

Unquiet Queens: Staging the (Sexual) Politics of Queenship in Late Elizabethan History Plays, 1587-1603



Elisabeth L. L. Jones

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

Cardiff University
January 2022

Abstract

This thesis analyses how early modern English history plays deploy representations of ‘unquiet’ medieval queens to navigate contemporary concerns about gender and power. Addressing plays that were written in the late sixteenth century by Shakespeare and his contemporaries Peele, Marlowe, and Heywood, the thesis focuses on dramatisations of the women who occupied or controlled the throne of England before Mary and Elizabeth Tudor: consorts, regents, and dowagers. These plays were all produced between 1589 and 1599, in a socio-political moment framed by the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots in 1587 and the death of Elizabeth I in 1603.

This study suggests that the proliferation of history plays in the 1590s is fueled, in part, by an interest in interrogating the gender politics and geopolitics of the present through prisms of the past. It explores history plays’ frequent foregrounding and questioning of the agency of queens’ bodies and voices in relation to these plays’ contemporary moment, when England had had a queen regnant for four decades and other women such as Mary, Queen of Scots and Catherine de Medici had recently been in power elsewhere in Europe.

Though there is a corpus of scholarship surrounding queenship, female rule, history plays, and (premodern) historiography, there is a gap in the field that my thesis redresses: it offers the first sustained study of medieval queens in late Elizabethan history plays, exploring the insights that these literary-dramatic representations of queens and history might engender.

Chapter One looks at two plays about King John, by Peele and Shakespeare. It argues that these plays place a particular emphasis on older queens, and how these queens derive authority from motherhood even when their sons are grown; in these plays, the queen mother deploys her power to comment upon and shape matters of nation and empire. Chapter Two focuses on plays about the first three king Edwards, and explores how queens’ sexual and maternal identities and relationships impact upon these plays’ particularly pronounced investments in the insular (geo)politics of the British Isles. It argues that the history plays establish conventions for the roles of queens – conventions that are sometimes queered and/or treated self-reflexively. The third and final chapter focuses on plays set during the Wars of the Roses: Shakespeare’s first tetralogy and Heywood’s *The First and Second Parts of Edward IV*. This chapter examines dramatic and rhetorical patterning in the representation of queens’ sexual identities; considers queens as embodiments of the Lacanian *extimité*; and explores how the staging of rival and multiple queens interacts, again, with late Elizabethan contexts.

By examining representations of understudied queens in (relatively) understudied plays, this thesis hopes to bring these female characters out of the wings of history and criticism and put them centre stage. Queen figures use their voices to offer alternative perspectives and political commentaries that sometimes threaten to upstage the historical narratives described by the plays’ sources and other characters: they interrogate history itself. They also interrogate contemporary female power in a way that neither straightforwardly celebrates nor critiques it: by staging a multiplicity of queens who variously adopt, struggle against, or reject gendered modes of authority and agency, history plays ask more questions than they answer about history, power, and gender.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the financial, intellectual, and emotional support of my incredible family. Firstly, I would like to thank my mother and best friend, Anne, who had the courage to go back to university when we were small and from whom I get my love of learning and literature. She has supported me in this as she has in everything: with laughter, love, and unwavering belief. Thank you to my father, Laurence, for his quiet, constant encouragement and genuine interest in everything I do. I am grateful for the support of my brother and sister, Catherine and Garin, who are always as proud of me as I am of them. I am also grateful to my niece and nephew, Lucie and Ieuan, who neither know nor care what a thesis is and just want me to colour with them. Auntie Linda, too, has always shown an interest in this project and allowed me to talk to/at her about it.

It would be remiss of me not to mention my dog Tudor, who saw me work on this thesis for more hours than anyone else: he kept me company through many all-night writing sessions and made sure I had a reason to go out and get fresh air every day. And of course, I am indescribably grateful to Lewis. He has been by my side through every step, setback, and success in my life for over a decade. I could not have completed this work without his support, ability to always make me laugh, and unquestioning faith that I could do it. He is everything a partner should be.

For financial support, I owe a great deal of gratitude to Cardiff University's School of English, Communication, and Philosophy for awarding me a PhD Starter Bursary. I am also incredibly fortunate to have received funding from The James Pantyfedwen Foundation: they very kindly provided the majority of my tuition fees, without which completing this research would have probably been impossible.

My friends and peers in ENCAP and the Arts and Social Studies Library have offered many valuable insights and words of encouragement about both thesis-writing in general and about my research in particular. MEMORI has been a source of intellectual curiosity and stimulation, and being part of this community provided plenty of ideas and avenues for exploration in this research.

Professor Martin Coyle was the independent reader for this project for a number of years, and I am grateful for his unique wisdom and advice on various versions of these chapters. Thanks to Dr Derek Dunne, who provided helpful feedback on a very early draft of the *John* chapter, and to Dr Rob Gossedge, who made a passing comment in a reading group that became central to this thesis's argument. Dr Melanie Bigold acted as my interim supervisor in late 2020 and early 2021: her comments on this research undoubtedly made it richer, and I am very grateful for her support and guidance during that difficult period.

My chief thanks go to my wonderful supervisor, Dr Megan Leitch. Her academic, pastoral, and professional support has meant more to me than I can articulate. Our conversations—about this work and everything—have been one of the best parts of my academic journey. I am incredibly fortunate to have had Megan's support for so many years, and this PhD experience would not have been as personally enjoyable or as professionally rewarding without her expertise, generosity, patience, trust, sense of humour, gentle guidance, astute thoughtfulness, and friendship.

Dedications

For Auntie Wheeze, who always hoped she'd see me do this. I hope she can.

For Grampy, who always asked if I was—and who always wished I would be—a
good scholar.

And for my baby, who made the last months of this project much harder and infinitely
more purposeful.

Abbreviations

Where I include quotations from multiple plays in adjacent lines, I use the following abbreviations:

Edward I – EdI

Edward II – EdII

Edward III – EdIII

Edward IV – EdIV

Henry VI, Part I – 1HVI

Henry VI, Part 2 – 2HVI

Henry VI, Part 3 – 3HVI

King John – KJ

Richard III – RIII

The Troublesome Reign of King John – TR

Introduction

Queenship and History Plays in Late Elizabethan England

QUEEN MARGARET: Ah, little joy enjoys the queen thereof,
 For I am she, and altogether joyless.
 I can no longer hold me patient.
 Hear me, you wrangling pirates, that fall out
 In sharing that which you have pilled from me.
 Which of you trembles not that looks on me?
 If not that I am Queen, you bow like subjects;
 Yet that by you deposed, you quake like rebels.
 ...
 I do find more pain in banishment
 Than death can yield me here by my abode.¹

Queen Margaret enters Shakespeare's *Richard III* cursing. In her first appearance in this play, Margaret articulates, embodies, and reflects on some of the central concerns of this thesis. Throughout the play, she is spectral, imposing; a forceful presence, both when she is onstage and when the contents of her bitter, caustic curses appear to be enacted later on the characters against whom they are uttered. Here in Act One, scene three, in a series of asides, she recounts the wrongs done to herself, and the Lancastrian dynasty into which she married, by the victorious Yorkist faction: the usurpation and murder of her husband, King Henry VI, the murder of her son, Prince Edward, and, consequently, her own deposition as the Queen of England. When the new Queen, Elizabeth, articulates that she has 'little joy' in her royal office, Margaret reshapes Elizabeth's misery and claims it as her own; she agrees that the Queen of England is indeed 'joyless', because she herself is miserable and she is, she maintains, 'queen thereof'. This insistent reminder to the audience of Margaret's regal identity punctuates her asides as, after fifty lines, she 'can no longer hold [herself] patient'. Stepping forward to reveal her presence to the other characters, Margaret demands that her audience—in the theatre and on the stage—'hear' her, forcefully affirming a voice for herself

¹ William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Richard III*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd edn, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: Norton, 2008), pp. 547-628 (1.3.155-162; 1.3.166.1-166.2). Further references will be to this edition unless otherwise stated, and act, scene, and line references will be given parenthetically—for this play and others—throughout the body of the thesis. I will henceforth refer to this play as *Richard III*.

at a moment when she might be expected to disappear from history and narrative as the wife of an overthrown king.

Then, Margaret vehemently insists that the victorious Yorkists are ‘pirates’, pillagers, ‘rebels’, deposers, usurpers. ‘I am Queen’, she reiterates, refusing to situate her royal identity in a lost past. The language Margaret uses here—and indeed throughout the play—is not the language of a victim, not even the language of a defeated queen consort; it is imperious, fearless, vengeful, and always stridently insistent on her own ‘rightness’ and *rightfulness*. Even while mourning and railing against the loss of her husband (the king) and the prince (her son), and though she is the foreign Margaret of Anjou, Margaret continues to define and demarcate herself as ‘queen’, the English court as her ‘abode’. In provocatively insisting that she is still queen, Margaret rejects the idea of queenship as subsidiary power within the sphere of a more powerful man. She suggests instead that her identity as queen is not contingent on the survival of the men from whom she, technically, derives her royal title and political power.

Here, as in other history plays produced in England during the 1590s which focus on England’s medieval past, there is a potent interest in, and interrogation of, an ideology of queenship: what it is and what it means to be queen. Margaret also articulates an alternative form of history to the one the other characters onstage would espouse, one in which Edward IV is not the anointed king returning to his rightful place in the social stratum following Henry VI’s brief readeption of 1470-71, but a violent and unjust usurper. Alternative political perspectives—such as the one Margaret asserts throughout *Richard III*—are often offered by queens in early modern history plays. Margaret’s insistence that she be heard is a feature shared by many of the queens I study in this thesis. They, like Margaret, are ‘unquiet’: they refuse to be silent or silenced and insist that their perspectives are heard, using their voices as

well as their bodies to comment on their often ‘unquiet wrangling days’ or troublesome times.²

This thesis addresses the ways literary and dramatic representations of queens and queenship engage with matters of history, historiography, and ‘herstory’ between 1589 and 1599. No comprehensive study of medieval queens in early modern history plays currently exists; this thesis offers the first sustained, book-length study of early modern dramatisations of the women who sat on the English throne prior to Mary and Elizabeth Tudor. It examines the roles and representations of historical queens in late Elizabethan English history plays, when the genre was at the height of its popularity and engaging closely with moments from history to comment on its own contemporary crises. Between 1589 and 1599, at least twenty works dramatising English history were first penned by dramatists including Thomas Heywood, Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, George Peele, and William Shakespeare. The content of these plays spans from the reign of King John (1199-1216) to the ascension of Henry VII (1485). This thesis argues that examining the representation of queens in history plays, by Shakespeare and a number of his contemporaries, allows us to deepen our understanding of queenship (both ‘medieval’ and ‘early modern’), the nature and cultural work of history plays as a genre, and the ways in which they (re)write the past.³

Though the main focus of this study is on plays first published in 1589-99, and though I argue that the 1590s saw the emergence of the history play as an identifiable genre (featuring realistic dramatisations of historical events and figures), the genre has precedents earlier in the century. These include John Bale’s *Kynge Johan* (1538), which Philip Schwyzer describes as ‘the birth of the history play’. Schwyzer argues that ‘nothing of the kind had been

² *Richard III*’s Duchess of York—the title character’s mother—laments the many ‘[a]ccursed and unquiet wrangling days’ that she has witnessed. This royal woman uses the term ‘unquiet’ to refer to the lack of peace caused by the ‘domestic broils’ and wars fought between brothers. Here, the Duchess is ‘unquiet’ in the sense that I use the term: she uses her voice to comment on her troublesome times. *Richard III*, 2.4.54-64.

³ Here, I am using the terms ‘medieval’ and ‘early modern’ in the modern, critical sense of referring to, and attempting to demarcate, a period of time. Later in this introduction, I discuss the terms and ideas of both the medieval and early modern further (particularly in relation to recent critical discussions about the accuracy and usefulness of historical periodisation).

witnessed on the English stage' before this play's first performance, and that the play takes a 'radical and provocative stance towards its source materials'.⁴ Thomas Norton's and Thomas Sackville's Inns of Court play *Gorboduc* (1561) is sometimes cited as a forerunner to both the history play and Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy.⁵ *Gorboduc*'s source was Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain* (c. 1136), and Alice Hunt cites it as 'a powerful example of just how political, and politicized, much Tudor drama was'.⁶ Hunt argues that the play 'follows the *speculum principis* tradition', was 'a dramatic mirror into which rulers and ruled should peer and learn', and 'worries about and urges counsel as a way to protect the realm'.⁷ Henry James and Greg Walker also note that '*Gorboduc* was read by its first audience as a direct commentary upon, and intervention in, contemporary political debates' because '[d]rama and politics did not inhabit separate spheres of operation'.⁸ Though they did not always share the apparently directly didactic nature of *Gorboduc*, late Elizabethan history plays similarly reflected on and were influenced by their contemporary moment.

Indeed, while the plays on which I focus most attention here were written in the decade between 1589-99, my thesis title adopts the broader parameters of 1587-1603. This choice reflects my argument that history plays are fundamentally shaped by their contemporary contexts, and that their burst in popularity is framed by two key events: the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots in 1587 and the death of Elizabeth I in 1603. Though history plays dramatised the past, the plays written in the last decade of Elizabeth's reign were very much informed by the contexts of powerful women competing for the throne, internal

⁴ Philip Schwyzer, 'Paranoid History: John Bale's *King Johan*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*, ed. by Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 499-513 (pp. 499-500). See John Bale, *King Johan*, in *The Complete Plays of John Bale*, vol. 1, ed. by Peter Happé (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985).

⁵ Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, *Gorboduc* [1561], in *Two Tudor Tragedies*, ed. by William Tydeman (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992).

⁶ Alice Hunt, 'Dumb Politics in *Gorboduc*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*, pp. 547-65 (p. 549).

⁷ Hunt, 'Dumb Politics', pp. 549, 561, and 550.

⁸ Henry James and Greg Walker, 'The Politics of *Gorboduc*', *The English Historical Review*, 110.435 (1995), 109-21 (p. 118).

(geo)politics, queens' sexual identities (or lack thereof), and questions of inheritance and succession.

By looking at Shakespeare's histories—themselves somewhat understudied compared to his tragedies, comedies and romances—alongside history plays written by his less-studied contemporaries, this thesis suggests that late Elizabethan drama offers an emphasis on (re)writing history: an emphasis that includes a focus on a 'feminine' history, or, to use a familiar but perhaps fruitful term, *herstory*.⁹ By examining how questions of gender, nationality, power and politics are explored through a literary and, particularly, a dramatic lens, this thesis builds on and complements existing scholarship that focuses on historical representations and examinations of queens but in which literary material appears only as an aside. Much like the theatrical 'aside', depictions of often-sidelined medieval queens in early modern drama can yield insight into contemporary and continued concerns. This thesis will bring these female characters, often forced to wait separately in the wings of history and criticism, to the fore, and put these characters and the (re)writing of their history centre stage.

The Drama of Queenship

When history plays began to emerge and grow in popularity in the late Elizabethan decade of 1589-99, England had been under the rule of an independent female sovereign for over forty years—a lifetime for many and, indeed, a lifetime for many of the genre's leading dramatists. Elizabeth I, following her accession in 1558 and coronation in January 1559, was into her fourth decade on the throne. Before Elizabeth, her older sister, Mary I, had ruled as Queen of England for more than five years, from July 1553 until her death in November 1558. It was during a period of longstanding female sovereignty, then, that the English history play genre

⁹ During second-wave feminism of the 1970s and 80s, 'herstory' began to be used as a term to describe a 'compensatory feminist practice' of 'designat[ing] women's place at the center of an alternative narrative of past events'. See Devoney Looser, *British Women Writers and the Writing of History, 1670-1820* (London and Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 1.

flourished; and, as this thesis will argue, the concerns and perspectives voiced by onstage queens (who are often portrayed as independent agents who exert power and influence despite not being sovereigns in their own right) resonate with the concerns foregrounded by having a queen on the throne of England.

During these decades of regnal queenship in sixteenth and early seventeenth-century England, the reigns of Mary and, especially, Elizabeth were subject to intense scrutiny, frequent questioning about the rightfulness and appropriateness of female rule, and a number of outright (but generally unsuccessful) rebellions spearheaded by various discontented noblemen.¹⁰ John Knox's 1558 pamphlet *The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women*, is one—and perhaps the most (in)famous—example of an explicit critique of allowing women to rule. Targeting Mary I directly and written on the cusp of Elizabeth's reign, Knox's misogynistic diatribe opens with the vehement statement that:

To promote a woman to beare rule, superioritie, dominion or empire aboue any realme, nation, or citie, is repugnā[n]t to nature, cō[n]tumelie to God, a thing most contrarious to his reueled will and approued ordinā[n]ce, and finallie it is the subuersion of good order, of all equitie and iustice.¹¹

For Knox, a woman in a position of authority is unnatural, chaotic, and even blasphemous.

Unsurprisingly, Knox's pamphlet made enemies of both Tudor queens regnant and effectively ended his theological career in England.¹² Nonetheless, the pamphlet contributed to an intense,

¹⁰ James D. Taylor details 'Wyatt's Rebellion' of 1554, which arose in response to Mary I's proposed—and unpopular—marriage to Philip II of Spain, in *Sir Thomas Wyatt the Younger, c. 1521-1554 and Wyatt's Rebellion* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2013). K. J. Kesselring's book on the so-called 'Rising of the North' (1569) provides details of this armed Catholic rebellion. See Kesselring, *The Northern Rebellion of 1569: Faith, Politics and Protest in Elizabethan England* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Aislinn Muller demonstrates how Elizabeth I's excommunication by the Catholic Church in 1570 'posed a destabilising threat to her regime' and 'exacerbated religious tensions'. *The Excommunication of Elizabeth I: Faith, Politics, and Resistance in Post-Reformation England, 1570-1603* (Leiden: Brill, 2020). Andy Wood provides details of early modern rebellion—before, during, and after the Tudor queens' reigns—in *Riot, Rebellion and Popular Politics in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001). Similarly, Diarmaid MacCulloch and Anthony Fletcher detail the major rebellions faced by the Tudor kings and queens. See *Tudor Rebellions* (Abingdon and New York: Taylor and Francis, 2020).

¹¹ John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (Geneva: J. Poullain and A. Rebul, 1558), p. 9 (B1r). Accessed via Early English Books Online [www.proquest.com/eebo].

¹² John Knox wrote to Elizabeth in the summer of July 1559 to apologise for any offence caused by his 'writing of a book against the usurped authority, and unjust regiment of women', though he insisted that he could 'perceive no just occasion' for Elizabeth to be offended as he had not attacked her directly. Further, Knox

prolonged discourse about the rights and roles of women, and particularly of ruling women, of queens. Indeed, female rule began to face more serious, extended interrogation in England and on the continent in the sixteenth century. This interrogation dovetailed with the fact that, in the latter half of the century in particular, Europe saw the increasing emergence of a number of politically powerful women, including queen regnants and regents.

Though the Tudor queens were the first women to rule England in their own right for any legally-sanctioned, sustained length of time, they were by no means the country's first politically influential queens. Matilda is often cited as an early precedent for the independent female rulership modelled by Mary I and Elizabeth I. Matilda, the daughter of Henry I of England, was (self-)styled as *domina Anglorum*—Lady of the English—during the civil war that followed Henry I's succession crisis. As the mother of Henry II, Matilda became *Mathildis, imperatrix* and *Herici regis filia*. Charles Beem discusses Matilda's navigation of various royal and gendered identities to conclude that '[s]ignifying herself as Empress and king Henry's daughter, Matilda presented an image of female power drawing legitimacy from the history of English queenship. The title of Lady of the English, however, signified singular possession of kingly power bearing no relationship to fathers or husbands, dead or alive'.¹³ Boudica, the British 'Warrior Queen' who was at the forefront of a rebellion against the Roman Empire in 60 or 61AD, is similarly considered as a precursor for the independent queenship we see with the sixteenth-century Tudor queens, and with Elizabeth especially. Though, as Laura Schechter writes, 'Elizabeth I rarely encouraged explicit comparisons between herself and martial women of the literary or historical past', allusions to 'leaders such as Boudicca are relatively common in popular early modern historiographical texts with

decidedly does not apologise for the sentiment of the pamphlet, being 'neither yet [...] minded to retreat, or call back any principal point.' This letter to the Queen was published in John Knox, *The History of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland*, ed. by William McGavin (Glasgow: Blackie, Fullerton & Co., 1831), pp. 184-85 (p. 184).

¹³ Charles Beem, *The Lioness Roared: The Problems of Female Rule in English History* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 25-62 (p. 61). Beem's chapter on Matilda discusses 'the construction of female lordship'.

encomiastic and nationalist passions'.¹⁴ Links between Boudica and Elizabeth exist in a number of early modern writings, including James Aske's *Elizabetha Triumphans* (a poetic celebration of the defeat of the Spanish Armada published in 1588) and Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590 and 1596).¹⁵ Richard Hingley and Christina Unwin claim that Boudica was 'particularly valuable to the English during the 1570s to 1590s, at the time of the war with Spain' as 'she could be interpreted as a patriot who had fought bravely against the invaders of her country'.¹⁶ And of course, both rulers were reputed to have delivered rousing speeches to their followers before battle: Boudica at Watling Street in 60-61AD (the supposed speech was later recorded by Tacitus) and Elizabeth at Tilbury before the Spanish Armada in 1588. Indeed, the idea of Elizabeth as a Boudica-like warrior queen is one that emerges more strongly after her death.¹⁷

These earlier female rulers are useful for contextualising this study of the medieval queens—consorts, regents, and dowagers—who feature in late Elizabethan history plays addressing England's recent, pre-Tudor past. This thesis explores how gender roles, questions

¹⁴ Laura Schechter, "'As liuing now, equald thyr virtues then": Early Modern Allusions, Boudicca, and the Failure of Monologic Historiographies', *ESQ* 39.2-3 (2013), 181-215 (p. 181). Schechter writes that it was more common for early modern writers wishing to praise the queen to adopt a 'well-established set of allusions aimed at lauding various combinations of the queen's chastity, beauty, intelligence, militancy, fortitude, peaceful disposition, and generosity' (p. 183).

¹⁵ James Aske, *Elizabetha Triumphans* (London: by Thomas Orwin for Thomas Gubbin and Thomas Newman, 1588). Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* [1590 and 1596], ed. by A. C. Hamilton, rev. 2nd edn (Harlow: Pearson, 2007). Samantha Frénée-Hutchins observes that, since 'Britomart is the descendant of Bouduca (Boudica) and the ancestor of Elizabeth', Spenser 'effectively reproduces Boudica in the person of Elizabeth, a move which uses history in order to legitimise the reign of a woman on the throne of England and to prove a woman's capacity to rule'. *Boudica's Odyssey in Early Modern England* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 9.

¹⁶ Richard Hingley and Christina Unwin, *Boudica: Iron Age Warrior Queen* (London and New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2005), p. 118.

¹⁷ In 1613, The King's Men performed John Fletcher's play *Bonduca*, in which the titular Iceni queen proclaims '[a] Woman Beat 'em, Caratach, a weak Woman, / A Woman beat these Romans!' (Fletcher, *Bonduca: Or, The British Heroine* (London: Richard Bentley, 1696), 1.1.16-17). Julie Crawford notes that Bonduca's declaration is rebuked and rendered as boastful by Caratach, 'the "real" hero of Fletcher's play'. Crawford says that the 'figure of Boadicea as a powerful war-like, or "Amazonian" woman identified with British nationalism necessarily constituted a challenge to the ideology of James's court', and argues that 'Bonduca can be read as a marker of the representational possibilities of the virago in the Jacobean reign, and as parody, or at least a representation, of Elizabeth'. However, neither Caratach nor King James is unproblematically heroic or straightforwardly celebrated, which, Crawford suggests, 'reflect[s] contemporary ambivalence about James as a ruler'. See Crawford, 'Fletcher's *The Tragedie of Bonduca* and the Anxieties of the Masculine Government of James I', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 39.2 (1999), 357-81 (357; 360; 374).

of national identity, and national and international politics are negotiated, mediated, and problematised through early modern—and, particularly, late Elizabethan—dramatic representations of medieval queens and queen-figures. I argue that history plays contribute to contemporary discourses surrounding a woman's 'place' and female rule, as well as to conversations about historiography, or more specifically, about how history is 'made' or determined. Dramatisations of queenly conversations and women's voices serve to reflect on the contemporary political landscape—in England most directly, but also abroad—as well as to interrogate the dominant narrative of history, and to comment on how history is constructed and received.

Early modern history plays are often identified by their central character, usually a historical king. The original printed title pages of many history plays placed their emphasis firmly on the king whose reign they dramatised, with subtitles often expanding to include information about other key male characters and historical events that audiences would likely have expected to see onstage. The title page of the First Folio's version of *Richard III* gives the title 'The Tragedy of Richard the Third: with the Landing of Earle Richmond, and the Battell at Bosworth Field'.¹⁸ The first Quarto edition, appearing in 1597, has a more comprehensive title page: 'The Tragedy of King Richard the third. Containing, His treacherous Plots against his brother Clarence: the pittiefull mutther of his iunocent nephews: his tyrannicall usurpation : with the whole course of his detested life, and most deserued death'.¹⁹ Early modern traditions of printing and editing these plays, then, helped to define the genre we classify as English history plays. As demonstrated in this example, many of these plays suggest a familiar set of expectations from their title pages: there is usually a king, usually important (noble)men, usually a famous battle.

¹⁸ Digital facsimile of *Richard III* in the Bodleian First Folio of Shakespeare's plays, Arch. G c.7.

¹⁹ Digital facsimile of *Richard III*, Quarto 1 (Huth).

But history plays are not only concerned with kings. They also dramatise historical queens—that is, the women who were married to various kings of England in the past, be this past distant or more recent from a late Elizabethan perspective. They often tend to also explore different ‘models’ of queenship and different types of queens, from the regnant-like Margaret of Anjou to the more consort-like Anne Neville in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, from the ruthless Isabella in Marlowe’s *Edward II* to the largely-absent Philippa who later intercedes with her husband to have mercy on their prisoners in *Edward III*. This thesis reads history plays in relation to their sources, primarily the recent chronicle sources with which these playwrights would likely have engaged directly: Edward Hall’s *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and Yorke*, more commonly known as *Hall’s Chronicle* (1548, 1550), and Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, 1577 and 1587).²⁰ Further, I read the feminine perspectives offered by history plays—perspectives that are largely absent from these sources—to suggest that drama (though written and performed by men and boys during this period) is a dialogic narrative form that allows greater space for voices, and particularly for female voices that are so often absent in the sources.²¹ These female voices offer commentaries that interrogate conventional gender roles, the gendered nature of power, and the very construction of history.

