Lewis:

Son, list to this conjunction, make this match;  
 Give with our niece a dowry large enough:  
 For by this knot thou shalt so surely tie  
 Thy now unsure assurance to the crown,  
 That yon green boy shall have no sun to ripe  
 The bloom that promiseth a mighty fruit.  
 I see a yielding in the looks of France;  
 Mark, how they whisper; urge them while their souls  
 Are capable of this ambition,  
 Lest zeal; now melted by the windy breath  
 Of soft petitions, pity and remorse,  
 Cool and congeal again to what it was.

(III.i.468-79.)

And, when she sees this tentative union destroyed by the threat of Pandolph, she is vehement in her disgust: "O foul revolt of French inconstancy!" (III.i.322.) Elinor's determination is strong, and her lines, though few, are selective in their revelation of her particular political activity.

2

Her political concerns so evident, it is difficult to assess Elinor's attitude toward Arthur. His right she definitely admits but disallows because of her hatred for his mother. Her capacity for affection is almost obscured by her policy--her relation with John is everywhere political partnership. The advent of the Bastard, however, arouses in Elinor a desire to play another role. Her first address to

him is one of chastisement for his diffident attitude toward women as mothers, which she interprets as a direct slander of his own mother (I.i.64-65); his innocence in the presentation of the suit and his facial and verbal similarity to her deceased son Richard attract Elinor to Philip. (84-88) His parenthood revealed, the ensuing eagerness with which she establishes her relationship with this, her estranged grandson, moves gradually from formality to familiarity; her position alters from that of monarch and soldier to that of woman and grandmother who delights in the quickwittedness and jocularly of her new-found relative:

Whether hadst thou rather be a Falconbridge  
 And like thy brother, to enjoy thy land,  
 Or the reputed son of Coeur-de-lion,  
 Lord of thy presence and no land beside?

(134-37)

I like thee well: wilt thou forsake thy fortune,  
 Bequeath thy land to him and follow me?  
 I am a soldier and now bound to France.

(148-50)

The very spirit of Plantagenet!  
 I am thy grandam, Richard; call me so.

(167-68)

Her joy is most evident in her last request.

From this point on, Elinor exchanges no words with Falconbridge; that is, until the time of his departure for England. The closeness which the two lastly display in the scene of parting, is not in discordance with this period of silence, however; it is rather an assertion of the Bastard's adoption of Elinor as grandmother, an indication of the success of their early established relationship. (His reciprocation of her affection, and

the development of the relationship could, of course, be conveyed in ways other than verbal in the period of silence, as in the case of Margaret and Suffolk.) The Bastard--Philip or Richard--addresses Elinor as "Grandam" (III.III.14.), and speaks to her in the jovial tone of their first encounter; he then takes his leave by kissing her hand. Such a gesture could be interpreted as mere formality, but no other visual display of affection is dictated to the players by and in the play (with the exception perhaps of the betrothal kiss of Blanch and Lewis suggested by Austria [II.i. 534-35.]). The relationship of Elinor and the Bastard is thus special; and the loving tone of her response to him --"Farewell, gentle cousin" (17)--is maintained when she turns to address her other grandchild, Arthur: "Come hither, little kinsman; hark, a word." (18) In the new context of fond farewell and emphasis on Elinor as beloved grandmother, her tender approach to Arthur seems genuine; and, in retrospect, acceptance of a sincerity in her previous beckoning to the boy--"Come to thy grandam, child" (II.i.159.)--is made possible. Her relation with the young boy is not elaborated on, but her love for him is here more plausible than her hate.

Although Elinor is always ready with pertinent comment, her comments, as suggested, are infrequent; the voluble quality assigned her role in the contention is confined to that encounter with Constance. She is not "an Ate, stirring [John] to blood and strife", (II.i.63.), as Chatillon reports; her portrait as gentle grandmother and her initial

desire to elude war<sup>93</sup> contradict this image of her. Her last words on the stage form a quiet wish for the welfare of all departing for England: "My blessing go with thee." (III.iii.71.)

## 3

This departure effects not only a literal but also a symbolic separation of John and his mother. John, on arrival in England, enacts the superfluous<sup>94</sup> ritual of a second coronation which signifies the beginning of his second reign--his second rule--without Elinor. The two periods are distinguished not only by the mother's absence in the latter or second reign, but also by the viewer's sudden disapproval of John. "The king has the audience's sympathy until he orders Arthur's death,"<sup>95</sup> says Bonjour; and, with that royal command, audience as well as court opinion alters. John himself realizes the "indignation" (IV.ii.103.) of the peers and repents: "There is no sure foundation set on blood, / No certain life achieved by other's death" (104-5); but it is too late. It is thus not his usurpation which condemns him but this crime: "When John is revealed a murderer, warrior, king, and usurper disappear."<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup>War declared in I.i. Elinor had suggested that, if not for the ambition of Constance, the issue of right could have been settled "with very easy arguments of love." (I.i.36.)

<sup>94</sup>To quote Pembroke: "This 'once again' but that your highness pleased, / Was once superfluous: you were crown'd before, / And that high royalty was ne'er pluck'd off." (IV.ii.3-5.)

<sup>95</sup>Adrien Bonjour, "The Road to Swinstead Abbey: A Study of the Sense and Structure in King John", ELH, vol. 18 (1951), p. 270.