Just as history plays dramatise different types of figures (and not only royal figures), and different types of queens, they also dramatise different forms of ‘history’ for the stage. Alongside their embellishment of sources, these plays offer substantial dramatic engagement with the voices of female and lower class characters. Female characters and characters of lower or working classes are traditionally less empowered than their male or higher-ranking

²⁰ Of course, dramatists were not necessarily just using one or two chronicle sources, and these chronicles were themselves amalgamating material from multiple older sources themselves.

²¹ Though he was writing primarily about novelistic discourse, it is worth noting Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism here. The notion that meaning is explored and created through dialogue is clearly also applicable to drama, and especially to my argument that history plays use the voices of powerful women to challenge dominate historical discourse. See M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008 [1981]).

counterparts respectively, and thus do not get to shape or articulate historical narrative. However, I argue that history plays dramatise an alternative—or, perhaps more aptly, a parallel—strand of historical narrative that sits alongside the more-often articulated masculine, militarist perspective. The scope of this study means I focus on history plays' frequent staging of queens (and royal women) in dramatic parallel to and alongside kings and powerful men, writing and rewriting history into a more 'feminine' sphere in terms of spatial location (domestic space, the court), emotional dialogue, and the staging of the actions of female characters. As such, these plays narrate a part or version of history that is not explored with particular depth in their (chronicle) sources. Queens in history plays are figured in relation to the men in their lives, but they are also dramatised as significant voices in their own right. They repeatedly and effectively comment on and intervene in national and court politics—whether this is by leading an army on the battlefield, interceding with the king on behalf of their subjects, or facilitating politically expedient marriage matches—thus influencing the course of action in the plays and, it is suggested, in history. Queens are written into history—or, perhaps, *back* into history—by history plays themselves.

Centring the (Sexual) Politics of Queenship

This thesis addresses the (gender) politics of queens in a range of history plays that were written in the 1590s. Chapter One examines two plays dramatising the reign of King John (1199-1216): Shakespeare's *King John* (c. 1595) and *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, which was probably written by George Peele c. 1589. In Chapter Two, I discuss three plays about the first three King Edwards, whose reigns spanned over one hundred years from 1272 to 1377: Peele's *The Famous Chronicle of King Edward the First* (c. 1593), Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* (c. 1593), and the *Edward III* play written around 1596, possibly as a collaboration between Shakespeare and Thomas Kyd. The closing act is Chapter Three, which

focuses on plays that dramatise the Wars of the Roses and the rival monarchs competing for the throne during these late fifteenth-century civil conflicts. Once more, Shakespeare's (possibly partly collaborative) plays take centre stage. In addition to the plays of the first tetralogy—the three parts of *Henry VI* (c. 1591) and *Richard III* (c. 1593)—this chapter examines *Edward IV, Parts 1 and 2* (c. 1599), which is probably the work of Thomas Heywood.

The plays of Shakespeare's second tetralogy—*Richard II*; *Henry IV, Part One*; *Henry IV, Part Two*; *Henry V*—are not given their own chapter here, for reasons of space and argument. The second tetralogy, alongside *Richard III*, consists of some of Shakespeare's most well studied history plays. Further, the reigns of the first two Lancastrian kings is terrain only Shakespeare seems interested in traversing in the 1590s: one of the aims of this thesis is to offer a study of late Elizabethan history plays that reads Shakespeare alongside his contemporaries without any exclusively Shakespearean chapters. Further, this is a thesis about queenly voices and action, and '[w]omen in the second tetralogy are rarely heard' and 'virtually all the women we see in these plays are enclosed in domestic settings and confined to domestic roles'.²² The French voice and sometimes-humorous language barrier between Queen Isabel and the king in *Henry V* is well-discussed, as is the relative silence and lack of personal identity of the queen in *Richard II*.²³ There are no queens in the two *Henry IV* plays. For these reasons, I do not discuss the second tetralogy, which in turn means there is no space for the other surviving play about the last Plantagenet king: the anonymous *Thomas of*

²² Kavita Mudan Finn and Lea Luecking Frost, "'Nothing Hath Begot My Something Grief': Invisible Queenship in Shakespeare's Second Tetralogy', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Shakespeare's Queens*, ed. by Finn and Valerie Schutte (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 227-250 (p. 230). Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 137.

²³ The queen in *Richard II* is nameless, and seems to be a composite of his first wife, Anne of Bohemia, and Isabella of Valois, the child who was Richard's wife at the time of his death that the play dramatises.

Woodstock (c. 1591-95), which depicts the events prior to those in Shakespeare's *Richard II* and which is sometimes referred to as *Richard II, Part One*.²⁴

Three main strands of argument run across this thesis's three main chapters. These strands concern queens and their bodies; queens and their relationships with the men who serve or oppose them; and queens and their countries. Throughout, I argue that late Elizabethan history plays reflect and comment on their contemporary moment, their contemporary monarch. This commentary, however, is never straightforward. The plays (and playwrights) do not celebrate nor condemn the queens they dramatise; rather, queens occupy an uneasy position as they are variably shown to be powerful and powerless, influential and ineffectual, commentators on history and then abruptly absent. Just as the medieval queens staged in the 1590s navigate their relationships with their bodily, sexual identities; with kings, princes, and male subjects; and with national identity (or perhaps identities) and international politics, so too does Elizabeth I in the moment that these plays are being penned and performed. Similarities between content and contemporary moment occur, daringly and strikingly, throughout the genre, and these similarities are used to probe questions of female rule and the late Elizabethan moment.²⁵

The first strand of this thesis, focusing on queens' bodies and queens as embodied agents, argues that the queens in the history plays are represented as navigating around or deliberately utilising expectations of feminine behaviour in order to negotiate difficulties faced as women in (relatively) powerful positions. Do they seek to legitimise their authority

²⁴ In *Woodstock*, we see Anne of Bohemia's (or, as the play calls her, Anne O'Beame's) coronation. We also see her intercede to and on behalf of her husband, as well as critiquing her husband's rulership. A. J. Hoenselaars notes that the queen is 'concern[ed] about the mismanagement of England', and that when she 'adopt[s] English nationality, King Richard is made alien'. See *Images of Englishmen and Foreigners in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: A Study of Stage Characters and National Identity in English Renaissance Drama, 1558-1642* (London and Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1992), pp. 38-9. Finn and Frost argue that Anne's 'purported influence is far greater than what is actually dramatized onstage'. "'Nothing Hath Begot My Something Grief'", p. 232.

²⁵ I develop this argument about history plays serving to reflect, comment on, and critique contemporary 'history' and politics—and about dramatisations of queens effectively reflecting, commenting on, and critiquing contemporary queenship and female rule—later in this Introduction.

in a manner reminiscent of Elizabeth I, who is often quoted as claiming that she was ‘but one body, naturally considered, though by his permission a body politic to govern’?²⁶ This 1558 first Queen’s speech at Hatfield (whether truly spoken by Elizabeth or not) engages with the idea of a ‘body natural/body politic’ distinction, an idea with premodern precedence and later explored by Ernst Kantorowicz’s seminal and much-debated *The King’s Two Bodies* (1957), and Marie Axton’s feminist reconsideration of Kantorowicz’s work (1977).²⁷ Though Elizabeth I supposedly insisted on drawing a distinction between her physical and political body and identity, history plays that write queens do not depict any similar level of separation. As such, we can read queens on stage as not necessarily reflections of Elizabeth I herself, but as comments about Elizabeth’s model of queenship.

Indeed, the distinction between the biological and political body is less defined for female and queenly characters. In history plays, queens’ biological bodies—and especially their sexual and maternal identities—are bound up with their political identities. In a world where the principal function of the female body was considered to be in childbearing and the queen’s primary responsibility was to produce a legitimate—preferably male—heir for the kingdom, the ‘body natural’ necessarily *became* the ‘body politic’, the physical means by which the stability of a monarch and/or dynasty was secured. My thesis scrutinises how early modern history plays represent the queen (as) mother or the queen ruling as regent in her child’s (or even her husband’s) stead. The shape and manner of queenly power shifts when she rules on behalf of a minor and acts in the capacity of regent, a role which is (supposedly) temporary and perhaps nominal when a regency is in fact, if unofficially, comprised by a team of advisors. Further, I examine the relationships between queens and their children beyond, or

²⁶ Queen Elizabeth’s first speech, Hatfield, November 20, 1558, quoted in *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. by Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2000), p. 51.

²⁷ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957). Marie Axton, *The Queen’s Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977).

parallel to, the political relationship(s) of mother to Heir Presumptives, Queen Regents, and Queen Mothers to ruling kings: the filial relationship between queens and their children is often emphasised in history plays, with priority—dramatically, and, implicitly, emotionally—generally afforded to the firstborn male heir. I also explore the effects of a queen's childlessness on her characterisation, considering how fictionalised depictions of royal motherhood or childlessness engage with the contentiousness and anxiety surrounding the Elizabethan succession problem. In the Wars of the Roses plays, for example, we see both Lancastrian and Yorkist heirs die and the grief—again, both personal and political—that this engenders. The result is further instability and conflict on both sides. It is possible, as such, to discern an implicit comment on the necessity of having an appropriate, legitimate, and capable heir for the safety of the monarchical line and the kingdom.

Distinguishing physical and political bodies is doubly important in early modern society in the case of a powerful woman: such rhetoric serves as a means of attempting to divorce 'femaleness' from authority to alleviate contemporary (masculine) anxieties about female power. How representations of queens in history plays engage with these anxieties is the focus of the second strand of this thesis, addressing the dramatised relationship between medieval queens and their male subjects and masculine court. How are relationships between queens and the men who serve them depicted in history plays? Does this representation differ from other genres and between plays? And, critically, what can such depictions tell us or suggest about Elizabeth's government both on a larger political scale and in terms of more personal, courtly relationships?

The thesis's final strand considers depictions of the queen's relationship to her country and (inter)national politics. How do queens figure and fit into their political landscape, both within and outside of the microcosm of the court, both in England and abroad? One of the central concerns of this thesis is with nation and identity, and the possibility and definition of

‘national identity’. I have thus far referred to ‘England’ and ‘English politics’; at this juncture, I would like to mention ‘Britain’ as both idealistic, ideological fantasy and, perhaps, political goal. The 1535 and 1542 Acts of Union saw the Principality of Wales subsumed into the Kingdom of England. But it was not until James’s 1604 ascension to the thrones of England and Scotland that a ‘Great Brittain’ was reintroduced. Prior to this, works like Geoffrey of Monmouth’s pseudohistorical *The History of the Kings of Britain* (c. 1136) provided origin narratives for ‘Britain’ and ‘Britishness’. This work held greater authenticity in medieval and early modern societies, and the material—whether directly or via later chronicles—was engaged with throughout the early modern period, such as with dramatisations of the Leir story.²⁸ Interest in national identity and the problems of an inappropriately fragmented Britain held cultural currency in late Elizabethan and Jacobean societies.

But in the history plays addressed here, the country we see is not Britain, but England.²⁹ Medieval queens, unlike their regnant descendant, did not rule Britain, but England. And indeed, ideas of Englishness, specifically, are palpable in many of these dramas. From plays dealing with earlier history like *Edward I* (where Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, the last sovereign prince of Wales, is conquered by the English king), to plays where characters of continental (especially French) origin are insulted whilst the supposed glory of

²⁸ Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (c. 1608) is, of course, the most well known play about the Brythonic king. *King Lear* was published in quarto form in 1608 (Q1), with the title page declaring the play Shakespeare’s ‘True Chronicle Historie of the life and death of King Lear and his three Daughters. With the unfortunate life of Edgar, sonne and heire to the Earle of Gloster, and his sullen and assumed humor of Tom of Bedlam’. The thorough detail of this title suggests hybridity of genre, from (chronicle) history to romance (a son and heir enduring hardship) to the tragedy for which it becomes most known (Lear’s death, Edgar’s unfortunate life). In addition to Holinshed’s *Chronicles* (1587), Shakespeare also had a dramatic analogue: the anonymous *King Leir* (registered in 1594 and published in 1605) under the title *The True Chronicle History of King Leir, and his three daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella*.

²⁹ Discussion of early modern plays based on (ancient) British history and Galfridian tradition falls out of the remit of this thesis, as well as—largely—outside of the late Elizabethan decade on which I focus. However, there seems to be renewed interest in writing and performing plays that discuss notions of a unified Britain—such as Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* (c. 1611) and John Fletcher’s *Bonduca* (c. 1613)—during the first decade of James VII’s reign in England. Kim Gilchrist explores early modern dramatisations of pre-Roman Britain in his monograph *Staging Britain’s Past: Pre-Roman Britain in Early Modern Drama* (London and New York: Arden, 2021).

English imperialism is articulated (like *Henry V*), England is very much the focal nation. In looking to the past for their content, these plays rarely articulate a notion of Britishness.

This thesis focuses on queens of England insofar as they sat on the English throne alongside an English king. More often than not, however, these queens were from a continental Europe and so only ‘English’ by marriage. In history plays, characters often articulate a sense that their national identity is being challenged and (re)configured when the queen originally hails from overseas, a fact made frequent by the political expedience of forming international alliances through marriages. One of the most prominent medieval queens dramatised for the early modern stage—in terms of both dramatic space and of the pivotal role she plays in the drama’s political action—is the queen with which I began: Margaret of Anjou. In Shakespeare’s first tetralogy, Margaret’s national ‘otherness’ is consistently reiterated. She becomes the ‘She-wolf of France’ in *3 Henry VI*, an epithet also applied to Isabella of France, Edward II’s wife and a similarly complex, compelling character in Marlowe’s 1593 play.³⁰ The dehumanising epithet emphasises that they are foreign queens, distinctly not-English despite having been at the heart of internal political power structures. The thesis, then, discusses early modern implications of Anglo-European political relations, as (re)imagined and reflected on in history plays. Once again, comments on Elizabeth’s government can be detected in the ways that history plays depict the politics of the past. Not explicitly instructive in a quasi-*Mirrors for Princes* model, history plays can nonetheless be seen to offer, if not explicit critique, then at least implicit discussion of Tudor politics and Elizabethan government.

³⁰ Shakespeare, *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York and the Good King Henry VI* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, pp. 326-97, 1.4.111. Further references will be to this edition unless otherwise stated, and act, scene, and line references will be given parenthetically throughout the body of the thesis. I will henceforth refer to this play as *3 Henry VI*.

Dramatising History

Though history plays were considered ‘[s]o out of fashion, so vnfollow’d’ by the late 1620s or early 1630s when John Ford wrote *Perkin Warbeck*, they enjoyed great popularity in late Elizabethan England before this decline in interest: at least twenty different plays which dramatise English history, written and/or performed between 1589 and 1599, survive.³¹ In a pamphlet of 1592, Thomas Nashe articulated an appreciation for the plays that drew their subject matter from English Chronicles, which we now tend to categorise as ‘English history plays’. Nashe argued that these plays could—and should—be celebrated because:

our fore-fathers valiant actes (that haue line long buried in rustie brasse and worme-eaten bookes) are reuiued, and they themselues raysed from the Graue of Obliuion, and brought to pleade their aged Honours in open presence: than which, what can bee a sharper reproofe, to these degenerate effeminate dayes of ours?³²

Nashe here cites the twofold merits of English history plays. Not only is their celebratory patriotism and ability to recall and revitalise traditional chivalric values laudable, but so too is the fact that such dramatic renderings provide ‘sharp reproof’ of the more indulgent, less masculine Elizabethan days of the early 1590s. For Nashe, history plays could perform a real and necessary function: to revive the ‘valiant’ past for the public eye and imagination, to a mass and not necessarily literate audience. Such valour was made all the more vivid through its contrast to the supposedly ‘effeminate’ (both meaning ‘womanish’ and acting as ‘a virtual antonym to military valour and honour’ in the sixteenth century, as Carol Banks notes) contemporary moment of dramatic construction and production.³³

History plays, however, do not straightforwardly aggrandise the past nor offer simple ‘reproof’ to an ‘effeminate’ present in the manner Nashe deems commendable. Though there

³¹ John Ford, *The chronicle historie of Perkin VVarbeck: A strange truth* (London: Thomas Purfoot for Hugh Beeston, 1623), Prologue, l. 2.

³² Thomas Nashe, *Pierce Penniless, His Supplication to the Divell* (1592), in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, vol. 1, ed. by Ronald B. McKerrow (London: A.H. Bullen, 1904), pp. 137-245 (p. 212).

³³ Carol Banks entitles her article after Nashe’s analysis of his contemporary moment, providing some detailed discussion of the sixteenth-century connotations of the term ‘effeminate’ to frame her argument about women in (some of) Shakespeare’s history plays. Banks, ‘Warlike women: ‘reproofe to these degenerate effeminate dayes’?’, in *Shakespeare’s histories and counter-histories*, ed. by Dermot Cavanagh, Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Stephen Longstaffe (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 169-81 (p. 170).

are indeed moments of nostalgia for an apparently dead or dying chivalric code in many history plays of this period (notably through the character of Talbot in *1 Henry VI*, to whom Nashe explicitly refers in *Pierce Penniless*), these plays also often offer a place to and platform for female voices.³⁴ They do not only (or simply) dramatise the ‘valiant acts’ of England’s forefathers; they stage, self-consciously, the actions and influence of queens, of England’s ‘foremothers’.

Banks’s essay discusses the role of queens in Shakespearean history plays, positing that a ‘significant part [was] played by numerous important and powerful female characters within these plays, most particularly in the first tetralogy’.³⁵ Her argument rebuts the limiting notion proposed by Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin in their seminal *Engendering a Nation* (1997), where it is suggested that the role of women in history plays is gradually reduced until they are once again confined to the domestic sphere and excluded from the political, a reading which itself has intriguing implications for the plays’ Elizabethan context, particularly since Elizabeth I was very much a politician who could not be defined by or confined to a domestic identity. In this thesis, I follow Banks more than Howard and Rackin to posit that women—and queens particularly—are afforded pivotal political roles in a dramatic genre which tends to focus primarily on the masculine and the men who often give the plays their titles.³⁶ Further, queens frequently challenge—through their dialogue and their dramatic presence—historical narrative, how history is perceived, and how audiences might have thought about history.

History plays respond to and resonate with early modern discussions of the nature and merits of (re)writing, (re)telling, and dramatising history and historical fiction. Where Nashe

³⁴ Nashe, *Pierce Penniless*, p. 212. Nashe is often proposed as a possible collaborator on *The First Part of Henry the Sixth*, and perhaps as the primary author of much of the play’s first Act. See Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane, ‘The Canon and Chronology of Shakespeare’s Works’, in *The New Oxford Shakespeare: Authorship Companion*, ed. by Taylor and Gabriel Egan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 417-602 (pp. 513-14).

³⁵ Banks, ‘Warlike women’, p. 169.

³⁶ Indeed, one of the ways in which history plays are often defined is by whether they have the name of a king in their title.

praises the propagandistic functionality of history plays as a genre that should ‘tell the truth’, more or less, Philip Sidney criticises historical material for precisely the opposite reason. His *Apology for Poetry* (c. 1579, published 1595) argues that historical literature can have no claim to ultimate veracity and certain truth. Instead, he suggests that ‘poesy’—fiction—is a more ‘fruitful doctrine’ than history because fiction can incorporate sentiment, can embellish the ‘old mouse-eaten records’ of history in a more ‘liberal [...] poetical’ fashion. The historian, Sidney writes, is ‘so tied [...] to the particular truth of things’, whilst writers of fiction can take (if you will) poetic licence.³⁷ Though many, if not most, of the history plays that this thesis explores do seem to perform Nashe’s celebratory, propagandistic, functional memorialisation of the past to some degree, they also often serve to question historical truth.

The genre of ‘history’, then, was being reworked and expanded by dramatists with some fervour in the 1590s: where chronicles were often constructed as historically accurate or truthful, drama gives space and voice to the gaps in that traditional approach to writing history, to a different kind of articulation of history, and invites audiences to interrogate conceptions and expectations of history and how history is conveyed, fictionalised, written, and recorded. One of the key ways that the genre interrogates history is by allowing (re)articulations and questionings of historical truth to be posited in the mouth of (powerful) female characters. Further, the very form of the play allows scope for ‘domestic’ aspects of history often excluded from the chronicles, and allows spaces for discussion and dialogue. History, in historical drama, cannot be straightforward. Queens— with their actions, dialogue, and very dramatic presence—complicate and even directly challenge prescribed and/or received notions of ‘what history is’ in history plays.

Though I argue that history plays use queenly characters to question historical ‘truth’, writing history in the medieval and early modern periods was a more nuanced, complex

³⁷ Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry (or the Defence of Poesy)* [1595], ed. by Geoffrey Shepherd, 3rd edn, rev. by R. W. Maslen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 89-90.

practice than recording ‘fact’ or ‘fiction’. Probably the most important source for early modern history plays was Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*. This vast, collaborative work chronicles the reigns of each English monarch, from William the Conqueror in 1066 to the middle of Elizabeth I’s reign in 1576. Despite its breadth and wealth of source material, Holinshed’s *Chronicles* does not claim to be a straightforward authority on history. As Henry Summerson writes, sources for the *Chronicles* ‘were often at odds with one another, as Holinshed himself clearly understood. His habitual response was to present the evidence known to him, and leave it to the reader to decide where the truth lay’.³⁸ It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that playwrights who use Holinshed as their source engage with questions of accuracy and authority.

Holinshed’s *Chronicles* is collaborative not only in the sense of its multiple author-compilers, but because of its assembly and reinterpretation of earlier sources. The *Chronicles* ‘appeared on the cusp of a shift in modes of historical writing just as the new ‘politic’ history was emerging’.³⁹ In the second half of the sixteenth century, the theological focus of medieval chronicles (which were ‘often written in monasteries’) gave way to ‘a new interest in causation, a recognition of anachronism, and a questioning of textual authority’.⁴⁰ As D. R. Woolf writes, ‘[t]he relationship between the past as a whole (that which is to be represented)

³⁸ Henry Summerson, ‘Sources: 1577’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed’s Chronicles*, ed. by Felicity Heal, Ian W. Archer, and Paulina Kewes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 61-76 (p. 62). Summerson also details the sources for the 1587 edition of the *Chronicles* in ‘Sources: 1587’, *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed’s Chronicles*, pp. 77-92. Summerson has also compiled extensive lists of Holinshed’s sources. See Summerson, ‘Catalogue of principal sources used in 1577 Edition of Holinshed’s *Chronicles*’

[www.cems.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/Catalogue%20of%20principal%20sources.....pdf]; ‘Catalogue of additional sources mentioned in passing in Holinshed’s *Chronicles*’

[www.cems.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/Catalogue%20of%20additional%20sources....-1.pdf]; ‘Catalogue of anonymous sources mentioned in Holinshed’s *Chronicles*’

[www.cems.ox.ac.uk/holinshed/Anonymous%20sources%20referred%20to%20in%20....pdf] [Accessed February 2021]. Recent work on *The Holinshed Project*, led by researchers from Oxford University, has made *Holinshed’s Chronicle* (in both its 1577 and 1587 editions) much more accessible. It also makes the division of historical narrative into monarchical reigns and historical moments all the more clear thanks to the Project’s digitisation of the *Chronicles*. See *The Holinshed Project* [www.cems.ox.ac.uk/holinshed] for further details.

³⁹ Felicity Heal, Ian W. Archer, and Paulina Kewes, ‘Prologue’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Holinshed’s Chronicles*, ed. by Heal, Archer, and Kewes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. xxix-xxxvii (p. xxix)

⁴⁰ Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare’s English Chronicles* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 5.

and history proper (its written representation) was itself in transition' during the sixteenth century, and the boundary 'between history and fiction was a negotiated, not a natural, frontier. It was neither fixed nor impermeable'.⁴¹ This permeability and scope for interpretation is something taken up by early modern playwrights, who participate in historiographical conversations and, I argue, use female (and especially queenly) characters to challenge what Graham Holderness calls the 'cardinal principles' of early modern historiographical theory: 'truth, memory, and instruction'.⁴² Rackin argues that:

Representatives of the unarticulated residue that eluded the men's historiographic texts and threatened their historical myths, women were inevitably cast as aliens in the masculine domain of English historiography.⁴³

In history plays, we see queens question 'truths', offer alternative 'memories', and reconsider what 'instructions' we should take away from the history they represent and on which they comment.

I have referred to the 'medieval' and 'early modern' periods, but it is important to consider the definitions of such terms. Although this study is inherently cross-period in its examination of medieval queens on the early modern stage, it also relies on and explores the construction of terms such as 'medieval' and 'early modern'. This thesis defines 'medieval queens' as historical queens—that is, real figures who had the title of queen as a result of their marriage to a king—from the English medieval period. And when discussing early modern history plays, I refer primarily to late Elizabethan dramatisations of matters and moments from English history. But of course, the 'medieval' and 'early modern' are not entirely

⁴¹ D. R. Woolf, 'The Shapes of History', in *A Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. by David Scott Kastan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 186-205 (p. 190; p. 194).

⁴² Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 46. I use the term 'historiographical conversations' deliberately. Michael Staunton, referring to those who wrote history in Angevin England, writes that they 'were joining a conversation that had gone on for centuries in histories and in other forms of writing'. See Staunton, *The Historians of Angevin England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 6. Similarly, Jennifer Jahner, Emily Steiner, and Elizabeth M. Tyler note that '[i]n the Middle Ages no less than today, history was a communal and conflictual enterprise, created, disputed, used, and abused. 'General Introduction', in *Medieval Historical Writing: Britain and Ireland, 500-1500*, ed. by Jahner, Steiner, and Tyler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 1-15 (p. 14).