<sup>96</sup>Hoey, p. 33.

Dramatically, the attempted murder of Arthur divides the scene of parting and that of the coronation emphasizing the horror of John's intention and thus preparing for his loss of esteem.

The impact of Elinor's death on John is great: he is "made . . . giddy/With these ill-tidings" (IV.ii.131-32.); he is "amazed/Under the tide" (137-38) of the news. And, this initial amazement is revived in plaintive sincerity when, left momentarily alone on the stage he cries, "my mother dead!" (181) It is significant that the advent of this news is followed by the prediction of John's resignation of the crown, a prophecy which is fulfilled when John does give up the crown to the Catholic Church. The earlier words of Pandulph are intrinsic to the connection between this Ascension Day deliverance and the event of Elinor's death; threatening King Philip of France, the papal legate said:

. . . to arms! be champion of our church,  
Or let the church, our mother, breathe her curse,  
A mother's curse, on her revolting son.

(III.i.255-57.)

The repetition of "mother" and the specification of "son" give emphasis or strength to this image which can be appropriately recalled in John's acceptance of the church which he formerly and vehemently rejected.

(147-60) In this unnatural act (of resigning the crown), he adopts the Catholic institution as his surrogate parent, as substitute for his own mother; thus the accuracy in the placement of the portent immediately after the report of his natural mother's death.

Although not integrated into a grand metaphoric scheme (as it was in Richard III), the image of the mother is important in this play; the

subject of inheritance demands this. In arguing the question of natural right in a literal manner, the debate of Constance and Elinor stresses-- as in Richard III--the wombs of the women producing heirs or kings. In that which I termed the "metaphoric world" of these plays it is Constance, in her curses and her final lament for the loss of her son, who--more than Elinor--acts as a wailing woman representative of an unnatural chaos. The public chaos engendered by the deprivation of Arthur's right, and the eventual loss of the child, however, is not the specific correspondent result of the deposition or destruction of a lawful heir and king; the determination of Arthur's death reflects rather a weakness and unnaturalness in John which demands his gradual demise. "John is both dominated and ruined by his mother,"<sup>97</sup> says Bromley; but this is inaccurate. John is ruined, if not by, at least in, Elinor's absence; he is dependent upon her for his success. The final chaos which the Bastard endeavours to terminate is not created by dissension in support of a rightful heir, for Arthur is by that time dead, and no issue is left by him. The revolt of the English peers is here (V.ii.) against their natural king--John--and against the order of their country. The final reinstatement of peace is made with the return of John's heir. There is no clear or direct moral retribution to be paid for John's theoretical usurpation; the crime for which he is guilty--even if he is only indirectly responsible--is the murder of Arthur. Although the disorder is figured in the image of the womb or mother basic to all these plays, the role of Elinor, and for that

---

<sup>97</sup>Bromley, p. 46.

matter that of Constance, unlike the role of Elizabeth, or more specifically the Duchess of York is not determined directly by that image, despite its graphic appearance in the Bastard's eloquent condemnation of the peers:

. . . you degenerate, you ingrate revolts,  
 You bloody Heroes, ripping up the womb  
 Of your dear mother England, blush for shame.

(V.ii.151-53.)

The familiar application of the image of the mother to the isle of England makes John's alliance with Pandulph not only a rejection of his own mother Elinor, but also a denial of his own country. The statement of the Bastard thus casts retrospective influence on the image and also the symbolic role of the mother whose healthy and teeming womb hence represents the converse naturalness which England lacks. The position of Elinor as ruling mother, can be regarded as natural, her role as a pillar of right in support of John. However, the prime representation of natural order is given to the Bastard. His role is similar although not parallel to that of Queen Margaret in that his symbolic function is ironic: as mother and figure of naturalness, Margaret's crime of murder made her the epitome of unnaturalness; the Bastard, contrarily, is initially a figure of unnaturalness who is given the task of upholding order in the realm. (V.i.77.) This ironic inversion depicts unnaturalness in both cases. In King John, however, delineation of order and disorder, right and wrong, naturalness and unnaturalness, is much less exact or absolute than in the other plays. John Palmer explains:



Here was a veritable king [John] of shreds and patches, audacious without courage, intelligent without wisdom, stubborn without strength of purpose. And the world in which he moved was as chaotic as the man himself. Here were English nobles leagued with a foreign prince to overthrow their English sovereign; a representative of Christ's vicar on earth provoking war between Christian princes; solemn treaties no sooner made than broken; coalitions for which it was impossible to find any basis in right and wrong; loyalties divided and confused. Shakespeare could make no dramatic sense of this distempered world. He just stands back and admires the fine confusion.<sup>98</sup>

In this "fine confusion", it is Elinor's function to support her son John whose initial strength and determination is, unlike his mother's, only apparent and unsubstantial without her literal and symbolic "encouragement" and aid.

---

<sup>98</sup>Palmer, p. 323.