⁴³ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, p. 51.

distinct categories. Reconsidering the apparent divide between these ‘periods’ challenges the shortsighted tendency to, in Helen Cooper’s words, ‘assume that the medieval and the early modern are [...] mutually exclusive, as if there were a clear break between them’.⁴⁴ This inclination, Cooper contends, is related to an arbitrary proclivity to devalue the medieval and to ‘label everything we like in the Middle Ages as proto-Renaissance, and everything we don’t like in the Renaissance as medieval’.⁴⁵ Indeed, the term ‘medieval’ is frequently uncritically used as a synonym for ‘barbaric’, ‘uncivilised’, and even ‘backwards’, whilst the term ‘Renaissance’ carries all its favourable connotations of rebirth and renewed enlightenment. Even the now-favoured term ‘early modern’, following New Historicism, implicitly associates this ‘period’ with our own modern world. Using these terms is often unavoidable, and is sometimes most appropriate; however, in this thesis, I also employ David Wallace’s more egalitarian term ‘premodern’: not necessarily to ‘escape the peculiar eddying (and indeed mutually antagonistic) force fields of “medieval” and “Renaissance”’, but rather to suggest a continuation of concerns, aesthetics, and responsibilities from the ‘medieval’ into the ‘Renaissance’ or ‘early modern’.⁴⁶

‘Premodern’ is not a perfect term, grouping as it does such vast (and often vastly different) bodies of time and defining this time against the ‘modern’. However, it affords a useful way of thinking about medieval and early modern societies (and literature) as more closely related than often presumed, and does not implicitly favour one of these ‘periods’ over

⁴⁴ Helen Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World* (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), p. 3.

⁴⁵ Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World*, p. 2.

⁴⁶ David Wallace, *Premodern Places: Calais to Surinam, Chaucer to Aphra Behn* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 11. Like Cooper and Wallace, Brian Cummings and James Simpson also share an interest in interrogating issues of periodisation. They argue that ‘to continue to exist politely on either side of the [medieval/Renaissance] divide’ is an ineffectual way to study these texts, because it ‘ignore[s] the way that the works we study, and the way in which we study them, are implicated in the complex history of that terminology and its making’. Cummings and Simpson, ‘Introduction’, in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. by Cummings and Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 1-12 (p. 4). *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, ed. by Gordon McMullan and David Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), also considers how the boundary between the medieval and early modern has become increasingly permeable. These works on periodisation engage with Brian Stock’s statement that ‘the Renaissance invented the Middle Ages in order to define itself’. *Listening for the Text: On the Uses of the Past* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), p. 69.

the other. This study considers the continuation of thematic and aesthetic concerns between medieval subject matter and the late Elizabethan reinscription of this subject matter for the stage. As such, an encapsulating term like ‘premodern’ is useful here. Nonetheless, I do not propose to use ‘premodern’ to replace both the terms ‘medieval’ and ‘early modern’:

‘premodern’ will be used to address the consistencies and continuations through and between ‘periods’, whilst ‘medieval’ and ‘early modern’ remain necessary to differentiate between these two broad timeframes and contexts.

In this thesis, I take a chronological approach to the historical events the plays dramatise, focusing on plays written between 1589 and 1599 but concerning English history from, primarily, the reign of King John (1199-1216) to the ascension of Henry VII in 1485. I group history plays by reign or successive reigns, beginning with plays about King John, then considering the three plays about the first three King Edwards, before concluding with plays dramatising the Wars of the Roses. Although this sometimes means discussing the plays in a different order to that in which they were composed, moving through ‘sets’ of plays is a useful approach as it allows us to move through history as do the plays themselves, helping to identify the differing thematic and political concerns of each dramatised dynastic moment. As a result, we can identify how these plays engage with and respond to late Elizabethan interest in, and anxieties about, national and gender(ed) identities through different stylistic choices and thematic foci.

By grouping the plays into these segments of history, I follow both premodern perceptions of history and the approach of modern literary critics and historians who categorise the past by its important and influential rulers and events. Although this almost-quantifiable categorisation of history is more clearly defined now (and indeed, more frequently interrogated in recent years), the practice and practicality of dividing medieval English history into discrete segments is discernible in many premodern chronicles. Often,

chronicles move through history reign by reign, significant event by significant event. Even in a work as supposedly ‘formless and prosaic’ as one of the main sources for many early modern history plays, the collaborative Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, the narrative is organised into discernible regnal years and dynastic lineages.⁴⁷ Rather than taking an approach based on chronological composition, the three main chapters here treat the history plays in groups according to the dynasty they dramatise. This approach follows both modern and early modern critical and historiographical (if not necessarily dramaturgical) practice, and allows for a clearer view of the ways in which late Elizabethan dramatists negotiated the crises of their own time through the prisms of the past.

Methodologies

This thesis is about gender and gender(ed) identity, and about the conventions, expectations, and frustrations surrounding gender. A feminist analytical approach, therefore, motivates and shapes my overall discussion, with theories from New Historicism, gender studies, psychoanalysis, and queer theory informing aspects of the thesis. My methodological approach, then, is itself intersectional, but rooted in an interest in studying women and female characters with a focus on queenship. Valerie Traub succinctly and smartly suggests that:

Given its heterogeneity, it may be that feminism functions most productively as a hermeneutic lens or as a heuristic rather than a stand-alone method—a way of asking questions about the role of women and/or the function of gender that are guided but not exhausted by various theories about the way power operates, the role of representation in mediating social relations, and belief in the necessity of and possibilities for social change.⁴⁸

Indeed, I use a feminist ‘hermeneutic lens’ to engage with the three central ideas of this thesis—about history, sexuality, and nationality—and to consider how these different

⁴⁷ A. R. Humphreys, ‘Introduction’, in William Shakespeare, *The Second Part of King Henry IV*, ed. by A. R. Humphreys (London: Methuen, 1981), p. xxxiii.

⁴⁸ Valerie Traub, ‘Introduction—Feminist Shakespeare Studies: Cross Currents, Border Crossings, Conflicts, and Contradictions’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*, ed. by Traub (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 1-38 (p. 30).

concepts interact with gender in early modern England and, more specifically, in late Elizabethan history plays. I strive to think dialectically and intersectionally in this work, to acknowledge that different ‘categories of identity [...] intersect in dynamic, mutually informing, and historically contingent ways’.⁴⁹ I discuss such categories of gender, class and rank, nationality, and sexuality in a way that acknowledges their dialogic complexities and intersections, with particular focus on the intersections between maternal and political influence and between female and foreign identities.

Approaching the history plays’ queens through the lens of gender theory also raises the question of how the representation of female characters on the stage is affected by the fact that they would have been played by boys. Such a question is often asked when studying female characters before the middle of the seventeenth century. It is indeed important to remember that women were not officially or legally permitted to act on the public stage until after the Interregnum (1649-1660), and so original productions of (history) plays from 1589-99 would have seen female characters played by boy actors. Though Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre would have demanded a certain suspension of disbelief when confronted by a boy-as-woman, and though this cross-dressing feature of contemporary drama was often engaged with metatheatrically, it nonetheless remains that female characters were meant to represent women on stage despite strict social and legal (theatrical) parameters.⁵⁰ That boy actors played female roles foregrounds the fact that queens in history plays are representations, of womanhood and of queenship.

Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity can be useful for considering the boy actor here. In 1990, Butler argued that ‘gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting

⁴⁹ Traub, ‘Introduction’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment*, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Shakespeare’s comedies, in particular, have a tendency to self-consciously draw attention to the fact that female characters were played by men, often through double cross-dressing (when female characters, played by boys or men, would dress as and pretend to be male characters). The fact of the actors’ male identity was not disguised.

the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing'.⁵¹ Of course, this idea of performativity takes on an additional dimension when the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries were first written and staged, with boy actors 'doing'—performing as—female characters. On the late Elizabethan stage, performing female characters also becomes a performance of gender itself, fitting with Butler's argument that

gender [...] is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.⁵²

The literal staged performance of gender was not necessarily meant to be 'convincing' in the 1590s. Audiences would have been aware that they were presented with an illusion—a representation, a stylisation—of biological women being on stage; instead, it is the 'effect' of this gender performance that is important. Female characters are given dramatic space, the audience hears their voices represented, and (in history plays) their narratives (or, at least, an interpretation of their narratives) are staged. In Butler's terms, the performance of gender creates gender in these plays; gender becomes a performative act embodied by the actors (through gesture, costume, staging, etcetera) and articulated by female characters through their speech and bodies. The performance of women, in turn, helps to create voices for queens who often slip into the peripheries of history. These voices often operate in a 'discursive register outside that of the normatively (heteronormatively?) masculine':⁵³ queens' voices queer historical narratives and dramatic traditions, and their frequent transgression of reified notions of expected gendered behaviour can be construed as a queering of gender and gender dynamics.

⁵¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 34. Emphasis in original.

⁵² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 179.

⁵³ Finn and Frost, "Nothing Hath Begot My Something Grief", p. 233.

Following Traub's view of feminism as a 'broadband', which can incorporate 'multiple views' (including—as I have suggested—queer theory), there are other theoretical frameworks with which it is fruitful to 'cross-pollinate' this thesis's feminist approach.⁵⁴ The first is New Historicism, which posits that literary texts and their cultural contexts have a symbiotic relationship, that 'every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices', and that 'literary and non-literary "texts" circulate inseparably'.⁵⁵ These core facets of New Historicism are reflected in the thesis's argument that late Elizabethan crises—about female rule, succession, gender and national identities, and nation, in particular—engendered the proliferation of history plays being written and staged in the 1590s. History plays are a reflection of (and on) both England's past and contemporary present, as well as being a product of their late Elizabethan moment.

I also apply some concepts from the field of psychoanalysis as a fruitful way of thinking about some of my central arguments. I refer, in particular, to the Lacanian *extimité*. Lacan's term 'extimacy' refers to that which is both intimate and exterior. It was 'coin[ed] to avoid the conventional distinction between "us" and "others"' and 'figures the other as embedded alien, occupying the most intimate place'.⁵⁶ We see a similar type of anxiety and ambivalence manifest in attitudes towards the queen from other characters in history plays. The contentiousness about women in positions of power may be interpreted as a form of extimacy, a woman in the heart of English court politics as the 'embedded alien'. Further, political expediency meant that international alliances were often formed by diplomatic marriage, and so foreign women were more likely to become the wife of the English king. Extimacy, and the idea of the alien in particular, have even more evident implications when

⁵⁴ Traub, 'Introduction', in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment*, p. 30; p. 3.

⁵⁵ H. Aram Veenser, 'Introduction', in *The New Historicism*, ed. by Veenser (London and New York: Routledge, 1989 and 2013), p. xi.

⁵⁶ Jerry Aline Flieger, *Is Oedipus Online?: Sitting Freud After Freud* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), p. 237.

thinking about a paradoxical-sounding foreign queen of England, implications which I discuss in each chapter.

Rival Queens and the Question of Succession

History plays are evidently about kings, about rivalries between men who fight for their right to be king, about threats and rebellions faced by kings and would-be kings. But in the 1590s, history plays are often also about rival queens and female rulers who are subject to (political) threats. Just as dramatisations of medieval queens in general serve to reflect and comment on their late Elizabethan moment of composition and staging, so too do dramatisations of female rivalries for the title and power of queen.

Questions of gender performance, performativity, and the role of speech acts also pertain to Queen Elizabeth I's own performance of gender and power. As mentioned, when depicting and addressing queenship and female rule in history plays at the height of their popularity in the 1590s, playwrights were doing so in a moment of longstanding, established, independent female sovereignty, of a true Queen Regnant. Elizabeth ruled England for over four decades, courting several suitors but never yielding to pressure to marry and produce an heir. Elizabeth very much embodied and *performed* her identity in gendered ways, as lady to be courted, as Henry VIII's daughter, as Queen, and also (perhaps contradictorily) as the (self)stylised Prince or even as King. Her lengthy reign and stubborn, solid personal and political autonomy allowed Elizabeth to be fashioned, or to self-fashion, as the quintessential powerful, effective monarch: she was the queen of a 'golden age' of artistic excellence; the military leader whose forces defeated the Spanish Armada; the prince-like figure who

withstood and resisted pressure and plots to which she was subject from both within the British Isles and from continental Europe.⁵⁷

However, despite the length of her reign, Elizabeth's queenship could never be taken for granted. Though generally considered to be an effective ruler—she quashed rebellions both within the country and abroad, negotiated with foreign powers, and established Protestantism in England, for example—her claim to the throne and her security on it were threatened by a number of monarchical rivals and political uprisings. Both male and female claimants (most notably, perhaps, Mary, Queen of Scots) contended for the English throne, and alternative strands of succession were being discussed, dangerously, throughout England for much of Elizabeth's reign. Between Henry VIII's death in January 1547 and Elizabeth I's accession in November 1558, the throne was occupied by Edward VI and Mary I, Henry VIII's children and Elizabeth's half-siblings. The crown also passed, disputably and briefly, into a third pair of hands: those of Lady Jane Grey. When history plays were being written and performed with their greatest prolificacy in the last ten to fifteen years of Elizabeth's reign, the recent history of rival monarchy and competition for the throne was very much the immediate context for these dramatisations.

Male primogeniture meant that Edward VI, as Henry VIII's only surviving male heir, succeeded his father in 1547. He ruled, under Protectorates, for five years, before his death in 1553 at the age of fifteen. In his will, Edward attempted to discount the Third Succession Act of 1543, which had restored his elder half-sisters to the line of succession, and instead maintained the view that they were illegitimate. He attempted to ensure the security of the Protestant faith in England after the Reformation by naming his cousin, Lady Jane Grey, and

⁵⁷ Historians and literary critics have done a lot of recent work to interrogate this 'cult of Gloriana', but such aggrandising ideas surrounding 'the Virgin Queen' have nonetheless been potent in the popular imagination since Elizabeth's reign.

her ‘heires masle’ [male heirs], as his successor(s).⁵⁸ Jane—devoutly Protestant and married to an English nobleman, Protestant Lord Guildford Dudley—offered the possibility of a monarchical line that would uphold English Protestantism. The brevity of Jane’s ‘reign’ (if indeed it can be called such) gained her the sobriquet ‘the Nine Days Queen’, but her claim to the throne—derived from her great-grandfather, Henry VII—was indicative of the possibility of alternative monarchs (including female ones) staking a claim to the crown and having the potential to garner public support. This possibility remained a palpable undercurrent throughout Elizabeth’s reign, and triggered much anxiety surrounding the stability of crown and country.

Henry VIII’s daughter and Edward VI’s sister, Mary, was next to take the throne, assuming power as Henry VIII’s eldest surviving child and (like Jane) breaking with the long and entrenched tradition of kingship being the only model for rule. As the late king’s council proclaimed Lady Jane Grey queen, Mary worked to form her own council and army to overthrow her rival. Indeed, Jane was quickly deposed, imprisoned, and eventually executed for treason after her father and brothers joined Wyatt’s Rebellion in January 1554. Mary’s accession-proper was ‘greeted with popular support, her royal entry into London [...] a triumphal procession’ in July 1553.⁵⁹ Edward’s (and Northumberland’s) attempt to exclude his half-sisters from the line of succession had not been legally ratified, while the terms their father had laid out in his Third Succession Act—namely that his daughters Mary and then Elizabeth should take the throne if Edward died without an heir—had been ratified by the Parliament of 1533-4. This legal sanction undoubtedly bolstered Mary’s claim to the throne and ensured it was upheld with relatively little (official) dissent. A year later, Mary married

⁵⁸ Edward VI, ‘My devise for the Succession’ (1553), in *Literary Remains of King Edward the Sixth*, Vol II, ed. by John Gough Nichols (London: J. B. Nichols and Sons, 1857), pp. 571-2. Edward wrote this will in his own hand, probably under the influence and guidance of John Dudley, the Duke of Northumberland and Lord Protector in all but title. Edward emended his original ‘L’Janes heires masles’ to ‘L’Jane and her heires male’, an important distinction which very much included Jane in his will for the succession.

⁵⁹ Sarah Duncan, *Mary I: Gender, Power, and Ceremony in the Reign of England’s First Queen* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 18.

Prince Philip (later Philip II) of Spain. Philip was variably considered, and styled, as Mary's equal and co-monarch, or as her 'helpmate' and consort and little more. Though, as Susan Doran notes, Philip was 'barr[ed] from policy-making and patronage' in England and though 'all court rituals and ceremonies of the reign asserted Mary's role as sovereign', Sarah Duncan comments that the 'tension between this image [as powerless consort and helpmate] and that of the king as a conquering stranger/tyrant remained unresolved'.⁶⁰ Indeed, there was popular concern surrounding the potential for a foreign king consort to lay claim to the English throne through his marriage to the queen, particularly in the context of early modern coverture laws in which a woman's property was automatically conveyed to her husband on her marriage. Though Mary and Philip's marriage treaty 'fixed clear limits on the king's political power in England', these limits would be tested (and probably broken) if the royal couple produced an heir and particularly if Mary died in doing so.⁶¹ Anxieties about foreign monarchs (and perhaps more particularly, at this time, foreign kings) somehow threatening or subsuming English nationality had been enough to contribute to Edward VI's justification (under the guidance of his advisors) for attempting to exclude both Mary and his acceptably-Protestant sister Elizabeth from the succession line in favour of the appropriately-married Jane Grey.⁶²

Both Mary and Elizabeth, then, had been subject to considerable changes and confusion regarding their position in the royal succession chiefly because of their gender, but also because of questions about religion and royal marriages which were only exacerbated by the fact of their femaleness. Together, they were declared illegitimate by their father's government, reinstated to the succession, and (almost) excluded once again by their half-

⁶⁰ Susan Doran, 'Why Did Elizabeth Not Marry?', in *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana*, ed. by Julia M. Walker (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 30-59 (pp. 34 and 35). Duncan, *Mary I*, p. 163.

⁶¹ Doran, 'Why Did Elizabeth Not Marry?', p. 34.

⁶² Carole Levin, 'Sister-Subject/Sister-Queen: Elizabeth I among her Siblings', in *Sibling Relations and Gender in the Early Modern World: Sisters, Brothers and Others*, ed. by Naomi J. Miller and Naomi Yavneh (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), p. 77-88 (p. 80).

brother. Together, they were ‘listed as the queen’s ladies-in-waiting’ in 1546 (probably due to the intercession of the queen, their stepmother and Henry VIII’s last wife, Katherine Parr).⁶³ They occasionally shared the same household, exchanged letters in which they called each other ‘sistar’, and even rode together into London following Jane’s deposition.⁶⁴ However, their relationship, ‘publicly amiable’ at the beginning of Mary’s reign, grew increasingly tense. Judith Richards offers possible reasons for this heightened distrust between the pair, including the ‘suspect’ nature of Elizabeth’s religious beliefs and the implication that Mary considered Elizabeth to be illegitimate.⁶⁵ But Mary’s reading of Elizabeth’s apparent illegitimacy did not simply derive from a necessary default—that is, the notion that both Mary and Elizabeth could not coexist as legitimate heirs because of the nature of the marriages which engendered them. Instead, as Carole Levin and Paul Johnson suggest, Mary supposedly put stock into the old rumours regarding Elizabeth’s mother’s alleged infidelity, rumours which eventually saw Anne beheaded: several men were accused of ‘using fornication’ with Anne Boleyn, and one—a lute player named Mark Smeaton—pleaded guilty.⁶⁶ Mary is said to have stated several times during her reign that ‘she could see a likeness between Elizabeth and Smeaton’, and in her last months claimed that Elizabeth ‘was neither her sister nor the daughter [...] of King Henry’.⁶⁷ The zenith of the rivalry between the two sisters, perhaps, came after Wyatt’s Rebellion in 1554, in which Protestants opposed Mary’s marriage to Philip and in which Elizabeth was implicated. Elizabeth was kept under house arrest for a year. As Levin states, ‘competing claims for power [...] often [made it] difficult for royal children to have close bonds’: this soon proved to be true in the case of the Tudor sisters,

⁶³ Levin, ‘Sister-Subject/Sister-Queen’, p. 77.

⁶⁴ Tracy Borman, *Elizabeth’s Women: The Hidden Story of the Virgin Queen* (London: Vintage, 2010), p. xxi.

⁶⁵ Judith Richards, ‘Examples and Admonitions: What Mary Demonstrated for Elizabeth’, in *Tudor Queenship: The Reigns of Mary and Elizabeth*, ed. by Alice Hunt and Anna Whitelock (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 31-46 (p. 35).

⁶⁶ Levin writes that ‘Mary assured intimates that Elizabeth physically resembled Mark Smeaton, reputed to be one of Anne Boleyn’s lovers, more than Henry VIII’. *The Reign of Elizabeth I* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 10. See also Paul Johnson, *Elizabeth I: a study in power and intellect* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1974).

⁶⁷ Levin, *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, p. 10; Johnson, *Elizabeth I: a study in power and intellect*, pp. 10-11.

more so as it became clear that each sister (and her claim to the throne) could (and did) attract support from rival religious and political factions, especially since Elizabeth was Mary's heir.⁶⁸ The relationship between Mary and Elizabeth straddled, and coexisted with, complex personal and political intersections of familial kinship and royal rivalry.

A similarly complex relationship characterised by competing personal and political interests existed between Elizabeth and another of her rivals for the throne: her cousin, Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. Mary posed the most palpable (and memorable) threat to Elizabeth's political security; she was a Catholic queen through whom many disillusioned Catholics could channel their hopes for a revived, public English Catholicism, an individual with a strong linear claim to the throne (through Henry VIII's eldest sister, Margaret Tudor), and a compelling character with a colourful history and personality. The differences in personality and religious convictions between Elizabeth Tudor and Mary Stuart have long been noted: the former is often characterised as more cautious with regards to her personal and political actions and affections, with the latter often considered more tempestuous and impulsive yet compelling. Anka Muhlstein summarises that:

Those two cousins, who shared the British Isles between them, adopted contrasting attitudes. Elizabeth, thinking like a queen, resisted her amorous inclinations and chose to remain unmarried. Mary, acting like a woman, and a woman in thrall to passion, married no less than three times.⁶⁹

A description like Muhlstein's is not uncommon, but it is somewhat reductionist and places the greatest importance on these queens' relationships to men and the performance of emotions as a way of defining their identities and differences. The distinction is nonetheless useful for beginning to think about how these rival queens might have been perceived in a

⁶⁸ Levin, 'Sister-Subject/Sister-Queen', p. 77. Levin also argues that Elizabeth's 'experience as Mary's heir convinced her not to name an heir of her own once she was Queen': conspiracies against her sister's rule appeared to locate Elizabeth at their centre, as her position as heir and her (apparent) Protestantism led to her being viewed as the 'natural alternative to the Catholic queen'. *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, p. 10.

⁶⁹ Anka Muhlstein, *Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart: The Perils of Marriage*, trans. by John Brownjohn (London: Haus Publishing, 2007), p. 2.

world in which their relationships with men would indeed have been under intense public scrutiny.

And indeed, such a narrative enjoyed a contemporary currency. As Keith Linley writes, ‘the Mary Queen of Scots/Elizabeth cousin rivalry bedevilled English politics until the former was executed for yet another plot against the queen’.⁷⁰ Fleeing Scotland after becoming embroiled in political scandals which saw her suspected of being involved in the murder of her husband and then marrying his suspected murderer, Mary was subsequently imprisoned under Elizabeth. She was held prisoner in England between 1568 and her execution in 1587, and for nineteen years she remained a ‘dangerous alternate Queen for much of Elizabeth’s reign’.⁷¹ The fact that Elizabeth refused to execute Mary for so long—despite the latter’s implication in several assassination attempts against Elizabeth—was a source of contention amongst many of Elizabeth’s advisors and ministers. This apparent leniency or weakness in Elizabeth was exacerbated because, just as Elizabeth herself had been a figure around whom to rally hopes for an alternative monarch during Mary I’s reign, Mary Stuart became the focal point for a number of anarchist ‘plots to assassinate Elizabeth, free the Scottish Queen, and place Mary on the English throne with the aid of foreign invasion’.⁷² Elizabeth’s apparent prevarication around coming to a decision about her cousin’s fate was considered dangerous to her personal security as well as the security of her country: Mary Stuart was not the natural, named, or perhaps even logically presumable heir to Elizabeth, but she was a queen who was explicitly and repeatedly posited as a very real immediate alternative to Elizabeth: a justified usurper, and not an heir to ‘wait her turn’.

But like the relationship between Mary I and Elizabeth I, the relationship between Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart was not one of straightforward rivalry but was located, complicatedly and intensely, between rivalry and familial kinship. The queens of England and

⁷⁰ Keith Linley, *King Lear in Context: The Cultural Background* (New York: Anthem, 2015), p. 60.

⁷¹ Levin, *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, p. 8.

⁷² Levin, *The Reign of Elizabeth I*, p. 20.

Scotland, both descended from Henry VII, were first cousins once removed. Though the two never met in person, they were in frequent correspondence until Mary's execution in 1587. After the murder of Mary's second husband, Lord Darnley, Elizabeth wrote to Mary several times with 'great frankness without any of the usual circumlocutions common in her diplomatic correspondence'.⁷³ Elizabeth urged Mary to distance herself from Lord Bothwell—who was widely considered guilty of Darnley's murder—and to punish Darnley's murderers. 'I do not write so vehemently out of doubt that I have,' Elizabeth insists, 'but out of the affection that I bear you in particular'.⁷⁴ She reiterates this fondness when she writes to Mary again two months later: 'I treat you as my daughter, and assure you that if I had one, I could wish for her nothing better than I desire for you'.⁷⁵ Addressing one another with this sort of (perhaps faux) affection and familiarity is characteristic of many of the letters between Elizabeth and Mary, with the two often referring to one another as 'cousin' and 'sistar'. Whether or not this way of communicating affection was genuine or a veil of familiarity for negotiating complicated political entanglements (and doing so as women and queens), it reveals an approach to personal and diplomatic encounters that straddles the personal and political.

Elizabeth, evidently, experienced such complicated personal and diplomatic relationships with several powerful women and fellow female rulers. Perhaps the most important of these relationships existing outside of the British Isles, and worth mentioning here, was with Catherine de Medici. One time guardian and mother-in-law of Mary, Queen of Scots, Catherine was the Italian queen consort of France between 1547 and 1559, from the

⁷³ George Bagshawe Harrison, *The Letters of Queen Elizabeth I* (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), p. 49.

⁷⁴ Queen Elizabeth to Mary, Queen of Scots, February 24 1567, in *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, pp. 116-17.

⁷⁵ Queen Elizabeth to Mary, Queen of Scots, April 8 1567, in Frank Arthur Mumby, *The Fall of Mary Stuart: A Narrative in Contemporary Letters* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1922), p. 219.

time of her husband's coronation as King Henry II until his death.⁷⁶ Like Margaret of Anjou, Isabella the 'She Wolf' of France, and 'Bloody Mary', Catherine acquired a reputation for independence and ruthlessness. Doran writes that 'while never a queen regnant, from the time of her husband's death in July 1559 until her own in January 1589, Catherine as *la-reine-mère* played a significant role in French political life, influencing both French domestic affairs and international relations'.⁷⁷ Catherine acted 'in dede and in effect' in a Regent-like capacity to her eldest son, King Francis II.⁷⁸ When Francis died after just a year and half on the throne, Catherine was named Regent for her ten-year-old son, King Charles IX, between 1560-63. She continued to exert influence over Charles for the remainder of his life, with Sir Francis Walsingham even reporting in 1569 that 'the government rests wholie in her hands'.⁷⁹ Charles died of tuberculosis in 1574, and was succeeded by his younger brother, Henry III. Henry was an adult at the time of his ascension, but his mother nonetheless played an important diplomatic role during his reign.