## VIII. BLANCH

In this again confused world the role of Blanch of Spain is clearly defined; she is, as M. M. Reese describes her, "just an innocent pawn in the game of power politics."<sup>99</sup> The niece of John, she is introduced to the court of France with her uncle, Elinor, and the Bastard; however, her position, the purpose of her presence, remains unknown until political marriage is recommended by the first citizen of Angiers as a solution to the city's conflict of loyalties. (II.1.422-55.) Unable to compel the citizens of Angiers to choose between Arthur and John, the opposing parties, France and England, at the suggestion of the Bastard, had determined to ransack the city and to fight later for its control. In obvious terror, First Citizen proclaims the idealness of the union of the Lady Blanch and the Dauphin of France, and advocates their nomination to the government of Angiers, thus precluding the necessity of war. Blanch is requested to and will play the part of wife in a marriage for political security and advantage; the proposition provides the first context in which she speaks, in which her opinion is offered. Her

---

<sup>99</sup> Reese, p. 280.

willingness to comply with the proposal must be, and is, believable.

The trick, in Shakespeare, is to combine romantic love with the practical need for marriage--to see to it that the young princess whose marriage is necessary for the good of the kingdom, like Blanch of Spain in King John or Katherine of France in Henry the Fifth, displays immediate maidenly interest in the prospective bridegroom, even though she may have seen him for the first time ten minutes before the marriage proposal is broached by the elders.<sup>100</sup>

In previous plays, such proposed expedient marriages were either averted or, if effected, merely mentioned;<sup>101</sup> in the case of Blanch and Lewis, however, both parties are present and their reactions readily given. Characterization of the two already rapturously given by First Citizen, Blanch's advantages are presented by John in more practical or realistic terms; like the daughter of Armagnac, she brings great benefit with her:

Her dowry shall weigh equal with a queen:  
For Anjou and fair Touraine, Maine, Poictiers,  
And all that we upon this side the sea,  
Except this city now by us beslagèd,  
Find liable to our crown and dignity,  
Shall gild her bridal bed and make her rich  
In titles, honours and promotions,  
As she in beauty, education, blood,  
Holds hands with any princess of the world.

(II.1.486-94.)

---

<sup>100</sup>Bandel, p. 200.

<sup>101</sup>The proposed unions of the daughter of Armagnac and Henry VI, and of Bona, "sister" to the King of France, and Edward IV, were not concluded. The marriage of Anne and Edward Prince of Wales is effected; the immediate response of Edward to the proposition is eager, but Anne is not present. The union of Clarence and Anne's sister though proposed by Clarence and not by the father Warwick is similarly concluded; the response of Warwick's younger daughter is also absent. The important union of Elizabeth and Richmond is agreed to by the girl's mother, but Elizabeth is never even seen.

To her beauty Lewis responds with the infatuation of earlier princes. In the metaphoric vein of First Citizen; a parallel in the quality of the language of the young prince and the citizen is emphasized by the Bastard's similar deprecation of the flowery or elaborate expression of the two men. Thus aligned with the obvious verbosity of First Citizen's speech, the sincerity of the Dauphin's words is undercut. This comparison emphasizes the contrasting "realistic" or sensible attitude of Blanch's response, which shows interest though not passion. Notable in John's estimation of the princess was his mention of her education, which, says Bandel, is often indicated by the plays as the source for their women's wisdom.<sup>102</sup> Blanch's acquired rationality or intelligence is revealed in the honest reason of her reply to Lewis' flattery:

My uncle's will in this respect is mine:  
 If he sees ought in you that makes him like,  
 That anything he sees, which moves his liking,  
 I can with ease translate it to my will;  
 Or if you will, to speak more properly,  
 I will enforce it easily to my love.  
 Further I will not flatter you, my lord,  
 That all I see in you is worthy love;  
 Than this; that nothing do I see in you,  
 Though churlish thoughts themselves should be your judge,  
 That I can find should merit any hate.

(II.i.510-20.)

She understands her duty and does not feign desire for the Dauphin; she declares to John that she is "bound in honour still to do/what [John] in wisdom still vouch[safes] to say." (522-23)

---

<sup>102</sup>Bandel, p. 176.

The conclusion of the union of the French and English princes, brings immediate opposition to the marriage--from Constance, who resents the French neglect of her cause, and then indirectly from Pandolph who threatens the joy of the union by weakening and finally destroying the English-French alliance. This estrangement puts Blanch in a position which has not yet been encountered in the plays: she becomes the tenuous link between two gradually separating parties and must direct her loyalty to one side, against her will. She discovers that political affiliation is stronger than the familial. To her husband's cry "Father, to arms!" (III.i.299.), she responds plaintively:

Upon thy wedding-day?  
 Against the blood that thou hast married?  
 What, shall our feast be kept with slaughter'd men?  
 Shall braying trumpets and loud churlish drums,  
 Clamours of hell, be measures of our pomp?  
 O, husband, hear me! ay, alack, how new  
 Is husband in my mouth! even for that name,  
 Which till this time my tongue did ne'er pronounce,  
 Upon my knee I beg, go not to arms  
 Against mine uncle.

(III.ii.300-8.)

Sprague finds that Blanch's predicament typifies a problem basic to the play:

Increasingly, the progress of the play is through episodes which involve some conflict between loyalties. Poor little Blanch's love and honour scene just before the beginning of the battle is of this sort.<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup>Sprague, p. 27.

Lewis's fear of the "curse of Rome" (207) outweighs the "motive of wife" (314); his political and religious adherence or loyalty proving stronger than his "allegiance" to Blanch, she is thus estranged from her family. She strives to maintain her conflicting loyalties but discovers that this is impossible:

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.