For much of the time in which they were in correspondence, Elizabeth and Catherine attempted, half-heartedly, to negotiate a union between the English queen and one of Catherine's sons: Charles, Henry, and—finally, and perhaps most seriously—Francis were each presented as potential suitors to Elizabeth between the mid 1560s and early 1580s,

⁷⁶ The Treaty of Greenwich—which aimed to establish peace between England and Scotland and to unite the two countries with a marriage between the English Prince Edward (later Edward VI) and Mary, Queen of Scots—was proposed, signed, and rejected in 1543. Instead, Henry II of France and Mary's regent, the Earl of Arran, negotiated her union with Francis, the Dauphin. Mary became a ward of the French court from her arrival in France at the age of five in 1548 until her marriage to Francis in 1558. Mary became queen consort of France—and so Catherine de Medici's daughter-in-law—in 1559 until Francis's death in 1560. Mary returned to Scotland in 1561. For more on the Treaty of Greenwich, see John A. Wagner and Susan Walters Schmid (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Tudor England. United Kingdom*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2012), pp. 521-22. Leonie Frieda also discusses Mary's time at the French court in *Catherine de Medici: A Biography* (London: Orion, 2003).

⁷⁷ Susan Doran, 'Elizabeth I and Catherine de Medici', in *The Contending Kingdoms: France and England, 1420-1700*, ed. by Glenn Richardson (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 117-32 (p. 117). Doran's essay offers a thorough discussion of the relationship between Catherine and Elizabeth.

⁷⁸ English ambassador Sir Nicholas Throckmorton, quoted in Doran, 'Elizabeth I and Catherine de Medici', p. 117. In this essay, Doran details how various ambassadors described the influence and importance of Catherine in matters of French government and international relations during her tenure as 'queen mother'.

⁷⁹ *CSPF Eliz. 1569-71*, p. 20, 24 January 1569. Quoted in Doran, 'Elizabeth I and Catherine de Medici', p. 118.

despite the ‘extreme youth of the Valois princes’ compared with the English queen.⁸⁰ The degree of seriousness about these matches varied between suitors and over the years of negotiations. Doran argues that neither Elizabeth nor Catherine was deeply committed to the idea of such a union between England and France, and that the latter used ‘matrimonial negotiations as a diplomatic device to express and strengthen Anglo-French amity’.⁸¹ Merely *discussing* possible matrimonial matches was itself a form of diplomacy and a way of forming alliances. Nonetheless, Doran explains, the two women continued to write to one another fondly, perpetuating the deliberate ‘fiction’ that ‘they shared this familial relationship’ of daughter and mother-in-law.⁸² The artificiality of this apparently familial fondness seems clear, but such correspondence demonstrates that these queens communicated with one another.⁸³ But not only did these comparable royal women communicate: they couched their implicit rivalries and potential alliances in terms of family and kinship, fictionalising a mother-daughter-friend-rival dynamic and performing a diplomatic script that—though centred on men and potential politically-motivated marriage unions—seems specific to women talking to one another.

These anxieties about rival claimants to the throne—and especially rival queenship as a phenomenon that developed in the latter half the sixteenth century—are concerns that helped to shape the society in and for which early modern dramatists were writing history plays, and by extension, helped to shape the history plays themselves. Mary, Queen of Scots’s execution in February 1587, for example, took place no more than four or five years before Shakespeare began writing his first tetralogy: the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*. The

⁸⁰ Susan Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony: The Courtships of Elizabeth I* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 99. For more on Elizabeth’s potential suitors, see *Monarchy and Matrimony*, where Doran charts ‘all those marriage negotiations that were taken seriously by Elizabeth and her contemporaries, and place[s] them within the context of court politics, religious developments and international diplomacy’ (p. 1).

⁸¹ Doran, ‘Elizabeth I and Catherine de Medici’, p. 129.

⁸² Doran, ‘Elizabeth I and Catherine de Medici’, p. 131.

⁸³ Robert Bucholz and Carole Levin, ‘Introduction: It’s Good to Be Queen’, in *Queens and Power in Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. by Bucholz and Levin, pp. xiii-xxxiii. Bucholz and Levin discuss literal correspondences between queens—such as between Elizabeth and Catherine—as well as how queens speak to one another ‘figuratively across time’ (p. xiv).

execution was very recent history when these plays—often so concerned with showing audiences rival monarchs, rival queens, in action—were being written and popularly performed. Such was the backdrop against which history plays of the 1590s were composed. It is not coincidental, then, that rival monarchs permeate many history plays (and particularly those concerned with the Wars of the Roses), or that these plays explore complex and problematic syntheses of rivalry and (familial and friendly) kinship.

History plays often reflect on contemporary politics and recent history. But more, playwrights employ historical material to self-consciously comment on contemporary politics. The historical distance between a play text and its context(s) allows dramatists to, relatively safely, project and probe ideas of rival queenship (both historical and contemporary). However, this ‘distance’ is indeed only relative. The events of the first tetralogy, for example, remain fairly recent history, with the plays dramatising a (propagandist) origin for the still-ruling Tudor dynasty. The first tetralogy is, as such, brought into closer relation to its contemporary audience: it dramatises recent history and the origin of its current dynastic family, as well as depicting events which appear to also have mirrors in the even more recent Elizabethan past.

Critical Contexts

This study of early modern dramatisations of medieval queens will contribute to the study of queenship from a literary and theatrical perspective. Focusing on literary-dramatic representations of queenship will also allow for an in-depth consideration of the tensions and anxieties surrounding female power in these history plays’ late Elizabethan moment, and analysis of how models of queenship were negotiated through early modern rewritings of and reflections on medieval history and past queens.

There is a substantial corpus of scholarship surrounding queenship and female rule, as well as about history and theoretical work about writing history. This thesis follows studies which have brought discussions of female characters in early modern plays to the forefront of early modern studies, which have offered discussion of the lives and influence of powerful historical women in their own right, and which have detailed the relationship between the past, writing the past, and the contemporary historical moment. Nonetheless, there is a gap in the field: there has been no sustained study of medieval queens in late Elizabethan history plays that explores the insights these literary-dramatic representations of queens and history might engender. Scholarship has concentrated on historical accounts of queens and (semi-) autobiographical narratives of single or small groups of queens. Predominantly historical studies of Tudor queens—especially Elizabeth I, whose reign has garnered a great deal of popular fascination and critical interest—loom large, as do studies of the works of Shakespeare.

Indeed, when considering queens and queenship from a literary or theatrical angle, many critics have focused on Shakespearean drama. Although the role of women and the question of female power have been explored extensively in Shakespeare's Comedies and Tragedies, these are comparatively understudied in the Histories.⁸⁴ In 1997, Howard's and Rackins's previously-mentioned *Engendering a Nation* offered an in-depth account of women in what we consider to be Shakespeare's English history plays, but ultimately 'negate[d] rather than promote[d] the women in these plays', according to Carol Banks.⁸⁵ Banks's article offers an insightful—albeit somewhat brief—alternative overview of women in these plays,

⁸⁴ See, for example, Cristina León Alfar, *Fantasies of Female Evil: The Dynamics of Gender and Power in Shakespearean Tragedy* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2003); Linda Bamber, *Comic Women, Tragic Men: Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982); Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether (eds), *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996); Penny Gay, *As She Likes It: Shakespeare's Unruly Women* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Alisa Manninen, *Royal Power and Authority in Shakespeare's Late Tragedies* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015); Marilyn L. Williamson, *The Patriarchy of Shakespeare's Comedies* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1986).

⁸⁵ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*. The analysis of this book's argument quoted comes from Banks, 'Warlike women'.

arguing that Shakespeare affords his queens (and powerful female characters generally) political and dramatic significance.

Studies which consider the role of women (and even queens specifically) in early modern drama include Theodora Jankowski's *Women in Power* (1992) and Marie Axton's *The Queen's Two Bodies* (1977).⁸⁶ History plays as a genre have themselves long attracted substantial critical interest, with their implications for national identity particularly fertile ground. Indeed, my thesis argues that history plays illuminate Tudor attitudes towards writing and dramatising history, and examines how the plays themselves interrogate the often-purported idea of history plays as Tudor propaganda. Allison Machlis Meyer's 2021 monograph *Telltale Women: Chronicling Gender in Early Modern Historiography* argues that 'chronicle and political histories value royal women's political interventions and use narrative techniques to invest their voices with authority and power'.⁸⁷ Indeed, I share some lines of enquiry with Machlis Meyer's work, though with several key differences. First, though my research is informed by historiography and the substantial corpus of work by scholars of writing history (such as Holderness and David Kastan), my methodology is not wholly historiographical and more intertextual: I read the plays in relation to their chronicle sources and medieval contexts, but I also read across the plays and consider how they relate to one another and to their contemporary context.⁸⁸ Further, the body of plays at which I look is larger and situated in the more specific historical moment of the 1590s: reading these plays together allows me to generate a better understanding of history plays as a dramatic movement, and one which self-consciously engaged with late Elizabethan contexts.

⁸⁶ Theodora A. Jankowski, *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992). Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*.

⁸⁷ Allison Machlis Meyer, *Telltale Women: Chronicling Gender in Early Modern Historiography* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2021), p. 3.

⁸⁸ See, for example, Graham Holderness, *Textual Shakespeare: Writing and the Word* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2003); David Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Queenship studies specifically began to garner a great degree of scholarly interest in the 1980s and 1990s, with studies of medieval and early modern queens no exception. This interest in queenship emerged, at least in part, ‘as an outgrowth of feminist historical studies since the 1960s’.⁸⁹ Indeed, many studies on queenship have taken a feminist approach; this is an effective and, perhaps, natural methodology for content about gender and its (re)presentations. Pioneering critical analyses of medieval queenship (particularly since the 1980s) include the essay collections *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (1988), *Medieval Queenship* (1993), and *Queens, Regents, and Potentates* (1993). More recent studies include J. L. Laynesmith’s *The Last Medieval Queens* (2004), Lisa Benz St. John’s *Three Medieval Queens* (2012), Helen Castor’s *She-Wolves* (2010), and Theresa Earenfight’s *Queenship in Medieval Europe* (2013). Studies on early modern queenship include *Queenship and Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms* (2005), *The Rule of Women in Early Modern Europe* (2009), *Tudor Queenship* (2010) and *Fairy Tales Queens* (2012).⁹⁰ These works have addressed questions of the queen’s position in domestic and (more extensively) political realms in the medieval and early modern ‘periods’, bringing queens firmly into the historical narrative. Their disciplinary focus, however, is more historical than literary.

However, despite this interest in queenship studies and though there is a growing body of scholarship which engages with the idea of the ‘premodern’ and attempts to trace the relationship between ‘medieval’ and ‘early modern’, few studies have traced the

⁸⁹ John Carmi Parsons, *Medieval Queenship* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993).

⁹⁰ Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (eds.), *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988). Parsons (ed.), *Medieval Queenship*. Theresa M. Vann (ed.), *Queens, Regents, and Potentates* (Denton, TX: Academia Press, 1993). J. L. Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens: English Queenship 1445-1503* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Lisa Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens: Queenship and the Crown in Fourteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Helen Castor, *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010). Castor’s book was also adapted into a BBC Four TV series, *She-Wolves: England’s Early Queens*, broadcast in 2012. Theresa Earenfight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Natalie Mears, *Queenship and Political Discourse in the Elizabethan Realms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Anne J. Cruz and Mihoko Suzuki (eds.), *The Rule of Women in Early Modern Europe* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009). Hunt and Whitelock (eds.), *Tudor Queenship: The Reigns of Mary and Elizabeth*. Jo Eldridge Carney, *Fairy Tales Queens: Representations of Early Modern Queenship* (Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan, 2012).

representation of medieval queens, on stage, from the perspective of an early modern England ruled by a queen. None have done so in a single, sustained study. Notable cross-period studies of queenship include Louise Olga Fradenburg's *Women and Sovereignty* (1991), Liz Oakley-Brown's and Louise J. Wilkinson's *The Rituals and Rhetoric of Queenship: Medieval to Early Modern* (2009), Charles Beem's *The Lioness Roared* (2006), and Robert Bucholz and Carole Levin's *Queens and Power in Medieval and Early Modern England* (2009).⁹¹

Several works mentioned here are included in Beem's and Levin's 'Queenship and Power' series, which 'aims to broaden our understanding of the strategies that queens [...] pursued in order to wield political power'.⁹² The earliest of this series, *High and Mighty Queens of Early Modern England* (2003), brought articles concerning both historical and literary queens to one collection.⁹³ However, exploring the intersections of the 'realities and representations'—history and its fictional iterations—of queens is far from the critical norm or even critically frequent. Existing historical studies of queens generally do not examine literary/fictional material in any great detail, instead using chronicles and other historical sources to produce their central analyses. Existing literary studies of queens, meanwhile, do not often tend to focus on the representation of queens from history or in history plays. My thesis puts queens and their (literary) history centre stage, using chronicle and historical sources to inform discussion of history plays from 1587-1603.

In this thesis, I draw upon these various existing bodies of scholarship, especially historiographical and feminist studies and studies of queenship, history plays and early modern drama. But it is by weaving together these different threads of critical interest into a

⁹¹ Louise Olga Fradenburg (ed.), *Women and Sovereignty* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1991). Liz Oakley-Brown and Louise J. Wilkinson (eds.), *The Rituals and Rhetoric of Queenship: Medieval to Early Modern* (Portland, OR: Four Courts Press, 2009). Beem, *The Lioness Roared* (2006). Bucholz and Levin (eds.), *Queens and Power in Medieval and Early Modern England* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

⁹² See 'Queenship and Power' Palgrave Macmillan book series, ed. by Beem and Levin. Available at: link.springer.com/series/14523 [last accessed January 2022].

⁹³ Carole Levin, Debra Barrett-Graves and Jo Eldridge Carney, *High and Mighty Queens of Early Modern England: Realities and Representations* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

single narrative—focusing mainly on dramatic representations of historical queens and the contemporary implications of such dramatisations—that this thesis offers new perspectives on these often-disparate research areas.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter One focuses on the representation of queens and powerful royal women in Peele's *The Troublesome Reign of King John* (c. 1589) and Shakespeare's *The Life and Death of King John* (c. 1596). These two plays dramatise some of the earliest events from English history that are depicted in Elizabethan history plays. Peele's play is also one of the earliest examples of the English history play genre, and it includes many narrative-dramatic features—such as a queen character speaking the first lines of a play and a queen mother influencing her princely son—that become conventions of the genre that other playwrights mirror, queer, or treat self-reflexively. In their respective iterations of King John's reign, Peele and Shakespeare place particular emphasis on queens and queen figures utilising their motherhood to enact influence and wield power in matters of nation and empire. Chapter One focuses particularly on how the queen mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, is depicted as an advisor to her youngest son when he becomes king. Both plays figure Eleanor's maturity as a source of strength in ways that recall Elizabeth I, who was herself an older, independent queen with a powerful voice when these two plays were first written and performed.

The second chapter examines three plays about three King Edwards: Peele's *Edward I* (c. 1593), Marlowe's *Edward II* (c. 1593), and Shakespeare and Kyd's *Edward III* (c. 1595). These three plays share a pronounced investment in the insular politics of the British Isles. Queens' sexual and maternal identities directly influence or shape England's complex and contentious relationship with Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, as well as the king's relationship with both his subjects and nearest neighbours. Further, the queens of these three plays are

younger than the *John* plays' Eleanor, and the plays place a greater emphasis on their fertility. In *Edward I* and *Edward III*, we see the heavily pregnant Eleanor of Castile and Philippa of Hainault on stage: their maternal bodies become explicitly politicised. Like the other queens studied here, *Edward II*'s Isabella of France uses her status as a mother to an English heir to wield power, whilst also—troublingly—pursuing her own sexual desires. But *Edward II* does not simply participate in dramatic traditions: it also queers them through the character of both the king and queen.

The final chapter analyses the staged representations of Margaret of Anjou, Elizabeth Woodville, and Anne Neville, with Shakespeare's first tetralogy and Heywood's *Edward IV* taking centre stage. These plays—all about or set during the Wars of the Roses—use queens' voices to question, oppose, and rearticulate history. The chapter examines, first, how Shakespeare uses rhetorical patterning to align the representation of Margaret, Elizabeth, and Anne's sexual bodies. I consider how these three queens are presented as 'other', and how their rivalries manifest to bring together different strands of what might be considered 'challenging' or 'alternative' history. Heywood's *Edward IV*, finally, participates in conventions of history plays whilst also encapsulating its evolution and pointing towards its decline in popularity. I argue that the shift in emphasis we see in *Edward IV*—from high ranking or royal characters to lower-ranked working characters; from concerns with (inter)national politics to the travails of city life—and the decline of the history play genre arises from a sense that the Elizabethan succession question has been, more or less, resolved.

Each of my chapters, then, reads Shakespearean history plays alongside plays by his contemporaries, which are not generally studied with the same depth or frequency. In doing so, I seek to identify the shared stylistic and ideological concerns that shape history plays in the 1590s, following the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots and in the latter years of Elizabeth I's reign and life. These late Elizabethan playwrights develop and, later, deconstruct

the genre. They all use queenly voices to metatheatrically engage with the genre, and to challenge dominant articulations of historical narratives. Indeed, in the plays studied here, queens and queen figures offer alternative perspectives on history and politics, and interrogate contemporary female power whilst refusing to either condemn or celebrate such power. By staging a multiplicity of queens who variously adopt, struggle against, or reject gendered modes of authority and agency, history plays refuse to answer the questions they raise about history, power, and gender.

Chapter I

Queens at the End of the Angevin Empire: *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* and *The Life and Death of King John*

The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England is perhaps the earliest secular English history play in print.¹ Its characters are not allegorical—as they were in many earlier precedents for the history play genre which emerged in the late Elizabethan moment—but are real, identifiable political figures from England’s past. Now most widely attributed to George Peele and identified as a precursor to—and source for—Shakespeare’s *King John*, *Troublesome Reign* was written c. 1589. It emerged at the beginning of a decade in which the history play developed as a recognisable and popular genre. Although it rarely receives critical attention in its own right, *Troublesome Reign* established a number of the conventions we see in many history plays that were written and performed in the 1590s: battles for the English throne; domestic and international conflict; questions of legitimacy, inheritance, and succession; interrogation of authority and historical accuracy (both as something the characters and content of the plays do diegetically, and also as something the playwrights do as they dramatise history and contribute to historiographical traditions); and, most significantly for the purpose of this study, a strong emphasis on the presence, action, and voices of female characters as (potential) wives, mothers, and political and familial supporters.

There are no history plays from the 1590s that dramatise the reigns of the Angevin Kings Henry II and Richard I. Further, there is no play that is wholly concerned with the reign of Henry III, King John’s heir and the first non-Angevin

¹ Though there are earlier precedents for the history play—such as John Bale’s *Kynge Johan* (c. 1538) and Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville’s *Gorboduc* (c. 1561)—I argue that the history play emerged most strongly as an identifiable genre, featuring realistic dramatisations of historical events and figures, in the 1590s. The anonymous play *The Famous Victories of Henry V* is probably the earliest extant play of medieval English history, having been written in around 1586. It was first printed in 1598, 7 years after *Troublesome Reign* was first published in Quarto format.

Plantagenet king. History plays depicting the early Plantagenet kings instead focus on unstable reigns and historical moments, calling attention to some of the more troubling (and *troublesome*) aspects of England's past in a way that seems to contradict Nashe's notion that history plays are (or at least should be) essentially patriotic propaganda. The two plays about King John thus stand apart from other late Elizabethan plays of the genre: they dramatise an earlier moment in history, and there are no plays about the reigns immediately before or after John's. This temporal separation, coupled with the plays' shared interest in the queen mother rather than the queen consort, warrants the *John* plays their own chapter. This chapter focuses on queens at the end of the Angevin empire, and particularly on the figure of Queen Eleanor.² It first looks at Peele's *Troublesome Reign*, as one of the earliest examples of the history play in terms of both compositional date and historical subject matter. It then turns to Shakespeare's *King John*, which follows some of the trends for representing women's agency that Peele begins to establish in *Troublesome Reign*. In order to analyse the interrogative conventions seen in these plays, the final section of the chapter addresses the politics of queens' bodies in both plays.

The first character to speak in this first English history play is Queen Eleanor.

She begins:

Barons of England, and my noble lords,
 Though God and Fortune have bereft from us
 Victorious Richard, scourge of infidels,
 And clad this land in stole of dismal hue,
 Yet give me leave to joy, and joy you all
 That from this womb hath sprung a second hope,
 A king that may in rule and virtue both

² Like 'the Wars of the Roses' (which I also use later), the term 'Angevin' originated in the nineteenth century as a descriptor for the English kings immediately descended from the counts of Anjou: Henry II, Richard I, and John. Kate Norgate used the demonym in her seminal two-volume *England Under the Angevin Kings* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1887).

Succeed his brother in his empery.³

Queen Eleanor is Eleanor of Aquitaine, former queen of France, widow of Henry II of England, and mother of both the deceased ‘victorious Richard’ and the country’s ‘second hope’, John (1.1.3; 1.1.6). Eleanor’s voice is one of authority as she addresses the English barons and ‘her’ noble lords, informing them that some of their grief for Richard (King Richard I, ‘the Lionheart’) can be assuaged with joy at the ascension of his brother. Eleanor locates the future health and wellbeing of England not solely in her sons, but also metonymically in her maternal body, her ‘womb’. Charles R. Forker argues that the ‘literal and metaphorical uses of the word [womb] became closely associated in history plays’.⁴ Similarly, the symbiotic relationship between the body natural and body politic became a familiar aspect of Elizabeth I’s iconography and self-fashioning, despite the fact that no progeny actually came from her womb.

Though the idea of the country as a metaphorical mother was familiar in early modern political discourse, Eleanor’s reference to the ‘second hope’ that ‘sprung’ from her womb is also very much a reference to her own personal, maternal body as the origin of the ‘second hope’ that (she says) is represented by her youngest son.⁵

In the opening passage of *Troublesome Reign*, Peele shows Eleanor asserting her voice and her body as centrally important to the future wellbeing of the country where she was once (but is no longer) queen consort. Peele situates Eleanor at the

³ George Peele, *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, ed. by Charles R. Forker (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 1.1.1-8. Further references to this play will be to this edition unless otherwise stated, and Part, scene, and line references will be given parenthetically throughout the body of the thesis. Following recent critical custom, this play will henceforth be referred to as *Troublesome Reign*.

⁴ Forker’s gloss of 1.1.6-7, in *Troublesome Reign*, p. 116.

⁵ John Carmi Parsons writes that ‘[n]o queen was ever “just” pregnant; she was the matrix of future kings—in Janet Nelson’s words the guarantor of the realm’s survival and integrity and so of peace and concord’. I discuss the queen’s womb as ‘the matrix of future kings’ in more detail in Chapter 2, but the idea is also fruitful here. Parsons, ‘The Pregnant Queen as Counsellor and the Medieval Construction of Motherhood’, in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. by Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 39-61 (p. 44). See also Janet L. Nelson, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London and Ronceverte: The Hambleton Press, 1986).

very beginning of this early history play as the first character to speak. She is positioned at the origin of the genre, but this mature queen can also be interpreted as the origin point of the genre: her maternal body is emphasised in *Troublesome Reign*, and we know that all kings in later history plays are also descended from Eleanor. I argue that the foregrounding of Eleanor in Peele's play sets a precedent for many of the English history plays that follow, where women, and particularly queens, are frequently given dramatic prominence and the opportunity to speak of and for themselves.

Moreover, the central queen in both *John* plays is, like Elizabeth I when these plays were written, an older queen. Queen Eleanor, who asserts her own importance and authority at the beginning of the *Troublesome Reign*, is not King John's wife and consort: she is the queen mother. In Shakespeare's *King John*, Eleanor occupies the same role as queen mother. Neither Peele nor Shakespeare include John's wives in their dramatic iterations, instead foregrounding the speech and action of his mother. In these plays, it is not John's ability to produce an heir with an appropriate queen consort that can assure his royal legacy. Instead, there is greater emphasis on the origin of John himself, on lineage and legal claims to the throne being pursued with maternal guidance and insistence as 'headstrong mother[s] prick' their sons into action and quarrel over their counsel (*TR*, 1.1.55). There is an implicit commentary here: not only do queen consorts become more valuable and powerful by producing an heir and possible future king, but in the *John* plays especially, queens' voices are often heard most strongly later in life, thus contributing to the sense that queen

mothers act as a kind of historical memory and that ageing queens can offer particular political wisdom.⁶

In the *John* plays, the mature queen does not simply diminish or disappear with age. At the inauguration of history plays in the early 1590s, Elizabeth I would have been in her late fifties to early sixties and into her fourth decade of being England's queen regnant: just as Elizabeth's political career continued into her later life, so too do the *John* plays show Eleanor being actively involved in court politics in her maturity. Neither Peele nor Shakespeare suggest the queen is in any way diminished by her age, nor do they relegate this mature queen to the background or make her disappear. Her continued involvement in the narrative is not only a politically prudent decision—so as not to offend the reigning queen—but it also reflects the contemporary royal landscape in England and Europe, where a number of powerful queens are either ruling in their own right or are actively involved in the reigns of the men closest to them.⁷ Queen Eleanor is both strikingly similar to, and generatively different from, Queen Elizabeth I. Written and performed at a time when the ruler of England is herself a mature queen—albeit a childless one—*Troublesome Reign* and *King John* present the ageing Eleanor as an influential political player with a powerful voice that plumbs contemporary English concerns about politics, power, inheritance, and (female) sovereignty.

Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane write that:

[t]hree of the most common ways of framing old age are chronological, functional, and cultural. Chronological old age is entered when one reaches a

⁶ We might compare Volumnia in Shakespeare's later *Coriolanus* (c. 1608). The title character's mother frequently claims maternal authority over her son, with this filial relationship foregrounded whilst Coriolanus's wife, Virgilia, is sidelined in both influence and narrative.