(327-30)

"Like Arthur," says Calderwood, "Blanch represents honour in a world of Commodity, and like Arthur, she is whirled by the force of Commodity to her destruction."<sup>104</sup> Blanch, conscious of political obligation but unaware of mere expediency, thus becomes a victim of the arrangement.

In spite of the brevity of her participation in the play, there is a complexity in the portrait of Blanch which makes her predicament a pitiable one: her lack of deceit,<sup>105</sup> her honesty, her unwillingness to comply with the dictates of policy, her awareness of her obligation to her husband, and formerly her family, make her an admirable figure. The abuse of Blanch indicates the corruption of a realm in which the issue of natural right, or even of warrant to the throne,<sup>106</sup> can be obscured in favour of mutual advantage.

---

<sup>104</sup>James L. Calderwood, "Commodity and Honour in King John" Shakespeare: The Histories, ed., Eugene M. Waith (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1965), p. 89.

<sup>105</sup>*ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>106</sup>Warrant, in view of the fact that the portrait of John does not question his right until III.iii.

## IX. CONSTANCE

Although Constance, by whatever means, has secured the aid of France on behalf of her son at the opening of the play, she is certainly not initially presented as an ambitious force "kindling" (1.1.33.) France to bloody war with England. The welcome which she extends to Austria, who comes in support of Arthur, is gracious and grateful:

O, take his mother's thanks, a widow's thanks,  
Till your strong hand shall help to give him strength  
To make a more requital to your love!

(1.1.32-34.)

Her advice to King Philip moreover, is not a rash encouragement to war, but a recommendation for hesitance in the hope that the embassy brings the alternate solution of peaceful settlement from England; ironically she desires those "easy arguments of love" (1.1.36.) which Elinor had intimated were contrary to Constance's wishes. Constance does not speak immediately in this scene; she waits until the king's "ceremony of introduction" has been concluded, until her son and Austria have exchanged cordialities. This restraint distinguishes her from Elinor who (although she admittedly is, unlike Constance, in her own court) speaks readily with eager political interest; whereas Elinor speaks thus as a politician,

Constance identifies herself specifically as mother and widow, and defines the role she will exclusively play in King John.

Mother of a young child, she is aligned more than Elinor, with Elizabeth and the other wailing women of these plays. It is not Arthur's death which she initially mourns, however; it is rather his loss of right, his disinheritance which is affirmed by the English-French alliance. Her grief goes beyond the "easing of the heart" (Richard III, IV.iv.131.) described by Elizabeth as the purpose of curse and lamentation. Constance's sorrow is self-indulgent; in act three, scene one, she magnifies it out of all proportion in a metaphor which suggests that Elinor's characterization of her was not wholly inaccurate. (III.i.70-74.)<sup>u</sup>

The advent of John and Elinor in Constance's first scene brings about a change in the initially temperate woman: faced directly with her opponents, the mother of Arthur is no longer reserved and gentle, but readily offensive. She is prompted by Elinor who first interferes in the converse of the two kings in calculated political comment; Constance's first remark is still somewhat restrained in phrasing and tone:

Elin. Who is it thou dost call usurper, France?  
Cons. Let me make answer; thy usurping son.

(II.i.120-21.)

In this context, Elinor's violent and accusing retort is unjustified: "Out, insolent! thy bastard shall be king, / That thou mayst be a queen, and check the world!" (123-24) Constance is not insolent, she is correct.

It is notable that the charge against which she defends herself here is not ambition, but rather infidelity. She proceeds to compare the



relative truth or naturalness of the births of John, Geoffrey and Arthur, thus returning Elinor's slander. Her statement moreover, is not mere defence of her honour, but also of Arthur's right. (124-31). True, the women insult and vent their anger on each other; but it is fair to say with Anna Jameson that in this instance Constance's attested ambition is not for herself but for her son.<sup>107</sup> She makes repeated reference to the boy and is eloquent in his behalf; she proclaims with lucidity Arthur's right and her conviction of Elinor's sin. (167-72; 174-82)<sup>108</sup> Her gradual preoccupation with Elinor's guilt, however, gives a consequent exaggeration of Arthur's suffering and results in the intricate logic of her final speech, the repetition and continuing flow of which give the converse impression of irrationality and rant. (184-90) She is unaware of the immediate sorrow of Arthur, and in her pity for him ironically torments him all the more. She thus demonstrates no maternal sensitivity or care and, totally engrossed in her own emotional release, concludes her part in the scene by yelling vindictively at her antagonist: "Ay, who doubts that [a will bars Arthur's title]? a will! a wicked will; / A woman's will; a canker'd grandam's will!" (193-94) The temperance with which she formerly presented herself must now be demanded of her by the king. She has reached an antithesis in temperament in revealing a tendency toward self-indulgent emotionalism, and also toward madness. She is not the

---

<sup>107</sup>Anna Jameson, Characteristics of Women (London: Saunders and Otley, 1858), p. 218.

<sup>108</sup>Elinor's infidelity must presumably be confined to the conception of John, or Arthur's right is invalidated.

"apotheosis [as ideal] of motherhood";<sup>109</sup> her wailing is not totally engendered by the loss of her child, nor is she aware of that son's practical needs. Her lamentation takes on a quality foreign to that of the earlier wailing women of whom Constance is the last.