⁷ Sharon L. Jansen notes that 'a whole range of "dynastic accidents" in early modern Europe had resulted in a surprising number of women ruling as queens or functioning as regents' and that 'the lives and political careers of [...] sixteenth-century queens were hardly without precedent'. In *The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Female Rulers in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 2002), p. 2. Jansen's book aims to 'redraw the lines of power' to acknowledge the 'foremothers' who came before the proliferation of queens regnant or regent in early modern Europe.

predetermined calendar age. Functional old age is not reached at a set moment, but is entered when an individual can no longer care for herself. Cultural old age combines aspects of these elements [...] plus other variables, and determines the understanding of old age according to the community's particular value system.⁸

Though there is no 'consensus as to what marks the threshold of old age or when that might begin', it is fair to say that Queen Eleanor is, necessarily, chronologically old in the plays dramatising the later years of her youngest son's reign.⁹ Aki C. L. Beam discusses the difficulty of accurately defining 'when early modern women grew old', and the different factors involved in attempts to categorise old age. Botelho argues that 'old age was subdivided into at least two phases, 'green' old age or the 'young' old, and advanced or decrepit old age'.¹⁰ If young women were thought to be vulnerable to being plagued by 'green virginity'—the 'disease of virgins' that supposedly resulted from late-onset menarche, responsible for a range of symptoms from paleness to palpitations, and supposedly cured by sex and therefore necessitating marriage—'green old age' was contrastingly, as Keith Thomas writes, 'often said to be the best part of life, when the passions had cooled, but the mind remained sharp'.¹¹ In both dramatic iterations of Queen Eleanor, she can be considered to be in the stage of 'green old age': though she is chronologically older, she is depicted as shrewd and strategic. Her continued astuteness—in matters both personal and political—again recalls Elizabeth I, whose character and reign are reflected and commented on in history plays of the 1590s, and not least in the two *John* plays.

⁸ Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane, 'Introduction', in *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500*, ed. by Botelho and Thane (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1-12 (p. 4).

⁹ Botelho and Thane, 'Introduction', p. 4.

¹⁰ Botelho, 'Old age and menopause in rural women of early modern Suffolk', in *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500*, pp. 43-65 (p. 43).

¹¹ Keith Thomas, 'Age and Authority in Early Modern England', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 62 (1976), 205-48 (244). For more on 'green sickness', see Ursula A. Potter, *The Unruly Womb in Early Modern Drama: Plotting Women's Biology on the Stage* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2019); Helen King, 'Green Sickness: Hippocrates, Galen and the Origins of the "Disease of Virgins"', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 2.3 (1996), 372-387; and Sara Read, *Menstruation and the Female Body in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

In these plays, powerful women—and Eleanor in particular—are shown to be more strategic than reactionary. Where (generally younger) queens in the plays about the Wars of the Roses are often shown responding to the actions of male characters and/or critiquing those actions after the fact, Eleanor contributes to the progress of history directly. She is shown to plan political manoeuvres and predict political motivations, and she also repeatedly articulates and insists on her relationship to her male heirs. She deploys familial bonds strategically in order to enforce influence over others, and she attempts to shape history itself through her voice, as we see at the beginning of *Troublesome Reign* when she proclaims that the assembled company may have ‘joy’ because ‘from [her] womb hath sprung a second hope’ (1.1.5-6). Eleanor’s speech is often concentrated on both memory and continuity, on the construction of dynasty and empire through family. And the mature Eleanor is given a voice that posits herself at the heart of this dynasty and, therefore, of this historical narrative

PART ONE: QUEENSHIP IN *THE TROUBLESOME REIGN OF JOHN, KING OF ENGLAND*

As the first voice we hear in *Troublesome Reign*, Queen Eleanor emphasises the centrality of her progeny—her womb—for the continued health and stability of English ‘empery’ (*Troublesome Reign*, 1.1.8).¹² It is the queen’s body that is credited with generating ‘empery’ (and ‘empire’, by extension), through the birth of kings or royal heirs. Eleanor says ‘from this womb hath sprung a *second* hope’ (1.1.6, emphasis mine), effectively reminding the other characters and the audience that it is through her body that England has another king to succeed Richard the Lionheart ‘in rule and virtue both’ (1.1.7). Eleanor’s speech at the beginning of Peele’s play brings together the three foci of this thesis: queens and their bodies, queens and their relationships with men, and queens and their countries or national identities. In this

¹²‘Empery’, of course, carries connotations of both ‘dominion’ (as Forker glosses it) and of empire and expansion. The question of whether using the term ‘empire’ is appropriate to describe the collection of lands conquered and held by the Angevin kings has been much debated amongst historians, as Martin Aurell details. See *The Plantagenet Empire 1154-1224*, trans. by David Crouch (Harlow: Pearson, 2007). Aurell argues that ‘[a]lthough no king of England since the tenth century had presumed to take the style of *imperator* as his actual title, the instances given of its contemporary use are a good enough warrant for the historian of the Middle Ages to use the phrase ‘Plantagenet Empire’ or ‘Angevin Empire’.’ *The Plantagenet Empire*, p. 2. The Angevins did not use the term ‘empire’ to describe their dominion over ‘a huge complex of lands along the Atlantic seaboard’ (Aurell, p. 1), and so Eleanor’s anachronistic use of the word ‘empery’ seems to signal an engagement with early modern England’s nascent empire. As Maria Fusaro argues, ‘[a]lthough its first attempts at establishing colonial outposts encountered mixed success, England was well set on its path towards global assertion’ and ‘certainly behaved like a rising power’. *Political Economies of Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean: The Decline of Venice and the Rise of England, 1450-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. ix. Jessica S. Hower argues that ‘the sixteenth century was pivotal in the making of Britain and the British Empire in the Atlantic world’ as she charts Tudor imperialism from its first to final ruler. *Tudor Empire: The Making of Early Modern Britain and the British Atlantic World, 1485-1603* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 4.

chapter, discussion of these foci will reveal how both *Troublesome Reign* and *King John* focus on mothers and mature queens in a way that self-consciously recalls their late Elizabethan moment. Though this chapter discusses other female characters such as Constance and Blanche (especially in Part Three), this study focuses more on queenship itself than on quasi-queens or other powerful female figures. Further, the character of Constance has often received more critical attention than Eleanor because she plays a larger part in Shakespeare's *King John*: this chapter attempts to redress this imbalance, whilst also locating Eleanor within the (emerging and popular) dramatic tradition of late Elizabethan history plays.

Despite situating Eleanor at the dramatic forefront of *Troublesome Reign* and giving her a powerful voice (especially in the first part of the play), Peele's play is, of course, chiefly about its titular character. By dramatising John's reign, Peele necessarily depicts just the later years of John's mother's life; in so doing, he constructs a character who we know must be 'chronologically' old (though her age is not explicitly mentioned), but who is not 'functionally' old nor relegated into the background of political events.¹³ The historical Eleanor of Aquitaine lived a long life of around 80 years, much of which was tumultuous, often scandalous, and at the centre of European politics. She was the Duchess of the French fiefdom of Aquitaine in her own right from the time of her father's death in 1137 to her death in 1204.¹⁴ Shortly after her father's death, Eleanor married Louis, the Dauphin of France who later became King Louis VII. The marriage was annulled after 15 years on the grounds of consanguinity. Just eight weeks after this annulment, Eleanor was married

¹³ See Botelho and Thane, 'Introduction', in *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500*, p. 4.

¹⁴ When Shakespeare's Eleanor hears of the King of France's withdrawal of support for John, she characterises it a 'foul revolt of French inconstancy' (*KJ*, 3.1.248). Eleanor's seemingly anti-French outcry could be designed to appeal to an English audience, who might find humour in the seeming contradiction of a Frenchwoman insulting her own country. However, though Shakespeare offers little space to defining Eleanor's cultural background, this line could suggest that Shakespeare's Eleanor has a greater regional affinity to Aquitaine than a cultural or national affinity to France.

to Henry, who would become Henry II of England two years later in 1154. She bore Henry five sons and three daughters, before the Revolt of 1173-74 in which her eldest surviving son with Henry, 'impatient to obtain' his inheritances and rule himself, rebelled against his father.¹⁵ The twelfth-century chronicler William of Newburgh wrote that 'the younger Henry, by the advice of the French, devising evil from every source against his father, went secretly into Aquitaine, where his two youthful brothers, Richard and Geoffrey, were residing with their mother; and with her connivance, as it is said, brought them with him into France'.¹⁶ Eleanor was 'said' to be complicit in her sons' rebellion against her estranged husband; we should note the suspicion of powerful women and the strength of rumour and hearsay in Newburgh's phrase 'as it is said'. Nonetheless, Eleanor's involvement in her sons' rebellion resulted in her capture and imprisonment for the sixteen years between 1173 and Henry II's death in 1189. For most of her long life, Eleanor possessed titles that gave her political influence. In addition to being the wealthy Duchess of Aquitaine, Eleanor 'dominated her first husband, Louis VII [of France], in the early years of their marriage, and acted as regent during the long absences on the continent of her second husband, Henry II [of England]'.¹⁷ She also became an unofficial guiding influence in the reigns of her two sons, Richard I and John.¹⁸

¹⁵ William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum* or *The History of English Affairs*, Book II, Chapter XXVII, 1198, from *The Church Historians of England*, volume IV, part II, trans. by Joseph Stevenson (London: Seeley's, 1861).

¹⁶ William of Newburgh, *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, Book II, Chapter XXVII, 1198.

¹⁷ Diana Dunn, 'The Queen at War: The Role of Margaret of Anjou in the Wars of the Roses', in *War and Society in Medieval and Early Modern Britain*, ed. by Dunn (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp. 141-61 (p. 146).

¹⁸ It is also worth mentioning that Eleanor was, by her marriage to Henry II, the daughter-in-law of the Empress Matilda. Though there is little knowledge or discussion of the relationship between Matilda and Eleanor (perhaps surprisingly, given the ferocity of their characters and shared historical moment), Eleanor married Henry II in 1152, two years before his ascension. We also know that 'Matilda assisted her son in the early years of his reign, carrying out duties such as negotiating with the King of France on Henry's behalf'. Lois L. Huneycutt, 'Matilda the Empress', in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Margaret Schaus (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 551. Matilda was therefore alive for 15 years of Henry and Eleanor's marriage, and actively involved in her

John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler outline the complicated, active, and surprisingly mysterious life of Eleanor of Aquitaine, and the inability to ‘disentangle fact and legend’ and the ‘rich mixture of traditions’ surrounding Eleanor.¹⁹ Parsons and Wheeler note that Henry II’s biographer W. L. Warren ‘excused himself from unsnarling [the multiple traditions about Eleanor] by situating Eleanor as “a creature of legend and romance, but not of history”.’²⁰ Despite the wealth of critical material about Eleanor, Parsons, Wheeler, and Warren all suggest that identifying a ‘historical’ Eleanor as clear and distinct from subsequent writings about her is not an easy—and perhaps an impossible—endeavour.

History plays are rarely able to offer a comprehensive, wholly ‘accurate’ overview of the lives of its historical characters, nor do they strive to do so: the plays featuring Eleanor are no exception. In *Troublesome Reign*, Eleanor is shown to be a significant presence (particularly in Part One): she is a close advisor to King John, is involved with offsetting the threat to John’s throne presented by her grandson, Arthur, and is employed as regent of England’s provinces in France. But it is her maternal identity, and the power she generates from this identity, that is foregrounded at the beginning of the play, and this emphasis continues throughout the rest of the first part of the play.

Queens’ Maternal Identities

As mentioned, Eleanor is the first character to speak in the *Troublesome Reign* and,

son’s court for at least part of that. She would almost certainly have had an influence on Henry II’s kingship, and we can at least infer that Eleanor was aware of the strength of the ‘Lady of the English’.

¹⁹ John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler, ‘Prologue: Lady and Lord: Eleanor of Aquitaine’, in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady*, ed. by Parsons and Wheeler (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. xvii-xxxiii (p. xvii).

²⁰ Parsons and Wheeler, ‘Prologue’, p. xvii. W. L. Warren, *Henry II* (Berkeley, LA: University of California Press; London: Eyre Methuen, 1973; repr. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 121.

arguably, in the late Elizabethan history play genre. Speaking immediately after John's ascension, Eleanor reminds the other characters and the audience that two kings have come from her 'womb' (1.1.6). Eleanor glorifies the reign of his elder brother, Richard, whilst also inviting 'joy' (1.1.5) from the assembled 'barons' and 'lords' (1.1.1) because John offers the country a 'second hope' (1.1.6).²¹ The titular character is the second to speak: he first addresses his mother and then the 'barons all' (1.1.9), before claiming to be 'unworthy' to be 'mighty England's king' (1.1.10-11) in a familiar modesty topos that acknowledges the responsibility that accompanies his new royal office. But John's way of addressing his mother suggests a conflation of identities that continues throughout Eleanor's time on stage: he calls her 'my gracious Mother-Queen' (1.1.9). When Eleanor is first identified onstage, it is neither as simply 'mother', nor old or former queen, nor the more familiar 'queen mother'.²² The hyphenated 'Mother-Queen' suggests inextricability between her motherhood and her now-former identity as queen consort.²³ Indeed, Eleanor remains close to her son, the king, throughout Part One of *Troublesome Reign*; we see John frequently turn to her for advice and rely on her for political support. There is a sense that the 'Mother-Queen' epithet might also be quasi-hendiadic: she is both mother *and* queen.

Indeed, neither of John's two wives are depicted nor mentioned in the play, an omission that is starker when contrasted with Eleanor's visible influence on John and presence in his court and political strategies. The absence of his first wife is perhaps

²¹ Eleanor is also involved in gathering and assuring support for John's reign in Holinshed's *Chronicles*: 'quene Elianor his mother by the helpe of Hubert archbishop of Canturburie and other of the noble men and barons of the land, trauelled as diligentlie to procure the English people to receiue their oth of allegiance to be true to king Iohn'. See Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587, Volume 6, p. 157). Accessed via *The Holinshed Project* [Available at www.cems.ox.ac.uk/holinshed]

²² *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'queen mother' as the 'widow of a king who is also the mother of the reigning monarch. Also (in form Queen Mother) used as a title'. It details how the diplomat Nicholas Throckmorton used the term in a letter of 1560. 'Queen mother, n.', in *OED Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) [Available at www.oed.com/view/Entry/156227].

²³ Chatillon also calls her 'Mother-Queen' at 1.2.55 and 1.2.72, suggesting that this conflated identity is familiar even abroad and outside of John's closest circle.

less surprising: John's childless, ten-year marriage to Isabella, Countess of Gloucester was easily annulled around three months after he acceded to the throne. The annulment was granted on the grounds of consanguinity as both were great-grandchildren of Henry I. However, there were other influential factors in the annulment: there had been papal opposition to the union, it did not produce an heir, John would retain the lands which motivated their marriage, and John supposedly became infatuated with the woman who would become his second wife. A year after this annulment, in 1200, John married Isabella, Countess of Angoulême, who was already betrothed to Hugh IX, the Count of Lusignan. John's choice of bride could have been motivated, according to Nicholas Vincent, by 'the beauty of Isabella, as various of the chroniclers allege, or, more likely, for hard-headed reasons, [he] made off with Hugh de Lusignan's intended bride, to prevent the creation of a united county of Lusignan, La Marche and Angoulême, and to claim the succession of Angoulême for himself'.²⁴ The union was both political and personal, but also one that Vincent calls 'a disastrous misjudgement which was to cost [John] Normandy and much of the Plantagenet dominion in France'.²⁵ Isabella's absence in *Troublesome Reign* (as well as Shakespeare's *King John*)—which both telescopically dramatise John's seventeen-year reign and conclude with his son from his second marriage succeeding him—is all the more surprising when we consider her political and personal importance to John's reign and Henry III's succession. Instead, the queen that we have in the *John* plays is his 'Mother-Queen', Eleanor of Aquitaine. I do not suggest that Eleanor is a straightforward substitute for John's wife—and I do not wish to pursue a Freudian reading here—but there is nonetheless a sense that Queen Eleanor's presence is forceful enough to afford the omission of John's queen consorts in *Troublesome*

²⁴ Nicholas Vincent, 'Isabella of Angoulême: John's Jezebel', in *King John: New Interpretations*, ed. by S. D. Church (Suffolk and Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 2007), pp. 165-219 (p. 173).

²⁵ Vincent, 'Isabella of Angoulême', p. 173.

Reign. Omitting queen consorts is not typical of the late Elizabethan history play; on the contrary, I argue that the genre generally offers them a compelling place in historical drama. *Troublesome Reign* and Shakespeare's *King John*, then, stand out not only because there is a chronological gap between their material and other history plays', but because they give no attention to the king's wife, instead favouring his mother.²⁶

Instead of an emphasis on producing and educating an heir to the English throne, *Troublesome Reign* focuses on the origin of kings (and kingship) and the emergence of a number of possible kings in light of the current king's perceived weaknesses, during his 'troublesome reign'. Indeed, there is a focus on matrilineality, maternal relationships and inheritances, and mothers claiming power for their sons throughout this early history play. Part One dramatises maternal relationships and identities in detail. In this chapter, I continue to explore how the two *John* plays foreground and often prioritise maternal relationships, and argue that in doing so they suggest that the origin of kingship can be as important as his succession, that mothers of current kings can be as important as potential mothers of future kings.

The foregrounding of mothers and 'maternity' as a way of securing the throne in turn invites commentary (both diegetic and critical) on conventional lines of succession (usually primogeniture) and how these can be disrupted. John, for example, became king only because of the death of four elder brothers. John's father, Henry II, himself claimed the throne through his (dispossessed) mother, Matilda. Such shifting, disrupted successive lines also recall the plays' contemporary moment.

²⁶ This emphasis on the mother-son relationship in *King John* is made all the more notable because Shakespeare often dramatises father-daughter relationships whilst omitting mention of the mother, as in *King Lear*, *The Tempest*, and *As You Like It*, for example. Oliver Ford Davies's *Shakespeare's Fathers and Daughters* explores some of these relationships (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), as does Diane Elizabeth Dreher's earlier *Domination and Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1986).

The Tudor dynasty, of course, emerged not as a result of direct familial inheritance but of civil war, complicated intergenerational relationships, and a politically astute marriage. Within the dynasty, heir-apparent identity and the throne itself were passed sideways more often than downwards: Henry VIII became king due to his brother Arthur's death, whilst all three of his (legitimatised) children became monarch. Meanwhile, in the 1590s, Elizabeth's advancing age and refusal to name an heir meant another inevitable shifting of lines of succession.

In the *Troublesome Reign*, John's first challenge as king is to respond to an alternative claim to the throne. Philip, the French king, has sent ambassadors to England, and while John desires to 'know what Philip [...] / requires of us' (1.1.17-18), Eleanor says:

[I] [d]are lay my hand that Eleanor can guess
 Whereto this weighty embassy doth tend:
 If of my nephew Arthur and his claim,
 Then say, my son, I have not missed my aim. (1.1.19-22)

The politically astute queen mother acknowledges that Arthur—the heir to John's elder brother and Eleanor's fourth son, Geoffrey, who died in 1186—has a claim to the throne that is legitimate enough to garner French support.²⁷ But these lines do not serve only to prove Eleanor's shrewdness in correctly guessing the reason for the embassy's visit; they also twice emphasise her own intimate involvement with both men who have the best claims to the throne according to their bloodlines. Eleanor uses the possessive determiner 'my' twice in two lines to refer to her grandson and her son: she claims John's rival as 'my nephew', which is how she refers to her grandson several times throughout the play (at 1.1.52 and 1.1.292, for example). Her prediction is addressed to John, to whom she directly refers as 'my son' for the first time. Here, Eleanor definitively locates Arthur within her family, and so his 'claim',

²⁷ Eleanor had five sons, four of who survived into adulthood.

by extension, depends on his relationship to Eleanor herself. She also states again that the new king is her son. In these four lines, Eleanor subtly reiterates her maternal (and politically generative) identity to the characters onstage and the audience.

Indeed, Eleanor attempts to ‘claim’ Arthur as her grandson on numerous occasions in the play’s first part. When the French ambassador, Lord Chatillon, relays that King Philip demands John give up his title and lands in favour of Arthur, John refuses and Chatillon declares John an enemy who should ‘prepare for bloody wars’ (1.1.48-49). Eleanor responds by asking Chatillon to give Arthur a message from ‘Queen Eleanor, his grandmother’ (1.1.53): she ‘charge[s] him leave his arms’, ‘forsake the King of France / And come to [her] and his uncle here’ in England (1.1.54; 1.1.59-60). She again insists on her matrilineal relationship to Arthur, and attempts to use this to appeal for guardianship of her young grandson. There is a sense of authoritativeness to this identity as she does not ‘beseech’, ‘implore’, or in any way ask Arthur to lay down his weapons: she ‘charges’ him to do so. Eleanor adds weight to her instruction by asserting her identity three times—‘I, Queen Eleanor, his grandmother’ (1.1.53)—and insisting on her authority as both Arthur’s queen and his kinswoman.

Eleanor goes on to blame Arthur’s ‘headstrong mother’ for encouraging him to pursue his claim to the English throne, arguing that her former daughter-in-law, Constance, will risk her son’s life ‘[s]o she may bring herself to rule a realm’ and fulfil her own ambitions (1.1.55-58). Eleanor effectively juxtaposes herself with Constance; though she is an authority figure here, Eleanor presents herself as fairly gentle as she wishes for Arthur to be assured that ‘he shall want for nothing’ if he comes into the guardianship of Eleanor (first and foremost) and his uncle, John (1.1.61). Indeed, throughout the rest of Part One, the playwright continues the

juxtaposition and bitter rivalry between the two mothers, both of whom have the potential to be the queen mother.

In scene two, we see Arthur torn between matrilineal loyalties more explicitly. He suggests a reluctance to pursue his claim to become king when he tells his mother that ‘possession of a crown is much’ (1.2.19). Arthur does not say that ‘possession of a crown is *too* much’; instead, his statement suggests an apathy, or at least a hesitation, rather than active fear or direct unwillingness to pursue his claim. This lack of personal ambition, and the sense that powerful relatives and supporters are directing Arthur, is further evident in the comparatively few lines he speaks in his own claim’s defence. When John and his followers (including Eleanor) arrive at the ‘French royal pavilion near Angers’, the French and English kings argue about who has the rightful claim to both Angers and the English throne (1.2.75-88).²⁸

Philip has six lines, while John has eight. The next almost thirty lines are dominated by an altercation between the two ‘mother-queens’ where they call one another false, vain, and ambitious as each reiterates their respective son’s rightful royal supremacy (1.2.89-124). Eleanor repeats her assertion that Arthur ‘hath nought to do with that he claims’ (1.2.97) but his ‘mother makes [him] wings / To soar with peril after Icarus’ (1.2.108-9). Eleanor blames Arthur’s supposed ‘over-reaching’—articulated in terms which demonstrates Peele’s classicism—on Constance’s personal ambition; Constance suggests that Eleanor is denying Arthur’s claim ‘for fear his mother [Constance] should be used too well’ (1.2.118). Peele is here drawing upon Holinshed, where Eleanor’s opposition to Arthur’s claim is a result of

enuie conceiued against his mother, [rather] than vpon any iust occasion giuen in the behalfe of the child, for that she saw if he were king, how his mother

²⁸ As Forker points out in his note about Part One, scene two’s location (*Troublesome Reign*, p. 140), King Philip announces that he is ‘come before this city of Angers’ (1.2.178). John also says that he has come to France ‘in defence and purchase of [his] right, / The town of Angers’ (1.2.84-85).

Constance would looke to beare most rule within the realme of England.²⁹

In Holinshed and in Peele's dramatisation, Eleanor's lack of support for Arthur derives from her dislike of, and distrust for, his mother rather than a simple, straightforward belief in the legitimacy and superiority of John's reign itself. Fear of outside or inappropriate influence over the would-be king motivates Eleanor's action against Arthur's claim, and her solution is to attempt to co-opt Arthur into John's household. We also have the suggestion here that the preferences and support of powerful women can determine the ruler, and so the direction, of the country as a whole.

Arthur briefly interrupts the quarrel between his mother and grandmother at almost exactly its halfway point (1.2.105-07), his only lines in this scene—and in defence of his own claim to the English throne—apart from the twelve he directs at his mother to express his doubt that John will 'resign the rule unto his nephew' (1.2.24-25). Arthur is thus dramatically poised between two powerful female relatives who each claim a different role or identity for him. It is their ambition, not his, that shapes both this scene and the political landscape of the play. Arthur lacks agency as a child, in contrast to the maturity of his mother and grandmother. When Arthur speaks here, however, it is not with the voice of a child. Instead, he appeals to the legitimacy of his claim as the heir to the elder son of Henry II: he says that even if Richard I did leave a legitimate will that favoured John as his successor, '[t]he law intends such testaments as void, / Where right descent can no way be impeached' (1.2.107). His claim depends on the custom of primogeniture, where the eldest sons inherit: as the heir to John's elder brother, Arthur should come before John in the line

²⁹ Holinshed, *Chronicles* (1587, Volume 6, p. 158). Holinshed's following comment that '[s]o hard it is to bring women to agree in one mind, their natures commonlie being so contrarie, their words so variable, and their déeds so vndiscreét' is both casually misogynistic and unintentionally ironic, given how he chronicles the many quarrels of many kings over many years.

of succession. Further, the claim of primogeniture that Arthur articulates suggests that his becoming king would owe nothing, in law, to either of his powerful kinswomen, thus rhetorically negating their influence. Primogeniture carried authority and credence in the later Middle Ages and in the late Elizabethan era, but in 1199 ‘precedence in blood was not yet clearly established’.³⁰ Locating ambition for the throne in Constance as opposed to Arthur himself allows Peele to treat the question of legitimate succession much more ambiguously than Shakespeare goes on to do in his own *John* play, as by Tudor standards the stronger claim would indeed be Arthur’s.

However, presenting John as a usurper would be at odds with how he is set up in the note ‘[t]o the Gentleman Readers’ which comes before the dramatic action of the play, in which John is described as a ‘warlike Christian and [...] countryman’ (l. 5, p. 114) in a way which suggests a proto-Protestantism and definitively English kingly identity.³¹ Indeed, though John’s reign is titled ‘troublesome’, John himself is self-assured, decisive, and patriotic for much of *Troublesome Reign*, which contrasts with many historiographical accounts of a ‘bad King John’. On the other hand, Arthur—who was twelve years old when John became king—is largely depicted as childlike in the play, and we see the two mother-figures of this ‘child’ weaponise their familial relationships to compete for his loyalty and thus gain control over his politics. Arthur’s claim to the English throne was considered to be as equal as John’s own in its medieval context, and it garnered some powerful support—most notably that of King Philip II of France—in both history and in the play. In *Troublesome Reign*, however, Arthur is not shown to pursue his own claim with any particular strength or determination. Despite some articulations of good logic—an example of which is his

³⁰ W. L. Warren, *King John* (Berkeley, LA and London: University of California Press, 1978), p. 48.