## 2

The emotionalism displayed by Constance at the conclusion of her quarrel with Elinor does not subside during her absence from the stage. She enters (in III.i.) just after the English-French alliance is made, evidently but newly informed of that league. Her speech begins with exclamations and questions about the marriage and the consequent peace; this heightened pitch betrays her agitation and is continued in the short quick phrases in which she attempts to convince herself of the falseness of the report of Salisbury:

It is not so; thou hast misspoke, misheard;  
 Be well advised, tell o'er thy tale again:  
 It cannot be; thou dost but say'tis so:  
 I trust I may not trust thee; for thy word  
 Is but the vain breath of a common man:  
 Believe me, I do not believe thee, man,  
 I have a king's oath to the contrary.

(III.i.4-10.)

The portrayal of her extreme anxiety is continued with the device of repetition used firstly in the explanation of her fears, which are stressed by the word's (fears') placement at the end of four successive lines (12-15); and secondly, by five interrogatory lines (19-24) which, in

---

<sup>109</sup>Pierce, p. 133.

each line's rising cadence, convey the 'trembling and quaking' (18) to which she attests her subjection.

Mrs. Siddons describes her preparation for this scene:

I never omitted to place myself, with Arthur in my hand, to hear the march, when, upon the reconciliation of England and France, they enter the gates of Angiers, to ratify the contract of marriage between the Dauphin and the Lady Blanch; because the sickening sounds of that march would usually cause the bitter tears of rage, disappointment, betrayed confidence, baffled ambition, and, above all, the agonizing feelings of maternal affection to gush into my eyes. In short the spirit of the whole drama took possession of my mind and frame, by my attention being incessantly riveted to the passing scene.<sup>110</sup>

The intensity of emotion resulting from the actress's preparation is necessary to and substantiated by the lines of the play; Constance's emphasis however, is not on Arthur, the object of such maternal affection, but on herself--her own oppressions and wrongs, her own weakness and fear. She will momentarily and incidentally revert her attention to the boy, but she is concurrently and finally preoccupied with her own misfortune:

"Lewis marry Blanch! O boy, then where art thou?/France friend with England, what becomes of me?" (III.i.34-35.); "leave those woes alone which I alone/Am bound to under-bear." (64-65) She attests that it is the virtuous Arthur's desert of a mother's love and a prince's inheritance which makes her grieve at his loss of right and loss of fortune (43-54); the resultant "pity" which she expresses, however, is not for Arthur, but for herself; her sorrow not only mourns Arthur's loss of power or author-

---

<sup>110</sup>Stanley T. Williams, ed., The Life and Death of King John (New Haven: Yale University, 1927), Appendix B. ("History of the Play"), p. 125.

ity, but takes the place of that power,<sup>111</sup> which Constance sees as her own:

To me and to the state of my great grief  
 Let kings assemble; for my grief's so great  
 That no supporter but the huge firm earth  
 Can hold it up: here I and sorrows sit;  
 Here is my throne, bid kings bow to it.

(70-74)

This metaphor of her magnified grief, which gives her royal-rulership of the kingdom of sorrow, reveals her ambition, and also her selfishness which, says Calderwood, "is masked, not consciously perhaps, within the cliché of doting motherhood."<sup>112</sup> The estimation of Constance as the embodiment of motherly devotion, the glorification of the character in the "Siddons tradition" was passing as early as the turn of the century; and what was formerly considered her eloquence was gradually reassessed as repetition and rant.<sup>113</sup> This negative reassessment of her verbal expression (by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics) though qualifying the success of the portrayal of Constance as ideal mother, ironically elucidates what might be called the essence of Constance as Shakespeare sees her, if her verbosity is regarded as intentional: the tendency toward madness intimated in her original rant (II.i.), is, then, continued here in act three, scene one, by the language of her

---

<sup>111</sup>The substitution of sorrow for the denied right and power finds a parallel in Constance's admitted substitution of that sorrow for her lost Arthur. (III.iv.93-97.) —

<sup>112</sup>Calderwood, p. 87.

<sup>113</sup>Sprague, p. 21.

lament over the loss of Arthur's right and her reaction to the news of Salisbury, which maintains her emotional self-indulgence and her agitation. This interpretation of the manner of Constance's expression is encouraged by the fact that she dwells on her fears indicating specifically a "sickness" making her "capable of fears" (12), and, moreover, by the fact that her repetition does not contribute a ritual quality to either scene or play; the loss of Arthur and of Arthur's right is more a personal than a "universal" deprivation.

Although in the context of the early history plays Constance as a wailing woman can be said to represent the chaos of England, her presence in King John is not felt to be primarily symbolic; her cries within the confines of the play seem rather literal or individual; her moans and fears are those of the woman Constance--not of England--and express her state of mind more than the state of the country.

Her grief and anxiety are contained in a speech which is also an expression of incredulity; the extent of her disbelief, of her unwillingness to accept the words of Salisbury as true, however, is so great as to give her utterance a self-imposed desperation. The betrayal of Arthur by the French king warrants her distress; but it is the effect of the marriage on herself on which she concentrates: "Thou shalt be punish'd for thus frightening me" (11), she tells Salisbury. Whereas the style of lament and verbal self-conduct of Anne and Elizabeth are determined by their emotional states and the dictates of dramatic ritual, the words of Constance conversely create or at least intensify her mood or emotional condition. She luxuriates in her sorrow and moves not toward "relief",

as in the case of Anne whose emotion is expelled and replaced by resignation, or toward mental exhaustion, as in the case of Elizabeth, but toward "frenzy". (IV.II.122.)

Although she regains a rationality in her curse upon the two kings (III.I.) in justly condemning Philip's altered loyalty, and in cleverly estimating the operation of the law,<sup>114</sup> the vehemence with which she calls upon the heavens for vengeance is contextually radical and irrational:

Arm, arm, you heavens, against these perjured kings!  
 A widow cries; be husband to me, heavens!  
 Let not the hours of this ungodly day  
 Wear out the day in peace; but, ere sunset;  
 Set armed discord 'twixt these perjured kings!  
 Hear me, O, hear me!

(107-12)

The brief curse of Constance, unlike Margaret's, has not the extensive prophetic function<sup>115</sup> and thematic integration into the symbolic and literal world of its respective play which demand the forceful delivery of the older Queen; nor has Constance the special dramatic role which

---

<sup>114</sup> . . . when law can do no right,  
 Let it be lawful that law bar no wrong:  
 Law cannot give my child his kingdom here,  
 For he that holds his kingdom holds the law;  
 Therefore, since law is perfect wrong,  
 How can the law forbid my tongue to curse?

(III.I.185-90.)

<sup>115</sup> Pandulph's arrival is too quick and coincidental to give the effect of the fulfillment of a prophesy.

allows Margaret her voluminous outbursts. Constance's cries bewray only her continued despair which again finds its source, not in the French rejection of her son but rather of herself.<sup>116</sup>

Constance's vindictive exclamations are not reserved for the monarchy; she directs inordinate slander at Austria as well, accusing him of a specific personal betrayal. Any justification for the evident rant of her speech (114-29) of short and again vehement exclamations, is obliterated by the Bastard's ready toying with her last line--"And hang a calf's-skin on those recreant limbs" (129)--and by the entrance of Pandolph, both of which divert attention away from Constance. Her speech thus partially neglected, the import of her words is lost and her speech becomes a mere outburst of unrelieved emotional verbosity.

With John's refusal to adhere to papal dictate Constance finds an ally in the papal legate who urges the estrangement of the newly united English and French. The fervency with which she vented her despair is now transformed into an almost witch-like eagerness with which she encourages Philip and Lewis to deny the alliance. (See 208-9, 211-16, 218, 309-12, 315-16) The ready exuberance with which she greets the French withdrawal from the peace pact (321) completes the portrait of Constance in this scene. The audience does not share Constance's enthusiasm for the French decision, which effects the disappointment and sorrow of Blanch, the now victimized pawn of the alliance; having been most favourably portrayed, it is she and not Constance who has audience

---

<sup>116</sup>This rejection of herself by France and Austria is stressed by her repeated use of the words "my", "me", "mine".

sympathy. Furthermore, not only ~~Blanch~~ but the entire English faction is preferred, if not to the dignified Philip and initially "starry-eyed" Lewis, most definitely to the papal legate with whom Constance sides. John's eloquent assertion of patriotism and independence (147-60) was especially pleasing to the Elizabethan audience, says Warner;<sup>117</sup> and John's words are not alien to any audience's sentiment at this point in the play, for as I suggested, he and his mother, like Blanch, are not disparagingly portrayed. Even King Philip himself is most unwilling to deny his English loyalty. The question of John's usurpation is, moreover, obscured by other issues: the compromising alliance itself, the problem of religious affiliation and, importantly, by Constance's self-preoccupation (conveyed by her minimal reference to the cause of her son's right).

It is thus that Constance emerges from this scene not as a vehement supporter of natural inheritance but rather as an emotionally disturbed woman whose final exuberant exclamation expresses but superficial rationality: "O fair return of banish'd majesty!" (32)

## 3

Constance's final appearance in the play finds her totally overcome by her grief. The death for which she indicated a longing in her address to Salisbury (III.i.29-33.) here becomes her preoccupation, the equivalent of her sorrow; Philip's description of her as she enters prepares the audience for her state of mind:

---

<sup>117</sup>Warner, p. 36.



Look, who comes here! a grave unto a soul;  
 Holding the eternal spirit against her will,  
 In the vile prison of afflicted breath.

(III.iv, 17-19.)

Exercising the power of her imagination which Anna Jameson rightly suggests gives the prevailing tone to her total character,<sup>118</sup> Constance luxuriates in the morbid fantasy of death whom she readily espouses. (III.iv.23-36.) Again she dwells initially on herself, defining her emotional state or mood, intensifying it in vivid description. This recurring self-indulgence determines her final madness by allowing her macabre imagination to create an alternate, internal world which now substitutes for the reality about her. Though she protests her sanity by identifying herself in those relationships which define her external existence, the first line she utters after her 'defence' (44-60)--"To England, if you will" (68)--if regarded as placed correctly, and purposely, argues contrarily and undermines that defence; the only logical point of reference for this line is found in Philip's "I prithee, lady, go away with me." (20)<sup>119</sup> Her statement is thus sequentially and ideologically illogical--mad.