³¹ We can infer a slight hint—despite the fact that the *Troublesome Reign* does not address the connotations of Arthur’s name—that a rightful ruler has been overlooked or somehow ‘missed’ with the name ‘Arthur’; the name, of course, suggests the legendary king, and also reminds audiences of Henry VIII’s elder brother, Prince Arthur, who died in 1502 at the age of 15.

insistence that law declares that ‘right descent can no way be impeached’ and ‘testaments’ supporting contrary are ‘void’ (1.2.106-107)—his claim is taken up with more vehemence by his supporters than by himself. In the play, the audience learns of Arthur’s campaign when Chatillon, the French ambassador, tells John that the French king ‘requireth in the behalf of the said Arthur, the kingdom of England, with the lordship of Ireland, Poitiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine’ (1.1.32-34). Arthur’s claim to the throne is first pursued by, and contested between, powerful adults, which suggests a lack of personal involvement (and therefore a certain youthfulness) on Arthur’s part.

In addition, as mentioned, Eleanor claims that it is Arthur’s mother, Constance, who ‘pricks him’ into pursuing his claim (1.1.55); Constance accuses Eleanor of obstructing Arthur’s claim ‘[f]or fear his mother should be used too well’ (1.2.117-118), suggesting that Eleanor’s motivation is not to keep John on the throne as much as it is a desire to keep Constance from exerting influence over Arthur should her son’s claim come to fruition. Indeed, Eleanor and Constance discuss Arthur’s claim to the throne in more detail, and with more vehemence, than Arthur does himself. Their discussions about Arthur—with one another and separately—are not based around politics or diplomacy so much as their personal relationships with him. Arthur’s mother and grandmother each attempt to ‘claim’ him by insisting on their (superior) familial relationships. Eleanor attempts to counsel her grandson against his mother who she says ‘makes [him] wings / To soar with peril after Icarus’ (1.2.108-109), admonishing against emulating a youth whose ambition and pride will bring about his own ruin.³² Each woman seeks the guardianship of Arthur, to guide his political pursuits. In the *Troublesome Reign*, the characters we see closest to the

³² The choice of image is apt for warning against over-reaching, but it is worth noting that Icarus’s fall was caused by the fact that he ignored his father’s advice about flying too close to the sun. Here, Eleanor is advising Arthur to ignore his mother’s advice, which could be seen as conflicting with the moral of the classical tale. Alternatively, Eleanor could be positing her advice to Arthur as safer and more sensible, thus claiming her identity as the better parental figure for her grandson.

would-be king are Eleanor and Constance. These interactions draw attention to Arthur's comparative youthfulness, as well as to the importance of appropriate guidance and education and especially how women can provide such guidance and thereby grow their own power.³³

It is perhaps a little surprising that Eleanor and Constance are so closely involved with helping to guide a political campaign of national and international significance. However, their attempts to educate Arthur are very much in keeping with the roles of women in medieval (and early modern) domestic life: Pamela Sheingorn discusses the importance of 'the mother's role as her children's first teacher', while D. H. Green and others have commented on the mother's involvement in teaching her children to read.³⁴ Michael Clanchy says that '[t]here is better evidence for mothers teaching in the latter half of the period [400-1400], notably in the fifteenth century, although it is probable that they had always been involved'.³⁵ Mothers in early modern England—when history plays were being penned and performed, of course—were similarly involved in the education of their children. According to Jennifer Heller, mothers 'generally assumed the primary responsibility for raising and educating young children' including the 'duty of teaching their children to read, thereby laying one of the cornerstones of later learning'.³⁶ Mary Beth Rose writes that '[h]istorians and literary scholars have demonstrated the ways in

³³ Though he was about sixteen years old when he died, Arthur often seems much younger in this play; this is perhaps due to the telescoping of history, which shortens of the four years during which John incarcerated Arthur.

³⁴ Pamela Sheingorn, "'The Wise Mother": The Image of St. Anne Teaching the Virgin Mary', in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 105-34 (p. 131); D. H. Green, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 94.

³⁵ Michael Clanchy, 'Did Mothers Teach their Children to Read?', in *Motherhood, Religion, and Society in Medieval Europe, 400-1400: Essays Presented to Henrietta Leyser*, ed. by Conrad Leyser and Lesley Smith (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 129-54 (p. 129).

³⁶ Jennifer Heller, *The Mother's Legacy in Early Modern England* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 45-46. Heller also cites Kenneth Charlton, who gives many examples of mothers teaching their children in his article 'Mothers as Educative Agents', *History of Education*, 23.2 (1994), 129-56.

which mothers (particularly aristocratic mothers), involved in the education, spiritual instruction, and marriages of their children, are performative in early modern culture playing crucial roles in endeavors that were construed as public'.³⁷ A notable early modern example of a mother (or mother-figure) who was closely involved in the education of the children in her charge is Katherine Parr. Though Katherine 'describes herself as an unlearned woman in two of the works she wrote', she is 'often credited with the schooling of Henry [VIII]'s children'.³⁸ Ted Booth describes her as 'an accomplished intellectual who was very interested in providing for the education of the royal children',³⁹ whilst Peter Gordon and Denis Lawton suggest that her 'educational attainments were modest', but she had an 'interest in the education of women'.⁴⁰ During her four years as Henry VIII's wife, Katherine oversaw the education of her stepchildren, Prince Edward and Princesses Mary and Elizabeth, seeking to ensure that the princesses' education was encouraged and their tuition as thorough as their brother's. Indeed, Mary and Elizabeth both received 'a fine humanist education in foreign languages and classical texts', learning languages, literature, rhetoric, and theology.⁴¹

³⁷ Mary Beth Rose, *Plotting Motherhood in Medieval, Early Modern, and Modern Literature* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 83.

³⁸ Elizabeth Mazzola, *Learning and Literary in Female Hands, 1520-1698* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 31, p. 30.

³⁹ Ted Booth, *A Body Politic to Govern: The Political Humanism of Elizabeth I* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), p. 10.

⁴⁰ Peter Gordon and Denis Lawton, *Royal Education: Past, Present and Future*, revised and enlarged second edition (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2003), p. 39.

⁴¹ See Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power*, 2nd edn (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 8. A great deal of useful scholarship has discussed the education of Henry VIII's royal children. See, for example: Aysha Pollnitz, 'Christian Women or Sovereign Queens? The Schooling of Mary and Elizabeth', in *Tudor Queenship*, ed. by Anna Whitelock and Alice Hunt (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 127-44; Pollnitz, *Princely Education in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); David Starkey, *Elizabeth: Apprenticeship* (London: Vintage, 2001); Cristina Vallaro, 'Elizabeth I as Poet: Some Notes on "On Monsieur's Departure" and John Dowland's "Now O Now I Needs Must Part"', in *Elizabeth I in Writing: Language, Power and Representation in Early Modern England*, ed. by Donatella Montini and Iolanda Plescia (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p.110.

Though we do not see Eleanor nor Constance ‘educating’ Arthur in any such skills of literacy explicitly in this play, both strive to educate him through counsel and guidance. Elizabeth I frequently attempted this sort of advice for her godson by proxy and eventual successor, James VI of Scotland (later James I of England), the son of her cousin, Mary, Queen of Scots. Elizabeth and James were in regular correspondence over the course of many years, broaching an array of topics such as ‘the nature of kingship, the source of political power and the moral and legal justifications of secular authority’.⁴² Rayne Allinson argues that their letters to one another reveal an ‘intellectual candour’, but Elizabeth’s letters to James were nonetheless ‘peppered with advice and admonitions on foreign policy, rebellious nobility and political ethics’ and so ‘reveal her careful, experienced and strategic style of rule’.⁴³ Elizabeth’s epistolary advice reminds James of her extensive, practical rulership experience, and is often packaged to her ‘good brother and cousin’ from his ‘affectionate sister and cousin’.⁴⁴ Whether this is perfunctory courtesy or crafted political strategy, Elizabeth’s letters about statecraft and politics are very much framed by a personal, familial relationship, or at least by the performance of such a relationship.

Again, we can make a link between the history play and its Elizabethan context. As I have been discussing, one of the ways that Eleanor and Constance each seek to guide Arthur and gain his trust is through their frequent insistence on their close maternal relationship to him, and particularly when the three characters are onstage together in Part One, scene two. But not only do the two mother-figures

⁴² Rayne Allinson, ‘Conversations on kingship: the letters of Queen Elizabeth I and King James VI’, in *The Rituals and Rhetoric of Queenship: Medieval to Early Modern*, ed. by Liz Oakley-Brown and Louise J. Wilkinson (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), pp. 131-44 (p. 132).

⁴³ Allinson, ‘Conversations on kingship’, p. 132; p. 131.

⁴⁴ See Elizabeth’s letters to James in *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. by Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

themselves reiterate their maternal identities in relation to Arthur as well as John, so too do other characters of the play. John refers to Arthur as ‘Lady Constance’ son’ (1.2.87), while Chatillon twice refers to Eleanor as John’s ‘Mother-Queen’ (1.2.55; 1.2.72). Motherhood, then, is not simply a personal identity but a political tool actively weaponised by mothers, and both of these functions of motherhood are familiar and easily recognised by other characters in the play.

Troublesome Reign’s foregrounding of motherhood as a dominant personal and political identity also plays out in the case of Margaret, Lady Falconbridge and her sons, Philip (the Bastard) and the younger Robert Falconbridge. A dispute is brought before the king because Robert claims he should inherit his father’s lands and fortunes as Philip is ‘[b]ase born and base begot – no Falconbridge’ (1.1.124). Robert says that his brother is a bastard son of King Richard I, Eleanor’s second surviving son and John’s elder brother. Eleanor’s first response to Robert’s claims is to draw attention to the effect they will have on his mother:

Ungracious youth, to rip thy mother’s shame –
The womb from whence thou didst thy being take!
All honest ears abhor thy wickedness.
But gold, I see, doth beat down nature’s law. (1.1.135-38)

Eleanor says that Robert’s behaviour in bringing his accusation into the court’s public sphere is ‘ungracious’ and ‘wicked’: he has ‘shamed’ his mother by ‘ripping’ open her sexual transgression for the court to see. Eleanor identifies personal greed as his motivation, allowing this to overcome the natural order whereby a son owes respect to his mother. The message is fairly simple, but the language draws attention to the maternal body in a deeply visceral manner. Lady Falconbridge’s shame is violently exposed, but Peele’s juxtaposition of this ‘shame’ with ‘the womb’ suggests that the womb too is something being metaphorically ‘ripped’ here, ‘beat[en] down’ by a son’s avarice. Lady Falconbridge extends the imagery of a body being violently

wounded by public accusation as she discusses her tears, ‘scalding sighs blown from a rented heart’, the ‘poisoned words / [That d]oth macerate the bowels of [her] soul’ (1.1.140-41; 1.1.145-46). Lady Falconbridge’s words here invite us to imagine the intangible soul as having corporeal form that is being ‘macerated’, broken down by the cruelty of her son’s public claim, which illustrates the depth of her hurt and shame.

But with bowels and womb being conflated so closely, we can read something of the maternal abject here. David Stehling discusses the etymological relationship between the Latin words for parts of the abdomen. He notes that ‘[u]ntil the sixteenth century *womb* could also mean “[t]he bowels, the intestines”.’⁴⁵ There is a certain ‘slipperiness’ to the womb here, etymologically and physically.⁴⁶ It challenges boundaries in a manner reminiscent of Kristeva’s abject. Literally meaning ‘throwing off’, the abject is that which exemplifies the ‘ambiguous opposition I/Other, Inside/Outside’.⁴⁷ It thus produces horror in those it confronts, and so must be ‘expel[led]’ in order to fortify the boundaries of the self.⁴⁸ The mother is the figure that most challenges the I/Other and Inside/Outside distinction; she is the source of life, previously part of a shared physical form. In this moment of trial, Lady Falconbridge draws attention to the relationship between her public image, her physical body, and her soul. Perhaps Robert is attempting to ‘expel’ the abject, to

⁴⁵ David Stehling, *Semantic Change in the Early Modern English Period: Latin Influences on the English Language* (Hamburg: Anchor Academic Publishing, 2013), p. 53.

⁴⁶ Zubin Mistry discusses the etymology of the word ‘womb’ in the Middle Ages, and also makes the analogy of the womb being slippery in both physical and linguistic form. See ‘The Womb of the Church: Uterine Expulsion in the Early Middle Ages’, in *Cultural Constructions of the Uterus in Pre-modern Societies, Past and Present*, ed. by M. Erica Couto-Ferreira and Lorenzo Verderame (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018), pp. 155-73 (p. 155). Potter notes how ‘two contrasting concepts of the womb—either chaste treasure and the promise of healthy motherhood, or filthy dross and the threat of damnation—became particularly prominent in early modern England as the medical profession championed the womb for their own field of expertise and the reformed church increasingly represented it as the devil’s domain’. See *The Unruly Womb in Early Modern Drama*, p. 15.

⁴⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 7.

⁴⁸ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 3.

‘cross [...] over the horrors of maternal bowels’.⁴⁹ He confronts the maternal abject by acknowledging his mother’s sexual body, the body of his mother as adulteress, and then he publicly separates himself from her to claim a new identity as his *father’s* illegitimate son.

Judging the Falconbridge dispute—and so Robert’s mother’s guiltiness of adultery—is not solely the office of the king here, as Eleanor actively critiques, comments on, and ultimately reaches a conclusion on the subject. Where she first notes Philip’s mother’s shame, on hearing Robert articulate his belief that Philip is Richard I’s bastard, she insists to Philip that he ‘needst not be / Ashamèd of thy kin, nor thy sire’ (1.1.158-159) as she requests Robert’s proof. She refutes his first point—that his mother gave birth ‘six weeks before her time’ (1.1.187)—with womanly and maternal authority. She questions Robert, offers counterpoints to his suggestions, and ultimately reaches a judgement when she concludes that Lady Falconbridge ‘lay with Sir Robert [...] and thought upon King Richard [...] and so [Philip] was formed in this fashion’ (1.1.204-206). Eleanor draws attention to Robert’s youth and maleness as she sardonically calls him ‘good Sir Squire’ (1.1.188), before noting his essential inexperience with maternal matters by challenging how he can ‘make account of women’s reckonings’ (1.1.189). This quotation suggests the possibility of an alternative knowledge structure that is the domain of women. But when John agrees that Philip resembles Richard I, Eleanor too seems to recognise the likeness even as she offers a rationale for it: that perhaps his mother was simply thinking of Richard when she conceived Philip with her husband. It is after Philip’s ‘dream’ or vision in which he accepts that he is ‘son unto a king’ (1.1.251) and is unable to make himself fulfill his plan to ‘[s]ay I am son unto a Falconbridge’ (1.1.277) that Eleanor’s

⁴⁹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 3; p. 53.

apparent open-mindedness to the potential of Philip's familial relationship becomes more overtly affectionate. She accepts him as her grandson and calls herself his 'grandam', claiming to take charge of improving his future as a part of her family as she claims him as her 'son' (1.1.297-300).

In *Troublesome Reign*, Peele explores how royal women can derive power and influence from their maternal identities. Eleanor's status as John's mother is foregrounded from the play's outset: she uses her voice to command attention and respect whilst simultaneously emphasising the role her physical body—her womb—has in generating or supporting men's power. The emphasis on Eleanor's motherhood continues throughout Peele's play, as the character often appeals to familial bonds to influence men in a way that perhaps becomes more self-consciously manipulative in Shakespeare's *King John*.

PART TWO: QUEENSHIP IN *THE LIFE AND DEATH OF KING JOHN*

The Life and Death of King John is Shakespeare's dramatisation of a king whose reign has often been seen as defined by financial and religious tensions and insular and international strife. Shakespeare used Peele's 1589 *The Troublesome Reign of King John* as one of his primary sources for *King John*, a play that was probably written c. 1596.⁵⁰ Indeed, *Troublesome Reign* is frequently studied only as a source against which to compare Shakespeare's dramatisation of the same king's reign. Peele's play does not often garner critical discussion in its own right, instead being '[v]iewed simply as the crude prelude to Shakespeare's greater play or even as its inferior derivative'.⁵¹ It is for this reason that I do not focus solely on comparing and contrasting these two plays; though there will be some discussion of their similarities and differences, it is with the aim of using these changes as a way of opening up discussion about how these two plays use female voices to negotiate discourses of history and female rule.

King John does not attempt to include all details about John's reign—indeed, both *King John* and *Troublesome Reign* omit some of what we might think of as the more famous aspects of John's reign, such as the Magna Carta and the First Barons' War—and has a plot that is neither wholly linear, unified, nor complete.⁵²

⁵⁰ Shakespeare, *The Life and Death of King John* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, pp. 1053-1120. Further references will be to this edition unless otherwise stated, and act, scene, and line references will be given parenthetically throughout the body of the thesis. I will henceforth refer to this play as *King John*.

⁵¹ Charles R. Forker, 'Introduction', in *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England*, ed. by Forker (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 1-104 (p. 55).

⁵² Deborah T. Curren-Aquino details some of the criticisms levelled at *King John* as a dramatic work, from its lack of 'governing central theme' to its 'inconsistency of style'. 'Introduction: *King John* Resurgent', in *King John: New Perspectives*, ed. by Curren-Aquino (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 1989), pp. 11-26 (p. 11). Andrew Hadfield calls *King John* 'an inconclusive play' that '[i]n many ways [...] looks forward to the experimental works of Shakespeare's last phase'.

Shakespeare's full title, *The Life and Death of King John*, suggests a more straightforward history play, a linear dramatisation of this king's reign. The play does not fulfill its suggestion, offering only select details from John's reign seemingly without a clear, overarching rationale for doing so and so denying a sense of cohesion in the play (perhaps, itself, a comment on John's reign). Neither does the title suggest judgement of its titular character and the quality of his reign, perhaps adding to the indefinability of its plot, logic, and motivations. Walter Cohen characterises *King John* as a play shaped by its 'skeptical view of traditional authority – ecclesiastical and secular alike' and its 'relative inattention to John himself'.⁵³ Cohen argues that there is thus a 'vacuum' in the play that is 'filled by women and a bastard, personages generally peripheral to dynastic history.'⁵⁴ '[W]omen and fools, break off your conference', King Philip of France says as he interrupts parallel arguments, between Queen Eleanor and Constance, and between Austria and Philip the Bastard with Blanche (*KJ*, 2.1.150). The French king effectively draws attention to the fact that these 'women and fools' are seizing rhetorical space and making their voices heard because they do have important things to say. Indeed, *King John* participates in the history plays' convention of going beyond simply telling the history of the men that often give the plays their titles, by also giving dramatic space and voices to the female figures of history and allowing them to challenge dominant masculine discourse and narratives.

Cohen's claim that '[n]owhere in Shakespeare's two historical tetralogies do women play so active a role' as they do in *King John* rightly recognises the importance and influence of female characters in this play. However, in emphasising

'Shakespeare's Tragedy and English History', in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. by Michael Neill and David Schalkwyk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 218-32 (p. 230).

⁵³ Walter Cohen, 'Introduction to *King John*', in *The Norton Shakespeare*, pp. 1045-52 (p. 1047).

⁵⁴ Cohen, 'Introduction to *King John*', p. 1047.

female presence in *King John*, Cohen neglects the proliferation of active and politically influential female characters elsewhere in Shakespeare's history plays, and in the first tetralogy in particular. Further, the two female characters to whom Cohen primarily refers in his introduction (Queen Eleanor and Constance) both disappear from the play before Act Four, and both have their offstage deaths briefly reported onstage. But nonetheless, the characters of Eleanor and Constance are allowed to go 'beyond the common female role—victim of history—these women attempt to direct the action' as they 'rhetorically dominate the stage', particularly in the first half of the play.⁵⁵ In this section on *King John*, I discuss the depiction of queenly motherhood, arguing that, despite the fact that Shakespeare splits his emphasis across a larger number of thematic concerns than Peele and so does not offer such a decisive focus on motherhood, Queen Eleanor's strongest identity derives from her motherhood. Indeed, motherhood is presented as a defining quality in both the queen mother and would-be queen mother, Constance.⁵⁶

Maternal Identities

In *King John*, Eleanor's interpersonal, socially relative identity—as queen, but more directly as the queen mother—is suggested to be more important than her personal identity as 'Eleanor'. While historical knowledge would allow the contemporary audience to know (or at least to infer) who the Queen in *King John* is, Eleanor is 'not addressed by her Christian name on stage'.⁵⁷ The stage directions refer to her as 'Queene Elinor', 'Eleanor', and 'Queene'. This lack of specificity is in contrast to *Troublesome Reign*, where she calls herself Eleanor (1.1.19), insists on her continued

⁵⁵ Cohen, 'Introduction to *King John*', p. 1047.

⁵⁶ As detailed at the start of this chapter, my primary focus will be on Queen Eleanor.

⁵⁷ Alison Findlay, *Women in Shakespeare: A Dictionary* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 122.

queenly identity in her opening speech, and John calls her ‘Mother-Queen’; in *King John*, John does not conflate Eleanor’s maternal and royal identities and instead calls her ‘mother’ once (1.1.6) and refers to her as ‘mother’ to other characters four more times throughout the play, the latter two in response to reports of her death (3.2.6; 3.3.5; 4.2.127; 4.2.182). There is a further lack of specificity in the mirroring of Eleanor and Constance throughout the play to the point where their offstage deaths are reported within two lines and three days of one another: Eleanor’s ‘first of April’ death is reported at 4.2.120-21, and the messenger says that Constance ‘in a frenzy died / Three days before’ at 4.2.122-23. As Carole Levin argues, ‘[j]ust as Eleanor and Constance balanced each other as opposing forces in life, so, too, do they in death’.⁵⁸ But even as the two characters are constantly opposed to one another, they still share similar maternal and royal identities: they both have influence over their sons and are able to rally support from other parties for their sons’ claim. The result is an alignment of two powerful female characters, a dramatic mirroring that not only emphasises their mutual antagonism but their shared identity as mothers of contenders for the English throne.

Despite female characters having the opportunity to speak themselves into history, the opening of Shakespeare’s *King John* differs from his source by relocating the opening lines onto the titular character. Where *Troublesome Reign* allows Eleanor to begin the play with eight lines which emphasise her own power and importance, *King John* begins with John’s direct question: ‘Now say, Châtillon, what would France with us?’ (1.1.1). He is direct and purposeful, telling his ‘good mother’ to be silent and ‘hear the embassy’ in full (1.1.6). Shakespeare thus reorients our focus: Eleanor is not asserting her own centrality in the court and the preservation of the

⁵⁸ Levin, “‘I Trust I May Not Trust Thee’”: Queens and Royal Women’s Visions of the World in *King John*, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Shakespeare’s Queens*, pp. 55-68 (p. 65).

wellbeing of England, nor is John deferring to, or presented as being dependent on or even particularly fond of, his mother. Instead, Eleanor's first lines in this play are to question the 'strange beginning' (1.1.5) of the meeting, the turn of phrase itself perhaps a metatheatrical nod to Shakespeare's departure from his dramatic antecedent. She queries Châtillon's referral to John's 'borrowed majesty' (1.1.4; 1.1.5), but we cannot infer whether she is offended or confused. Regardless, the question makes Eleanor's voice much less certain and forceful at the outset of *King John* than it is in *Troublesome Reign*.

Indeed, after John tells her to be quiet, Eleanor does not speak again for another 25 lines, and when she does, it is not to the whole court and the '[b]arons of England, and [her] noble lords' (*TR*, 1.1.1); though there are other characters onstage, she seems to speak to John directly. The result, in the opening moments of *King John*, is a less (politically) respected Queen Mother, but one who seems immediately more tactful and careful. Her role in providing and preserving the monarchic line is not foregrounded, nor does John invite her opinions. Unlike in *Troublesome Reign*, *King John*'s Eleanor does not follow John's reply—that he will not surrender his lands and title to his nephew, Arthur, but rather have 'war for war and blood for blood' (*KJ*, 1.1.19)—with her own interjection to Châtillon. Instead of publicly emphasising that she is Arthur's grandmother and inviting him into her care, Eleanor speaks privately to John in an aside, expressing her opinion that 'ambitious Constance' (1.1.32) is pushing Arthur's claim to the English throne. She tells John that this newly-articulated conflict 'might have been prevented and made whole / With very easy arguments of love' (1.1.35-36), revealing a strategic mind that acknowledges the politically beneficial aspects of familial relationships. Nonetheless, Eleanor's suggestion remains hypothetical: it is too late to make 'arguments of love' as war has

already been declared. We also know that she strives to make such friendly or familial ‘arguments’ in *Troublesome Reign*, and that her attempts to nurture a maternal relationship with her grandson are ultimately ineffectual as she descends into bitter rivalry with his mother, Constance. In Shakespeare’s play, the emphasis is more on her status as John’s mother than her attempts to utilise a grandmotherly identity.

Indeed, the first words she speaks directly to John—‘[w]hat now, my son!’ (1.1.31)—emphasise their relationship, as does the fact that their conversation is (or appears to be) private despite the abundance of characters on stage with them.⁵⁹ But the content of their conversation also evokes a certain sense of secrecy. Eleanor expresses her regret that England and France will go to war rather than resolve the dispute diplomatically; John says his ‘strong possession’ and ‘right’ are on his side (1.1.39). Eleanor’s response articulates a doubt about the strength of her youngest son’s claim that is not present in *Troublesome Reign*:

Your strong possession much more than your right,
Or else it must go wrong with you and me:
So much my conscience whispers in your ear,
Which none but heaven and you and I shall hear. (1.1.40-43)

It is John’s personal and political possession of the throne, she says, that must keep them safe and in power; his ‘right’ is much less compelling by contextual late Elizabethan standards of primogeniture. Eleanor shares her ‘conscience’ with John—her knowledge that John’s claim could be perceived as ‘inferior’ to Arthur’s—and effectively pledges her support for him with her silence on the matter.

Eleanor is also figured *as* John’s conscience here, privately whispering in her son’s ear and influencing his decisions. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that much of

⁵⁹ The First Folio does not include any stage directions to specify that their conversation is an aside. The *Norton* edition states that Eleanor speaks [*aside to KING JOHN*] at line 39, when she encourages John to carefully consider the strength of his claim against Arthur’s, and after her suggestion of making ‘arguments of love’. However, the direct question to John, and the fact that their dialogue comes after the exit of Châtillon and Pembroke, suggests that the whole exchange is an aside. Eleanor’s lines at 1.1.40-43 are certainly spoken in an aside.

Eleanor's influence over John (as well as her action) happens offstage. When Châtillon announces to King Philip that John and his army are marching on Angers, he tells the French King that with John has come 'the Mother-Queen, / An Ate stirring him to blood and strife' (2.1.62-63). The reference is to the Greek goddess who brings 'destruction, discord, folly, and delusion to humans'.⁶⁰ Shakespeare's Châtillon fashions Eleanor as a violent, vengeful force in John's court. At first, this accusation seems jarring and unfair, perhaps motivated by an ageist and misogynist gaze on the continued political involvement of the older queen mother. But Eleanor does have a forceful presence from the play's beginning, where she has twenty-nine of Act One, scene one's 276 lines. Thirteen of these are the already-discussed lines that she speaks either before or as a response to Châtillon's message at the beginning of the play, and I have argued that twelve of these are directed privately to John. The other sixteen are in response to the Falconbridge dispute, which takes place after Châtillon's exit from the scene. By having Châtillon refer to the 'Mother-Queen' as an 'Ate', Shakespeare helps to establish Eleanor's reputation for ruthlessness whilst also showing that other characters recognise the behind-the-scenes influence she has on John and in court.

Indeed, that Eleanor is trusted to act on John's behalf is shown when she is placed in charge of English territory, possessions, and (presumably) soldiers in France. When John says to his mother '[s]o shall it be; your grace shall stay behind [in France]' (3.3.1), it is not clear whether he is instructing her or agreeing to a (her?) suggestion. Nonetheless, that she is given authority in France demonstrates that she is trusted and competent. Despite the fact that Shakespeare does not stage her martial, political activity in France, and though her last appearance in the play is in this scene, Eleanor's political capability is implied: when a Messenger reports that a French army

⁶⁰ Marguerite A. Tassi, *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare: Gender, Genre, and Ethics* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2011), p. 35. Here, Tassi also discusses other instances where Shakespeare references Ate in his plays.

is advancing, John asks '[w]here is my mother's ear, / That such an army could be drawn in France, / And she not hear of it?' (4.2.117-119). The Messenger reports that Eleanor has died (as has Constance, in another instance of the two characters being paralleled), eliciting John's exclamation:

What, Mother dead?
How wildly then walks my estate in France! (4.2.127-128)

John moves quickly from his mother's death to the consequence it will have on his 'estate in France', which demonstrates his dependence on Eleanor as both his mother and protector of English lands in France. As Shakespeare enlarges the focus on Anglo-Roman (and therefore Anglo-French) tensions, Eleanor is figured as a 'soldier' (which she calls herself in 1.1.150) and as a sort of general who inspires people to 'follow [her]' (1.1.148) in a manner reminiscent of Queen Margaret in his earlier *Henry VI* plays and of Elizabeth I herself.⁶¹

While we only hear about her role as John's regent in France, we see her political influence onstage in the scene at Angers in Act Two, scene one. After the citizens' suggestion that John's niece, Blanche, marry Louis the French Dauphin, Eleanor advises John (in an aside, according to the *Norton's* stage directions) to 'make this match' because it will 'so surely tie / [His] now unsured assurance to the crown' before Arthur 'bloom[s]' into a 'mighty fruit' (2.1.469-474). She demonstrates her awareness of international diplomatic relations, and a pertinent ability to both listen to the citizens' counsel and offer her own counsel to her son the king. There is less emphasis on her motherhood here than in *Troublesome Reign*, where Peele's Eleanor says to John: 'follow this motion, as thou lovest thy mother. / [...] yield to anything' (*TR*, 1.4.99-100). In both instances, John follows his mother's advice, but

⁶¹ I discuss both Margaret and Elizabeth I as 'generals' in Chapter Three. Eleanor successfully implores that Philip 'forsake [his] fortune, / Bequeath [his] land to [his] brother, and follow me' because 'I am a soldier and now bound to France' (1.1.148-150). Unusually, here she does not insist on a grandmotherly relationship, but one based on loyalty to her (rather than to the king).

where *Troublesome Reign*'s Eleanor rhetorically urges John to agree to the union of Blanche and Louis on the basis of his love for her, *King John*'s Eleanor is more strategic in her advice as she outlines the political expedience of John's agreement to the union.

The emphasis on Eleanor's strategy more than (or at least alongside) her maternal identity runs throughout *King John*. There is little insistence on Eleanor's maternal relationship with Arthur in either the dialogue or action of the play's early scenes. In the scene at Angers, Eleanor accuses Constance of over-arching ambition: she says Constance wants her son to be 'king / That [she] mayst be queen and check the world' (2.1.122-23).⁶² But Eleanor goes further than locating the motivation for pursuing Arthur's claim in Constance's desire for power; she also accuses Constance of adultery and says that Arthur is a 'bastard' (2.1.122). In striving to introduce doubt about Arthur's legitimacy before attempting to draw him into her custody, Shakespeare's Eleanor implicitly acknowledges that 'claiming' Arthur as her grandson will not itself eradicate the threat he poses. When she says to Arthur '[c]ome to thy grandam, child' less than forty lines after she names him a bastard (2.1.159), it is not straightforward self-contradiction but an attempt to uphold John's claim. Here, she both delegitimises Arthur and then 'claims' him as her family in order to neutralise his potential to stir powerful support and political upheaval.

We see Eleanor interact with Arthur directly only once in the play, but we do not hear their interaction. In Act Three, scene three, Arthur is captured, assured by John that he should 'look not sad; / Thy grandam loves thee' (3.3.2-3), and then taken aside by Eleanor as John speaks separately with Hubert. 'Come hither, little kinsman. Hark, a word', Eleanor says, and this is all we hear of the interaction (3.3.18). The

⁶² Levin argues that this statement 'could with even more truth be made about Eleanor herself', though I suggest that, despite much critical opinion to the contrary, Eleanor does not actually explicitly demonstrate a desire for personal power. See Levin, "I Trust I May Not Trust Thee", p. 60.

focus is once again on secrecy between the queen mother and one of her close male descendants, a parallel which echoes the play's early interaction between Eleanor and John and draws our attention to the covert, subtle nature of Eleanor's maternal-political manoeuvrings. In the early lines of this scene, Eleanor's status as Arthur's grandmother and the pair's familial relationship is mentioned twice, and contributes to a sense of horror if we follow the interpretation that Eleanor is distracting Arthur to give John the opportunity to issue the order for her grandson's execution. If we do accept this interpretation—as many critics and performances of the play do—then this is a significant overhaul to how Eleanor is represented in *Troublesome Reign*, as Shakespeare's Eleanor manipulates her grandson for an amoral, almost unfeeling purpose. But again, this is a matter of interpretation and conjecture; Eleanor's negative reputation as a 'canker'd grandam' (2.1.194) does not really play out in *King John*. Indeed, we hardly see her speak to anyone onstage except John (mostly in asides) and Constance (mostly in insults). There is the sense that the speech we do hear from Eleanor is concentrated in its targets, and that her offstage, unstaged voice—that is in a sense silent—is also persuasive, effective, and resonant.

Constance's voice, on the other hand, is heard onstage more forcefully and frequently in Shakespeare's dramatisation of John's reign. The 93 lines she has in *Troublesome Reign* increases to 265 lines in *King John*, giving her more to say than any other character except Philip the Bastard and John himself. She has more than 200 lines more than Eleanor (whose 123 lines in *Troublesome Reign* is decreased to just 55 by Shakespeare); it is not the queen mother who speaks the most in Shakespeare, but the would-be queen mother. Indeed, Constance is often allowed to speak in defence of her son's claim to both the audience and the influential (male) characters who have the power to support and pursue Arthur's cause. Constance is

unapologetically vociferous and challenging: Philip knows she must not be present when Blanche and Louis's union is agreed because she 'would have interrupted much' (2.1.543); John wishes to 'satisfy her so / That we shall stop her exclamation' (2.1.559); and she trades insults with Eleanor 'until the men refuse to listen anymore'.⁶³ But she is both unwavering and logical in supporting Arthur's (superior, by Elizabethan legal standards) claim to the throne, and this support is not located solely in her own ambition. There is also a greater emphasis in *King John* than in *Troublesome Reign* not just on the fact of Constance's motherhood, but on the personal relationship she has with her son.

As in *Troublesome Reign*, Shakespeare devotes a significant portion of *King John*'s first scene to the inheritance dispute between Robert Falconbridge and his illegitimate brother, Philip: both plays give around 84 percent of their first scene's lines to the introduction and resolution of the quarrel about whether Philip is 'old Sir Robert's' legitimate son or the bastard of Richard I (*KJ*, 1.1.82).⁶⁴ Where Peele devotes more space to the conversation about identity and legitimacy that takes place between Philip and his mother (*TR*, 1.1.319-425), Shakespeare foregrounds the voice and characterisation of Philip. Nonetheless, both plays confront the anxiety caused by the fact that a mother has the almost exclusive power to know whether or not her children are legitimate. In *Troublesome Reign*, we see John call Robert's 'proofs [...] frivolous' and instructs the Earl of Essex to 'first ask the mother thrice who was his sire' (*TR*, 1.1.210; 1.1.225); by first turning to the mother, John (and Peele) gives weight to a woman's word whilst also again emphasising that it is only this word that can speak to a child's paternity.

Shakespeare's Philip also acknowledges this uncertainty about one's

⁶³ Levin, "I Trust I May Not Trust Thee", p. 60.

⁶⁴ In *Troublesome Reign*, 357 of the first scene's 425 lines focus on the Falconbridge dispute, whilst 232 of 276 lines in the first scene of Shakespeare's *King John* are concerned with this matter.

parentage immediately following the brothers' introductions in *King John*. When John supposes that the brothers came 'not of one mother' to explain why Robert claims himself to be the heir (1.1.58), Philip replies:

Most certain of one mother, mighty King—
That is well known—and, as I think, one father.
But for the certain knowledge of that truth
I put you o'er to heaven, and to my mother,
Of that I doubt as all men's children may. (1.1.59-63)

Only 'heaven' and his mother, Philip says, may have 'certain knowledge' of the paternity of a child. Philip's doubt is explicit here and throughout the scene: he says 'I suppose' (1.1.52), 'I think' (1.1.60), 'I doubt' (1.1.63), and 'whe'er I be as true begot or no, / That still I lay upon my mother's head' (1.1.75-76). Though it is he who loses his Falconbridge identity and inheritance and is called 'Bastard' in both the *dramatis personae* and speech prefixes, culpability is placed firmly onto Philip's mother for her 'transgression' (whether consensual or otherwise). Margaret, Lady Falconbridge, herself acknowledges to Philip that he is 'the issue of [her] dear offence' (1.1.257) later in the scene.

Though Philip could be seen as 'a series of discontinuous theatrical functions', he is, Cohen argues, 'obviously a positive character'.⁶⁵ Warren Chernaik discusses the contradictions in, and development of, Philip throughout *King John* to suggest that he is ultimately 'morally indistinguishable from the other characters' in the play; Janet Clare says that his character is a 'patriotic, sceptical, and sometimes emotional commentator on events'; and Jesse M. Lander and J. J. M. Tobin say that Philip is the only character with a 'glimmer' of 'the magic of royal charisma'.⁶⁶ Indeed, Shakespeare makes Philip *King John*'s most prominent character (he speaks almost

⁶⁵ Cohen, 'Introduction to *King John*', p. 1048.

⁶⁶ Warren Chernaik, *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's History Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 90. Janet Clare, *Shakespeare's Stage Traffic: Imitation, Borrowing and Competition in Renaissance Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 47. Jesse M. Lander and J. J. M. Tobin, *King John* (London and New York: Arden, 2018), p. 7.

one hundred lines more than the eponymous king) as the almost-mythical ‘lost son’ of Richard the Lionheart. In Shakespeare, there is no sense that Philip is ‘the faulty fruit’ of his mother’s indiscretion (*TR*, 1.1.385): the characters ultimately locate the transgression and shame in his mother.

However, as in *Troublesome Reign*, the characters first impugn the claim that Philip is illegitimate. Where Peele’s Eleanor criticises Robert for ‘rip[ping] [his] mother’s shame’ with his claim (*TR*, 1.1.135), Shakespeare’s iteration tells Philip that he ‘dost shame [his] mother / And wound her honour with this diffidence’ (1.1.64-65). By shifting Eleanor’s denunciation of the dispute from the son who seems overly ambitious to the son who cannot assert his legitimacy with certainty, Shakespeare again emphasises a sense of anxiety about paternal origins and heirs. But in both plays, Eleanor’s primary concern is with the dishonor this public disagreement brings upon Lady Falconbridge.⁶⁷ And in both plays, Eleanor subsequently embraces Philip as family and encourages him to be proud of his heritage. Her response to Philip in *King John* is less personal than in *Troublesome Reign*, but he is still declared to be ‘the reputed son of Cœur-de-lion’ and the ‘very spirit of Plantagenet’ (1.1.136; 1.1.167): ‘I am thy grandam, Richard’, Eleanor insists, ‘call me so’ (1.1.168). Again, Eleanor stresses her maternal identity and attempts to construct a relationship based on this identity. In both plays, then, the mature Queen Eleanor is represented as a both a shrewd politician and as a mother (and grandmother) who is willing and able to utilise her maternal identity as a means to claim and wield authority.

⁶⁷ Unusually for Shakespeare, there is no emphasis on the shame for the cuckolded husband here.

PART THREE: ROYAL WOMEN'S BODIES IN *TROUBLESOME REIGN* AND *KING JOHN*

For Queen Eleanor, the body natural and the body politic are intimately, and perhaps inextricably, linked in *The Troublesome Reign of King John* and *The Life and Death of King John*. As I have discussed, this dichotomy is foregrounded chiefly through her identity as mother to King Richard I, King John, and so the subsequent Plantagenet dynasty. Despite her age, Eleanor is not treated with a geriatric gaze and made socially and politically irrelevant, but there is little focus on her body, fertility, or sexual identity beyond her status as mother.⁶⁸ In this section on queenly bodies in *Troublesome Reign* and *King John*, therefore, I look more at two other female characters (and potential queens or queen-figures), Constance and Blanche. I first discuss the presentation of Constance's grief as related to her motherhood, before considering the younger, sexually available character of Lady Blanche of Castile, King John's niece. Reading the two plays alongside one another here allows me to move beyond the frequent critical convention of treating *Troublesome Reign* merely as a source for Shakespeare's more canonical *King John*, and to consider how each play presents royal women's bodies.

Like Eleanor, Constance's identity is similarly shaped around her motherhood. However, Shakespeare also focuses sharply on her physical body in relation to her grief when John's forces imprison her son. Indeed, the captured Arthur predicts 'this will make my mother die with grief' (3.3.5), and the audience is then allowed to see Constance's extreme, visceral grief played out onstage. As Katharine Goodland points out, Shakespeare gives Constance 168 more lines than she has in *Troublesome Reign*,

⁶⁸ Mike Hepsworth's term 'geriatric gaze' refers to a way of 'project[ing] beliefs about aging and the place of old people in society'. See *Handbook of Communication and Aging Research*, ed. by Jon F. Nussbaum and Justine Coupland (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

and ‘nearly half of these lines are added in her final scene of mourning (3.4)’.⁶⁹ Her grief in Act Three, scene four is neither violent nor inarticulate; it is performative but not inauthentic. When Pandolf says that she ‘utter[s] madness, and not sorrow’ (3.4.43), Constance replies:

I am not mad: this hair I tear is mine;
My name is Constance; I was Geoffrey’s wife;
Young Arthur is my son; and he is lost.
I am not mad; I would to God I were,
For then ‘tis like I should forget myself.
O, if I could, what grief should I forget! (3.4.45-49)

In this structured speech, Constance reasserts her own identity as Geoffrey’s wife (or widow) and Arthur’s mother. Her hair is loose in a familiar theatrical symbol of grief, and the binding and loosing of Constance’s hair as a way to symbolise the grieving process is very self-consciously discussed by the characters in this scene. David Bevington argues that Constance’s ‘binding and unbinding of her hair expresses her powerlessness’: made inert in the absence of her son and ‘at the hands of the King of France and Cardinal Pandulph’ (to use Bevington’s phrase), Constance struggles to articulate her grief through her physical body.⁷⁰ Her tearing of her hair is also self-conscious and performative; she wishes for madness to help her forget about her motherhood and captured son, even as this motherhood continues to define her as demonstrated in her last lines of the play:

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! (3.4.103-05)

Constance’s deeply affective language shows her not as a single-minded, self-serving woman of ambition who will use her son’s claim to the throne to fulfill a desire to

⁶⁹ Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama: From the Raising of Lazarus to King Lear* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), n.p.

⁷⁰ David Bevington, *Action is Eloquence: Shakespeare’s Language of Gesture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 85.

‘check the world’ (as Eleanor accuses her at 2.1.123), but as a genuinely grief-stricken mother.

Goodland argues that ‘Constance, in the extremity of her sorrow, evokes the medieval English *Mater Dolorosa*’, the Virgin Mary mourning for Christ.⁷¹ This idea suggests that there is something honorable and natural in Constance’s grief, but there is also something deeply uncomfortable about her expression of mourning for both the audience and characters onstage. When faced with a ‘distracted’ Constance ‘with her hair about her ears’, King Philip begs and then instructs her to be calm and bind up her hair on four occasions: ‘Patience, good lady; comfort, gentle Constance’ (3.4.22), ‘O fair affliction, peace!’ (3.4.37), ‘Bind up those tresses’ (3.4.61), ‘Bind up your hairs’ (3.4.68).⁷² King Philip goes on to accuse Constance of being ‘as fond of grief as of [her] child’ (3.4.92). It is in response to this accusation that Constance articulates her grief in terms that Samuel Johnson described as ‘very affecting’ in a way that understates the moving nature of her language.⁷³ ‘Grief fills the room up of my absent child’, she begins, before going on to describe how her anguish and Arthur’s absence haunts her, walks with her, ‘repeats [Arthur’s] words’, and reminds her of him at every moment (3.4.93-100). Constance then decides not to ‘keep this form upon [her] head / When there is such disorder in [her] wit’ (3.4.101-102): even when her grief is expressed eloquently and affectingly, Constance attempts to fully express her distress by writing it on her body in a visible, recognisable way.

⁷¹ Goodland, *Female Mourning and Tragedy*, n.p.

⁷² ‘Enter CONSTANCE [*distracted, with her hair about her ears*]’ reads the stage direction for Constance’s entrance in Act Three, scene four, in the *Norton Shakespeare*. The *Arden* version of the play says *Enter CONSTANCE* [, *her hair dishevelled*], in *King John*, p. 243. These stage directions are editorial; the First Folio does not contain any such explicit stage directions and instead has the customarily simpler ‘*Enter Constance*’.

⁷³ Samuel Johnson, quoted in W. K. Wimsatt, *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare* (London: Hill and Wang, 1960), p. 85.

The other female character whose identity is bound up with her physical body is Blanche. The *dramatis personae* of *Troublesome Reign* lists her as ‘Blanche, daughter of Alphonso VIII (King of Castile) and Eleanor (daughter of King Henry II of England and Queen Eleanor); niece to King John’.⁷⁴ The *Norton* edition of *King John* lists her as ‘Lady Blanche of Spain, niece of King John’, whilst the Arden edition calls her ‘Blanche of Castile, niece to King John’.⁷⁵ Forker’s edition of *Troublesome Reign* foregrounds Blanche’s lineage more strongly, but both editions of *King John* also demonstrate her close familial relationship to the titular king. In Peele’s and Shakespeare’s plays, Blanche’s identity plays an important part in the narrative as her claim to the throne is taken up by the man she marries, Louis (or Lewis, as he appears in *Troublesome Reign*) the Dauphin.⁷⁶ Despite the centrality of her claim to the plot and much of the action of both plays, Blanche actually says very little: in Peele’s play, Blanche appears in three scenes and has only 16 lines, whilst in *King John* she has 42 lines. Despite being afforded little rhetorical space and disappearing from the stage around halfway through both plays, Blanche is at first framed as the key to solving Arthur and John’s competing claims to the throne and the Anglo-French conflict these claims engender. Blanche is young, sexually viable, and of a high social status: her marriage could—and does—have great political importance.

In both *Troublesome Reign* and *King John*, Blanche’s first lines celebrate her uncle, Richard I, and the lion hide that legend said he won after pulling a lion’s heart out of its throat: ‘Ah, joy betide his soul to whom that spoil belonged. / Ah, Richard, how thy glory here is wronged!’ she exclaims in response to the verbal spat between Limoges (who supposedly killed Richard I) and Philip, Richard’s bastard son (*TR*,

⁷⁴ *Troublesome Reign*, ed. by Forker, p. 109.

⁷⁵ *The Life and Death of King John*, p. 1053. *King John*, ed. by Lander and Robin, p. 136.

⁷⁶ For the sake of clarity, I will henceforth refer to him as ‘Louis’.

1.2.131-132). In *King John*, her first lines are less of a judgement on the quarrels (between Limoges and Philip, between Arthur and John, and between Constance and Eleanor) as she simply says ‘well did he become that lion’s robe / That did disrobe the lion of that robe!’ (*KJ*, 2.1.141-42). In both cases, Blanche seems to begin by celebrating Richard I as a way of reminding the characters and the audience of the comparative unrest that has arisen after his death.

Where *King John*’s Blanche does not speak again until after her union with Louis has been proposed, *Troublesome Reign* shows Blanche’s sexual viability more explicitly by staging a flirtation between her and Philip and suggesting the possibility of their union. However, the origin of this potential relationship is shown to be somewhat artificial. When Philip vows to ‘[d]isrobe [Limoges] of the matchless monument’—Richard I’s lion hide that Limoges now wears—and not to rest until he has ‘torn that trophy from [Limoges’s] back / And split [his] heart for wearing it so long’ (1.2.154-56), Blanche’s response is curious. ‘Well may the world speak of his knightly valour / That wins this hide to wear a lady’s favour’ (1.2.163-64). Though Philip does subsequently vow to ‘present it’ to Blanche (1.2.166), his motivation for reclaiming the hide is to avenge his father and prove himself his son rather than to win a ‘lady’s favour’. Here, Blanche reinscribes a moment of a son’s masculine ambition for revenge and glory into a narrative of quasi-courtly love. Blanche’s suggestion that Philip is motivated by a desire to win her ‘favour’ is both flirtatious and performative as she adopts the role of celebrator of Richard I and potential lover of his newly recognised son.

The performance of courtship continues during Blanche and Philip’s next interaction in *Troublesome Reign*. Philip presents the lion hide to Blanche, claiming that it is the spoils of his ‘first adventure [...] / And first exploit your Grace [Blanche]

did me enjoin' (1.4.42-43). Since we saw Philip vow to reclaim his father's lion hide before his first interaction with Blanche, we know that she did not 'enjoin' him to this 'exploit' at all. She then gives him her favour in exchange for the hide, the exchange of tokens reminiscent of courtly love conventions. Both parties seem to have embraced performative roles and an almost scripted dialogue, as though they know what parts they are playing, or what genre they are in. By staging a prior relationship between Blanche and Philip and showing that there was, offstage, 'half a promise' from Eleanor that he should marry Blanche (1.4.123), Peele creates a layer of tension between the English Philip and the French Louis. Indeed, after Blanche's marriage to Louis is proposed, Philip bemoans the loss of the 'wealth' promised to him if he had married Blanche (1.4.124). But his tone is not just opportunistic; it is also passionate. In asides, Philip cries for Blanche to 'take an English gentleman' and vows to cuckold Louis, to 'front him with an English horn' (*TR*, 1.4.120; 1.4.130). He also claims to have 'thought to have moved the match': to have proposed to Blanche already and half agreed this with their mutual grandmother, Eleanor (*TR*, 1.4.121-25). Peele effectively highlights the fact that Blanche is highly desirable and valuable to both English and French (would-be) heirs. Shakespeare, on the other hand, removes the flirtation and interaction between Blanche and Philip entirely. Philip does have one aside where he decries Louis as 'so vile a lout' that his union with Blanche is a 'pity' (*KJ*, 2.1.508-10), but there is little sense of an established personal relationship between these two characters.

Nonetheless, both Peele and Shakespeare acknowledge the importance of Blanche's identity and its ability to help build peace between a warring England and France. In both plays, Philip and then a spokesperson for the citizens of Angers suggest that the two countries would do better to work together. Philip says that they

should ‘unite / And knit [their] forces’ (*TR*, 1.4.55-56) and ‘be friends a while’ (*KJ*, 2.1.379) to defeat the rebellious city of Angers. The Citizen of Angers is next given leave to speak in both plays. He suggests that the two kings indeed ‘knit’ their forces (*TR*, 1.4.70; 1.4.73), but their coalition should be ‘unto peace [...] / To live in princely league and amity’ (*TR*, 1.4.73-74). A direct solution is offered: that ‘Lewis, the Dauphin and the heir of France’ should marry ‘[t]he beauteous daughter of the King of Spain, / Niece to King John, the lovely Lady Blanche, / Begotten on his sister Eleanor’ (*TR*, 1.4.80-85). Peele’s Citizen outlines the relationship between several powerful characters, thus explaining why the match is politically expedient as well as being designed to inspire ‘love’ between the two nations. In *King John*, the suggestion of this union accompanies the thinly-veiled threat that the citizens will not yield the city if they do not agree to the match, highlighting the intrinsically political nature of the union between the French heir and the English king’s niece.

In *Troublesome Reign*, there are almost 50 lines of other characters explicating the match and agreeing to its fruitfulness before Blanche is asked ‘what answer [she] makes’ (1.4.131). It is fairly surprising that Blanche is asked her opinion at all, though perhaps this is more customary than something that will actually be taken into consideration. Indeed, the union has all but been agreed before Blanche says her second utterance of the play. Her response is equally perfunctory:

But give me leave, my lord, to pause on this
Lest, being too too forward in the cause,
It may blemish my modesty. (1.4.135.137)

Just as she performed courtship with Philip earlier in *Troublesome Reign*, Blanche performs modesty and ‘appropriate’ hesitation when faced with this proposal. It is Eleanor who directs the kings of England and France to ‘confer awhile about the dower’ and she will ‘school [her] modest niece so well / That she shall yield as soon

as you have done' (1.4.140-141). Eleanor is actively involved in advising both John and then Blanche to agree to the union, as well as with helping Blanche perform appropriate womanly modesty.