Her reply to Philip's instructions to bind up her hair--"Yes, that I will; and wherefore will I do it?" (69)--is too explicit and childlike a response to such a simple request, and is hence abnormal; she furthermore makes the gesture metaphoric or symbolic of Arthur's

<sup>118</sup>Jameson, p. 22.

<sup>119</sup>Craig, p. 355, footnote to line 68.

bondage (70-75), and, her thoughts thus returning to her child, she again moves to the level of fantasy. She imagines a meeting with Arthur in heaven, but pictures him so changed that she does not recognize him; "I shall not know him" (88), she cries and concludes plaintively, "therefore never, never/Must I behold my pretty Arthur more." (88-89) Knowledge of the destiny awaiting Arthur supports the conjecture of Constance; because her opponent John has lost audience approval with his command for Arthur's death in the previous scene, and because her grief is now specifically and poignantly focused on this separation from and loss of her child, she finally engenders the audience's sympathy and pity. The despair is here, near her exit, at last warranted.

Her vivid personification of her grief in her concluding speech confirms it as her new reality:

Grief fills the room up of my absent child,  
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,  
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,  
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,  
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form.

(III.iv.93-97.)

Constance's last gesture and her cries for her son intimate her final reported frenzy (IV.ii.122.):

I will not keep this form upon my head,  
When there is such disorder in my wit.  
O Lord! my boy, my Arthur, my fair son!  
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world!  
My widow-comfort, and my sorrow's cure!

(101-5)

Mother and widow, Constance thus departs as she was introduced.<sup>120</sup> The fate of Constance--the breaking of the familial bonds (defining these roles) in the loss of her son and her husband--though obviously determined by forces outside herself, is not dictated directly by the symbolic needs of the play. Her deprivation thus differs from that of Elizabeth whose identifying bonds are destroyed to allow her fulfillment of a specific symbolic role. Constance's destiny is complicated by her internal development, the growth of her madness. Whereas the final emotional and intellectual state of Elizabeth constitutes a reluctant draining of her rational powers resulting from the despair of her isolation and her final intellectual battle with Richard (her early vehement wailing having been demanded by the ritual element of the play); the emotional end of Constance is not an unqualified response to an increasing external loss, nor is it the product of an intellectual and emotional contest: her final madness, if not overtly willed, is at least partially created by Constance herself. The verbosity of her early mourning, as suggested (above, p. 145), does not contribute to ritual effect, but is a self-indulgent dwelling on the internal world of her imagination which magnifies her grief out of all proportion; it is Constance who because of self-interest or an inherent weakness<sup>121</sup> initially manufactures the intensity of her despair. It is, with this tendency to magnify her grief, she who generates her final madness.

---

<sup>120</sup>"O, take his mother's thanks, a widow's thanks." (II, i. 32.)

<sup>121</sup>"I am sick and capable of fears." (III, i. 12.)

Mad, no longer responsible for the creating of despair, this emotional fate of Constance encourages the audience's final pity for the woman, whose last cries convey not her selfishness or self-interest, but the tragedy of her loss and final truth of her grief.

## CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this essay, I stressed that restrictions were imposed on the portrayal of female characters by the symbolic structure, political theme or concern, and philosophical basis of these early history plays; it was in this context that I quoted M. M. Reese in describing the particular limitations caused by the application of the retributive theory of history to the first tetralogy. The emphasis with which Reese asserts his views in the comment on these four plays is also felt in a general assessment of the historical plays and characters of Shakespeare which he makes in the same critical text,

### The Cease of Majesty:

The histories lie uniformly within a comprehensive vision which determines plot, argument and characterization in sole reference to the safety of England and the political qualities that minister to it. Outside this, the characters have no individual life whatever--or if they do, it is a superfluity, an irrelevance or an artistic blunder. The private essences which many of them do in fact develop are an overflow of Shakespeare's creative energy, and an admission of his inability to write strictly to a formula. But he never loses sight of his main structural purpose, and from time to time he brings us up short, . . . puts an end to indulgence and thrusts his characters back into the play. If for a moment they have seemed to feel and bleed, it was only an illusion.<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup>Reese, p. 163.

The abruptness and apparent facility with which Reese dismisses the individual or private lives of these characters suggests an attitude which denies the actual existence of a significant humanity in these characters -- a humanity which this essay has attempted to elucidate as the very factor individualizing the women of these plays.

The suggestion of the importance of political plot in determining character portrayal is not contested here. Particularly in the tetralogy, the function of woman is to determine and reflect in a politically literal and symbolic way the state of the realm of England. Elizabeth Grey, for example, is not only a woman victimized by her country's unnaturalness, but a character whose role is decided by the politically literal and symbolic needs of her play. Even in the case of Constance, the character's personal development--the private determination of her destiny--is not unqualified; for ironically, she becomes a victim as well--not of her realm's unnaturalness, but of herself, of the madness which denies her control of her actions.

The use of the word development here requires some clarification. In discussing an apparent discrepancy between the treatment of Shakespeare's male and female characters (a subject admittedly not dealt with in this essay), Betty Bandel makes a fine distinction between character development and character portrayal. The Elizabethan woman's life role (being determined at a young age, primarily by her early marriage) left her little time for the attitudinizing and self-exploration allowed her adventuring university-attending male contemporaries. Hence, says Bandel, allowing that Shakespeare's plays are an accurate reflection of the life

of his times, men more often than women are seen in Shakespeare as characters that develop or change; the inherent abilities and qualities of women (already formed) are portrayed implicitly rather than dramatized.<sup>123</sup>

The characteristics, of which Bandel speaks are primarily social or societal, whereas those of which I write are more psychological or personal. However, the distinguishing of the two terms "development" and "portrayal" endows portrayal with a special quality which, I suggest, when applied to the female characters of Shakespeare's early history plays, allows those women a humanity within their relatively (again personally or psychologically) undeveloped roles.

It is perhaps thus that S. C. Sen Gupta can say that the incidents of the political plots of Shakespeare's history plays are subordinated to the portraiture of character,<sup>124</sup> can offer as the antithesis to Reese the suggestion that "in all the history plays the emphasis is on the personal human aspect of things."<sup>125</sup> It is only by incorporating these two extreme attitudes--of Reese and Sen Gupta--that a final assessment of the total dramatic portrayal of these characters can be made. The quality of the import or impact of the dramatic presence of each is determined by the proportion of these two elements (one of which is emphasized in each critic's attitude), the political and symbolic, and the individual or human. And, it is in the variation of these proportions

---

<sup>123</sup>Bandel, p. 171-73.

<sup>124</sup>S. C. Sen Gupta, Shakespeare's Historical Plays (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 7.

<sup>125</sup>ibid., p. 53.

(between their representative or symbolic and their individual human roles) that the characters--Joan, Eleanor, Margaret, Elizabeth, the Duchess of York, Anne, Elinor, Blanch, and Constance--are differentiated.

In spite of their integration into the political and symbolic spheres of their respective plays--and Elinor and Constance may be included in this--'if for a moment these female characters seem to have felt and bled--they have; only the plays were an illusion.'



## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bandel, Betty. "Shakespeare's Treatment of the Social Position of Women." Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1951.
- Bevington, David M. "The Domineering Female in 1 Henry VI." Shakespeare Studies II, ed. J. Leeds Barroll. Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati, 1966, pp. 51-58.
- Birney, Alice Lotvin. Satiric Catharsis in Shakespeare. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973.
- Bonjour, Adrien. "The Road to Swinstead Abbey: A Study of the Sense and Structure of King John." ELH, vol. 18 (1951), pp. 253-74.
- Bromley, John C. The Shakespearean Kings. Boulder, Colorado: Colorado Associated Press, 1971.
- Brooke, Stopford Augustus. "Richard III." New Shakespeare Society Publications. London, Series 1, no. 10 (1880-86), pp. 509-22.
- Bullough, Geoffrey. Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare, vol. 3. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968.
- Calderwood, James L. "Commodity and Honour in King John." Shakespeare: The Histories, ed. Eugene Waith. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1965.
- Clemen, Wolfgang H. A Commentary on Shakespeare's "Richard III." English version by John Bonheim. London: Methuen and Company Ltd., 1968.
- Craig, Hardin, ed. The Complete Works of Shakespeare. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1961.
- Ebisch, Walther, and Levin L. Schucking. A Shakespeare Bibliography. Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1931.
- Fitch, Robert E. Shakespeare: The Perspective of Value. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969.
- Hoey, Sister M. J. Frances. "Shakespeare and Two Women: A Study of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Margaret of Anjou." Ph.D. dissertation, St. John's University, 1950.
- Jameson, Anna. Characteristics of Women. London: Saunders and Otley, 1858.

- Law, Robert A. "The Chronicles and the Three Parts of Henry VI." University of Texas Studies in English, vol. 38 (1954), pp. 13-32.
- Mackenzie, Agnes Mure. The Women in Shakespeare's Plays. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1924.
- McNeal, Thomas H. "Margaret of Anjou: Romantic Princess and Troubled Queen," Shakespeare Quarterly, vol. 9 (Winter, 1958), no. 1, pp. 1-10.
- Moulton, Richard G. The Moral System of Shakespeare. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1903.
- Nathan, Norman. "The Marriage of Richard and Anne," Notes and Queries, vol. 200 (Jan.-Dec.), Feb. 1955, pp. 55-56.
- Palmer, John. Political Characters of Shakespeare. London: Macmillan and Company, 1948.
- Pearson, Lu Emily. "Elizabethan Widows." Stanford Studies in Language and Literature, ed. Hardin Craig. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1941, pp. 24-42.
- Pierce, Robert B. Shakespeare's History Plays: The Family and the State. Athens, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1971.
- Reese, M. M. The Cease of Majesty. London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1961.
- Ribner, Irving. The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare. London: Methuen and Company, 1965.
- Sen Gupta, S. C. Shakespeare's Historical Plays. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Smith, Gordon Ross. A Classified Shakespeare Bibliography, 1936-1958. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1963.
- Sprague, Arthur C. Shakespeare's Histories: Plays for the Stage. London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1966.
- Tillyard, E. M. W. Shakespeare's History Plays. London: Chatto and Windus, 1956.
- Turner, Robert Y. "Characterization in Shakespeare's Early History Plays." ELH, vol. 31, no. 3 (Sept. 1964), pp. 241-58.
- Warner, Beverley E. English History in Shakespeare's Plays. New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1899.

Williams, Stanley T., ed. The Life and Death of King John. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927.