King John's Blanche voices her opinion on the union before John asks her for it (2.1.523):

My uncle's will in this respect is mine.
 If he see aught 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 should themselves be your judge,
 That I can find should merit any hate. (2.1.511-21)

In her longest sequence of lines in the play, Blanche is remarkably frank. There is no semblance of pretense or performance here: she will perform her duty as John's subject and niece by making herself malleable to his will, but she will not claim to love everything about Louis. When directly asked for her acquiescence to the match, Blanche confirms that she will do what 'she is bound in honour still to do / What [John] in wisdom shall vouchsafe to say' (2.1.523-24). Her refusal to play at love here contrasts starkly with Louis's response when John asks if he can love Blanche: 'Nay, ask me if I can refrain from love, / For I do love her most unfeignedly' (2.1.526-27). It is more likely that Louis acknowledges that it is pragmatic to 'love' Blanche, who is near kin to the English king, who could have her own claim to the English throne, and who would have a dowry, John says, that 'weigh[s] equal with a queen' (2.1.487). We know that Blanche does indeed become Queen of France through her marriage and that she later acts as regent for her son, Louis XI. In the latter parts of both *Troublesome Reign* and *King John*, too, we see Louis the Dauphin claim the throne of

England in right of Blanche's claim. Blanche's financial and political value is demonstrated here: she is valuable because of who she is, because of her political identity.

But Shakespeare also places greater emphasis on the physical form of her body when establishing the match between herself and Louis. The Citizen who speaks for Angers offers a way for the 'great Kings' to '[w]in [...] this city without stroke or wound' (*KJ*, 2.1.417-419); he directs the assembled personages to '[l]ook upon the years / Of Louis the Dauphin and that lovely maid' (2.1.425). Both characters become subjects to be gazed on, but the Citizen's following lines focus closely on Blanche with a series of rhetorical questions:

If lusty love should go in quest of beauty
Where should he find it fairer than in Blanche?
If zealous love should go in search of virtue,
Where should he find it purer than in Blanche?
If love ambitious sought a match of birth,
Whose veins bound richer blood than Lady Blanche?
Such as she is in beauty, virtue, birth,
Is the young Dauphin every way complete. (*KJ*, 2.1.427-34)

This exaggerated language, designed to aggrandise the idea of Blanche and Louis's marriage, is in direct contrast with Blanche's own direct practicality. It also serves as a form of blazon, as the Citizen lists Blanche's positive traits and suitability to 'complete', 'finish' (2.1.439), make Louis whole: she is beautiful, virtuous, and of high birth. These traits are all readable on Blanche's body and through her identity to strangers and citizens who cannot know her personally. John also contributes to the idea of Blanche's body as a readable form when he says Blanche shall have a large dowry '[i]f that the Dauphin [...] / Can in this book of beauty read 'I love'' (2.1.486-87). Blanche is a 'book of beauty', a commodity to be valued and ultimately utilised. Her body is both readable and read by the characters around her.

Blanche's marriage to Louis tears her allegiance in both *Troublesome Reign* and *King John*. When John is excommunicated and King Philip consequently breaks his coalition with the English king on the same day that Blanche and Louis are married, Blanche pleads with her new husband not to take arms against her uncle. In Peele's play, she asks Louis if he will 'upon [his] wedding day / Forsake [his] bride and follow dreadful drums?' (*TR*, 1.6.140-41). Her last spoken line of the play sees her ask Louis to 'stay [...] at home with [her]' (*TR*, 1.6.142): when Blanche is mentioned again, it is when Louis has gone to war against her uncle and garnered support as a claimant to the English throne through his marriage to her.⁷⁷ We see Louis attempt to appease his wife by saying '[s]weetheart, content thee, and we shall agree' when his father proclaims that 'France will fight for Rome and Romish rites' (*TR*, 1.6.142; 1.6.133).

Though *King John* follows the same pattern—excommunication followed by a break of allegiance and war—this iteration of Louis does not hesitate to cry 'to arms!' after Pandolf's long speech warning the company about being 'enem[ies] to faith' following John's excommunication (*KJ*, 3.1.226; 3.1.189-223). Shakespeare's Blanche articulates her resulting conflict of loyalties using overwrought language, gestures, and bodily terms. She accuses Louis of going '[a]gainst the blood that [he] hast married', of making their wedding guests 'slaughtered men' and their music 'clamours of hell' (3.1.227-30). She takes up John's cause with her husband, begging '[u]pon her knee' for him to 'go not to arms' (3.1.234). Her attempts to use her wifely identity to sway her new husband prove fruitless. As Levin writes, '[e]arlier in the play, Lewis uses the rhetoric of a lover far more than Blanche, but Blanche obviously

⁷⁷ In *Troublesome Reign*, Philip tells John that '[t]he nobles have elected Lewis king / In right of Lady Blanche, your niece, his wife' (*TR*, 2.2.75-6), articulating Blanche's identity according to her ties to powerful men. In the next scene, Pembroke asserts that 'Lewis, in challenge of his wife, / Hath title of an uncontrollèd plea / To all that 'longeth to our English Crown' (*TR*, 2.3.75-77). Blanche is valuable to Louis because of the political potential he can claim through their marriage.

takes the marriage and what it represents far more seriously than her new husband' as she suggests that his foremost loyalty should be towards his wife.⁷⁸ The result is that Blanche herself struggles to know '[w]hich is the side that [she] must go withal' (3.1.253). She says:

I am with both, each army hath a hand,
And in their rage, I having hold of both,
They whirl asunder and dismember me. (3.1.254-56)

Blanche's language here is visceral, violent. She describes the horrors of war on a personal, bodily level, personifying the army and placing herself between two opposing armies and ideologies: the union that was meant to engender peace is now metaphorically 'dismembering' her body. When she goes on to describe her familial relationships with members of both warring parties, she states that she cannot hope for either of them to win or lose: she is trapped, physically and in terms of loyalty, between two seemingly immovable sides. Ultimately, despite her youth, beauty, high birth, and the important political identity they afford her, Blanche remains inert, powerless, and used.

In *Troublesome Reign* and *King John*, the political usefulness of Blanche's sexually viable body is explored even as her voice is rendered ineffective. Constance, on the other hand, has a forceful voice, though this voice is not always heard or respected: the grief that is written on her body perhaps speaks just as loudly as the words she says. Neither play emphasises Eleanor's sexual body; instead, her maternal body is the means by which she is able to exert power and influence. But she also uses her voice to explicitly articulate the importance of her status as mother, effectively bringing together her body and voice in a way that demonstrates her authority in both plays.

⁷⁸ Levin, "I Trust I May Not Trust Thee", p. 63.

*

When John discovers his mother has died in Shakespeare's play, there is an almost comical focus on the political with very little space for the personal. Though his repetition of '[m]y mother dead!' (4.2.182) around 60 lines later suggests John is in fact lingering on her death, *Troublesome Reign's* John responds to the news with the seemingly more heartfelt lines:

Dame Eleanor, my noble mother-queen,
My only hope and comfort in distress,
Is dead, and England excommunicate. (2.2.118-120)

In both cases, Eleanor's centrality to her son's reign and therefore to England's imperial dominion is highlighted as John expresses the effect her death has on his status and security as king. Peele and Shakespeare both emphasise Eleanor's voice and astuteness, with her maturity not precluding her from national and international politics. Instead, Eleanor's age appears to be figured as a source of strength in these plays in a manner that consciously recalls the contemporary monarch: Elizabeth I, too, was a queen with a powerful voice, the capacity to act independently, and was in the stage of 'green old age' when these plays were first written and performed.

Chapter II

Queens in the Plantagenet Plays: *Edward I*, *Edward II*, *Edward III*

Late Elizabethan playwrights between them offer an almost complete catalogue of medieval monarchical history in dramatic form, from the reign of Edward I to Henry VII's victory against Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth. While the *King John* plays are the only history plays of the 1590s that dramatise the reign of an Angevin king, and while there is no surviving play about Henry III's reign after John at the start of the Plantagenet dynasty, there are plays that are about or feature the reigns of all the kings of England from 1272 (the ascension of Edward I) to 1485 (the death of Richard III).¹ The same sort of chronological completeness cannot be claimed for the queen consorts of England, as history plays sometimes conflate the identities of kings' wives into a general 'queen' character. Despite this occasional lack of personal specificity, and despite not being declared as the primary foci of individual plays, queens' voices and actions—as I argue throughout this thesis—are nonetheless strikingly prominent in the history play genre.

In this chapter, I examine three plays about three kings of the Plantagenet main line: King John's descendants Edward I, Edward II, and Edward III.² Part One of the chapter concentrates on George Peele's *Edward I* (c. 1593), Part Two on Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* (c. 1593), and Part Three on Shakespeare and Thomas Kyd's *Edward III* (c. 1595). As well as discussing the three plays and their shared concerns as a whole—particularly

¹ Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth* (c. 1613) also offers a Stuart portrayal of aspects of Henry VIII's reign. There is no surviving early modern history play about Henry VII.

² The House of Plantagenet ruled England from 1154 until the ascension of Henry Tudor in 1485. The name 'Plantagenet' was applied retroactively to this group of kings: John A. Wagner explains that 'the name Plantagenet was never used by Henry II or his successors or applied to them by their contemporaries' but was later adopted by Richard, Duke of York, in the late 1440s to signal his royal descent (See Wagner, *Encyclopedia of the Wars of the Roses* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 2006), p. 255). Nonetheless, using the name 'Plantagenet' to define the dynasty that ruled England for over 300 years is common critical and historiographical practice. The history plays with which this thesis is concerned all fall within the broad parameters of this royal house, and so it is necessary to further nuance this dynastic definition. Indeed, it is also common practice now to subdivide the House of Plantagenet's long sovereignty into four royal houses contained within the wider family group: the Angevin kings (those who originated from the French province of Anjou), the main line, and the cadet branches who fought during the Wars of the Roses (the Houses of Lancaster and York).

around insular geopolitics and inheritance—I also focus on the Plantagenet queens and queen-figures of these plays: the first wife of Edward I who features in the play of that title, Eleanor of Castile, as well as Eleanor of Provence who was Edward I’s mother and Henry III’s wife; Isabella of France, Edward II’s (in)famous queen; and finally, Philippa of Hainault who was married to Edward III. These queenly characters insist on their own authority and claim power through their words and actions. In doing so, they contribute to late Elizabethan discourses on models of queenship, in challenging and contrarian ways, at this time of independent female rule. Queens’ voices and bodies in these three plays, in particular, are used to navigate discussions around the (geo)politics of the British Isles, as the characters move across geographies and explicitly comment on the plays’ geopolitical action.

The full titles of these three plays offer progressively fewer details about their content as we move chronologically through their titular kings. *Edward I*’s full title is one of the longest in the history play genre. It contains a level of detail similar to that given in *The Troublesome Reign of King John*’s full title, but is longer than most other non-history play titles in Peele’s canon of work. The title page of the first quarto edition, printed in 1593, reads: *The Famous Chronicle of King Edward the First, surnamed Edward Longshankes, with his returne from the Holy land. Also the life of Lleuellen, rebell In Wales. Lastly, the sinking of Queen Elinor, who suncke at Charing-crosse, and rose againe at Potters-hith, now named Queene-hith*. In calling itself a ‘famous chronicle’, this play suggests a sense of historical veracity that is actually absent. Further, it draws attention to Edward’s crusading ambitions before he became king, and the subsequent war with the Welsh and the last sovereign prince of Wales, Llewelyn ap Gruffudd. Finally, it includes the strange episode of the ‘sinking’ of Edward’s wife, Eleanor, and the quasi- (and strangely, given the nature of Eleanor’s fairly negative characterisation, particularly in the latter part of the play) religious sounding ‘rising again’ of the queen. *Edward I*’s full title, then, not only gives a fair amount of plot

information, but effectively draws attention to several of its thematic concerns: Edward I's expansionist ambitions, the conquest of Wales and its 'rebel' leader, and the punishment and confession of a supposedly untruthful (or untrue) queen.

The original, full title of *Edward II* is much less detailed: it is simply *The Troublesome Reign and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second, King of England*. Marlowe's title is of average length and not overloaded with detail, but it nonetheless draws attention to the instability of the reign it dramatises: like Peele's rendering of John's reign, Edward II's reign is 'troublesome'. Marlowe also offers a judgement on Edward's death as something 'lamentable', though whether it is the nature or fact of his death (or otherwise) that makes it 'lamentable' is not specified. Though Shakespeare and Kyd's works both often have longer, more detailed titles, their collaborative play about Edward III is simply titled *The Raigne of King Edward III*. It offers no specific details, nor any value judgements on the nature of this king or his reign. The three titles each guide an audience's expectations and suggest what they should value before the first lines are delivered.

Edward I and *Edward II* were probably written around the same time, in 1593. Marlowe's play was entered in the Stationers' Register in July 1593 (a little over a month after Marlowe's death), with Peele's appearing later that year, in October. *Edward III*, meanwhile, was entered in the Stationers' Register in December 1595, with the descriptor '[a] book Intituled Edward the Third and the blacke prince their warres with kinge John of fraunce'. The Stationers' Register gives more detail than the title page of the earliest extant printed edition (published anonymously in 1596), which gives only the title discussed above.

Edward II has enjoyed the surest authorship, with the title page of the earliest extant printing of the play—an octavo from 1594—attributing the play to 'Chri. Marlowe *Gent.*'. *Edward I* does not name an author on the title page, but the 1593 quarto edition contains the *explicit*: 'Yours. By George Peele Maister of Artes in Oxenford'. However, Peele's second

history play does not follow his first, *Troublesome Reign*, in style, and is a less well-crafted piece of theatre than the earlier play. Indeed, the ‘confused and chaotic’ *Edward I* has garnered a reputation as ‘one of the crudest of the early English history plays’.³ It is stylistically inconsistent: it mixes features of the history play with those of romance ballads and folklore, is episodic, and incorporates more humour, spectacle, and elements of pageantry. Despite its contemporary popularity, *Edward I*’s lack of finesse and negative reputation has resulted in a lack of recent scholarly editions and relatively little critical interest.⁴ Nonetheless, as Ribner writes, *Edward I* ‘is not without importance in the history of English drama’, and I suggest that it is also important to the development of the English history play as a genre that establishes and defines itself in the 1590s.⁵ *Edward I* participates in—and helps to establish—many conventions of the history play, including the frequency and forcefulness with which queenly speech and agency is dramatised in the genre.

Of the three plays discussed in this chapter, *Edward III* has attracted the most colourful and contentious authorship debates. Many scholars—including Ribner, Kenneth Muir, and most editors of recent Shakespeare anthologies and publications of *Edward III*—agree that the play was probably written collaboratively. Jean E. Howard notes that the Oxford editors ‘have come to believe that [Shakespeare] wrote at least part of [*Edward III*]’, while Muir argues that Shakespeare was ‘at least intimately acquainted’ with the play.⁶ This (partial) attribution to Shakespeare becoming common critical practice and the increasing inclusion of *Edward III* into Shakespearean canon in recent years has no doubt contributed to the interest in this play. The identity of Shakespeare’s collaborator is not certain, with various contemporaries being proposed by critics at different points. Recent discussion has largely

³ Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1965), pp. 87 and 85.

⁴ As Ribner writes, ‘Henslowe records fourteen performances between August 29, 1595 and July 9, 1596’ of ‘*longshankes*’, which he says ‘can be no other than Peele’s play’. *The English History Play*, p. 86.

⁵ Ribner, *The English History Play*, p. 87.

⁶ Jean E. Howard, ‘Introduction to *The Reign of King Edward III*’, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, pp. 711-16 (p. 711). Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare as Collaborator* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005 [1960]), p. 30.

revolved around Thomas Kyd's candidacy for co-authorship, with some editors being more tentative than others in naming a joint Shakespeare/Kyd collaboration. Brian Vickers has argued on many occasions that Kyd is the primary author of *Edward III*, and has recently used trigram tests and plagiarism software technology to make the linguistic case for Kyd's authorship.⁷ This assertion and approach has not been without its controversies and opponents, most notably in the editors of and contributors to the *New Oxford Shakespeare*.⁸ Kernot, Bossomaier, and Bradbury have suggested that Kyd wrote even more of *Edward III* than had already been claimed, whilst Marina Tarlinskaja 'still hesitate[s] about the Kyd authorship'.⁹ However, whilst exploring questions about authorship can be useful for contextualising this play (and indeed, plays in general), the purpose of this thesis is not to join authorship debates. In lieu of a clear critical consensus, then, I follow most frequent and recent patterns and refer to *Edward III* as Shakespeare's and Kyd's, whilst acknowledging that definitively attributing this anonymous and seemingly collaborative play remains a difficult, debated issue.

What is more important for my work is to demonstrate what the three plays I have grouped together here—*Edward I*, *Edward II*, and *Edward III*—contribute to the history play genre and discourses about and presentation of queenship and female authority. As I have been arguing throughout, these queens' actions and voices—their 'unquietness'—interrogate the construction of history and historical narrative and contribute to late Elizabethan discourses about gender roles by exploring how a queen speaks and behaves. The three *Edwards* plays also share a particular, unique focus on Britain and the insular (geo)politics of the British Isles, and their queens contribute to this focus by commenting on and intervening

⁷ See Brian Vickers, 'The Two Authors of Edward III', *Shakespeare Survey*, 67 (2014), 108-18.

⁸ See particularly *The New Oxford Shakespeare: Authorship Companion*, ed. by Taylor and Egan. This book forcefully rebuts Vickers's approach and conclusions about *Edward III's* authorship.

⁹ David Kernot, Terry Bossomaier and Roger Bradbury, 'Did William Shakespeare and Thomas Kyd Write *Edward III*?', *International Journal on Natural Language Computing (IJNLC)*, 6.6 (2017), 1-13. Marina Tarlinskaja, *Shakespeare and the Versification of English Drama, 1561-1642* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), p. 92.

in political action. Both *John* plays move back and forth across the English Channel and spend time dramatising Anglo-French conflicts, while the Wars of the Roses plays demonstrate an insularity that zooms in specifically on England and English civil war. In the three *Edwards* plays, however, we do not only see England and France: we also see Wales and Scotland, hear about Ireland, and see and hear about the conflicts between these countries that would be conquered or integrated into a ‘Britain’ ruled by England. The first sections of each part of this chapter, then, focus on queens and countries, and examine how these plays use queens’ voices and bodies to contribute to discourses around insular politics (that is the politics pertaining to the British Isles) and English nationalism. The three Plantagenet plays dramatisise conflicts within the British Isles—between England and Scotland and between England and Wales—in ways that recall contemporary Elizabethan national and international relationships, with the queen characters presented as possible symbols of both peace and protest. There is tension between how queens’ bodies and queens’ voices are portrayed in these plays: while we often see queens’ bodies (and particularly their maternal bodies) co-opted to attempt to reify ideas of English nationalism and monarchical supremacy, we hear their voices actively trouble such ideas.

Despite this insular focus of these plays, the queen characters still unsettle narratives of English superiority because they are foreign. Most medieval queen consorts of England were from continental Europe by birth, and so they had complex identities (and potentially complex national allegiances). Indeed, all of the queens discussed in these chapter are foreign: Eleanor of Provence and Isabella of France were culturally French queens, whilst Eleanor of Castile was Spanish, and Edward III’s wife Philippa was from the county of Hainaut in the Low Countries.¹⁰ The *Edwards* plays dramatisise Anglo-French conflicts and, particularly, conflicts within the British Isles (between England and Scotland and England

¹⁰ They are ‘culturally French’ in that they are from French-speaking polities that are now in modern France. I discuss the geopolitics of French regionality, and the complex relationships queens from the French polities have when they become queen of England, later in this chapter.

and Wales). In the first ‘queens and countries’ sections of this chapter’s three parts, then, I examine the tensions and complexities that once again arise from this European ‘foreignness’, and how queens and female characters are utilised in political manoeuvring in these plays to construct, deconstruct, or challenge a sense of ‘Britishness’ or ‘Englishness’.

Though political pragmatism made it common for English kings to marry foreign queens, the latter’s national or regional identities are often shown to be somewhat ‘other’ (and ‘othering’) in English history plays. This otherness can be exacerbated when coupled with queens’ sexual identities. We see this particularly with *Edward II*’s Queen Isabella, who, as the daughter of King Philip IV of France, is depicted as both fundamentally French *and* an emasculating force as a cuckold of the king. Queens’ bodies, then, is the second thematic strand explored in each part of this chapter. I consider queens’ sexual bodies, with particular emphasis on them as either cuckolding women or women who are themselves cuckolded. *Edward III*’s Philippa, for example, is typically considered a ‘good’ queen; her husband, Edward III, however, is infatuated with the Countess of Salisbury. Philippa is presented as the ideal queen: she is beautiful, patient, a queen who fulfills her duties but rarely transgresses what is expected of a king’s wife. She intercedes effectively but she does not interfere inappropriately. Her husband’s adultery, then, seems all the more inappropriate because Philippa is one of history’s—and the history plays’—most ‘appropriate’ queens. Isabella, on the other hand, cuckolds the king and acts as a sort of barrier to his apparent homosexual desires towards his favourite. Marlowe closely aligns Isabella’s sexual transgressions with her political ones, as she attempts to depose her husband with the help of her lover as she deploys her sexuality to make political alliances and manoeuvres in a way that perhaps evokes Mary, Queen of Scots. In these plays, queens’ sexual bodies are not treated identically, but there is an enduring, common concern with how a woman’s body—a

queen's body—may be politically charged: a source of power and voice for queens, a useful political tool for men and kings, or a site of commentary and critique on the conduct of kings.

In *Edward I*, *Edward II*, and *Edward III*, queens' sexual identities, maternal bodies, and political manoeuvres are often explicitly aligned. As in the *John* plays, these plays demonstrate an interest in dramatising queens who are pregnant or already mothers, and in showing how queens use their status as mothers to influence political action. Indeed, queen mothers are often depicted holding onto their technically defunct title of 'Queen' and continuing to wield political power or to rule as queen regent, whether effectively, inappropriately, or otherwise. *Edward I*'s Queen Eleanor, for example, does not fade into obscurity once her son becomes king, while *Edward II*'s Isabella uses both her sexual body and maternal identity to claim power for herself and her son. In addition to discussing queens' (sexual) bodies, the second sections of each part of this chapter look at how motherhood and maternal identities are constructed and invoked, often alongside a sexual identity. In these sections, I continue to develop the argument that history plays' construction of royal mothers serves as an analogue for Elizabeth I's controversial childlessness and the consequent succession problem. Further, I discuss how the *Edward* plays depict queens using their status as mothers to royal sons to claim and wield political power, and how queens' voices emphasise their own authority and importance for ensuring political and dynastic stability.

PART ONE: QUEENSHIP IN *EDWARD I*

i. Queens and countries

Illustrious England, auncient seat of kings,
 Whose chiuallrie hath roiallized thy fame:
 That sounding brauely through terrestiall vaile,
 Proclaiming conquests, spoiles, and victories,
 Rings glorious Ecchoes through the farthest worlde.
 What warlike nation traird in feates of armes,
 What barbarous people, stubborne or vntaimd,
 What climate vnder the Meridian signes,
 Or frozen Zone vnder his brumall stage,
 Erst haue not quaked and trembled at the name
 Of Britaine, and hir mightie Conquerours?
 Her neighbor realmes as *Scotland, Demarke, France,*
 Aude with their deedes, and ielialous of her armes,
 Haue begd defensiuie and offensiue leagues.
 Thus *Europe* riche and mightie in her kinges,
 Hath feard braue England dreadfull in her kings:
 And now to eternize Albions Champions,
 Equiualent with Troians auncient fame,
 Comes louely *Edward* from *Ierusalem*.¹¹

So speaks ‘Helinor the Queene mother’ in some of the earliest lines of George Peele’s *Famous Chronicle of King Edwarde the first*. This is the dramatic characterisation of Eleanor of Provence, the widow of Henry III and mother of the eponymous King Edward I. Having instructed the lords who were assembled at the beginning of the play to greet their king as he returns from his crusade in the Holy Land (the Ninth Crusade of 1271-72), the ‘Queene Mother’ remains alone onstage to deliver almost 30 lines that seek to aggrandise both England and its new king.¹² As with the opening lines of Peele’s earlier English history play, *Troublesome Reign*, we have an elderly queen mother beginning this play’s action, her

¹¹ George Peele, *The Famous Chronicle of King Edwarde the first* [1593], ed. by W. W. Greg (Oxford: Malone Society Reprints, 1911), 1.16-34. All further references to this play will be to this edition unless otherwise stated, and scene and line references will be given parenthetically throughout the body of the thesis. I will henceforth refer to this play as *Edward I*.

¹² After the first stage direction giving ‘Helinor’ as her name, this character is henceforth called only ‘Queene Mother’. Given that there are three queen-figures who share the name ‘Eleanor’ in this play, I follow the in-text example and henceforth call her ‘Queen Mother’.

speech dominating its early moments as she articulates her son's conquests and character at the moment of his ascension to the English throne. The Queen Mother's speech patriotically celebrates England, its 'chivalrie', 'fame', 'conquests, spoiles, and victories'. She is given the role of introducing the titular character and his aim—the central focus of the play—to unite 'Britain'. Edward has returned from Jerusalem 'shining in glory' (1.14), and his foreign crusade will be succeeded by conflict with its closest 'neighbor realmes' (1.27). In this section, therefore, I focus on how *Edward I* depicts England's relationship with its nearest neighbours, and with Wales in particular. I argue that *Edward I*'s Queen Mother speaks to English expansionist ambitions, whilst the queen consort's Elinor's maternal body is deliberately used as a means of conquering and colonising Wales as her son is named Prince of Wales.

The Queen Mother's speech anachronistically claims that the name 'Britaine'—not 'England'—has made people and nations 'quake' and 'tremble'. Though a unified 'Britain' would be one step closer to being realised by the end of the play, when both Wales and Scotland have effectively been subjugated to English rule, no such country existed in this play's late thirteenth century setting. The Queen Mother's speech suggests a cultural depth and longevity to England by claiming it as an 'auncient seat of kings' and aligning it with ideas of ancient Britain. 'Britain' (or 'Albion') and 'England' are almost interchangeable here. In attempting to conflate England with Britain, Peele's Queen Mother authoritatively voices England's claim to rule 'Britain' in the play and, implicitly, in Peele's contemporary Elizabethan moment. As Marisa R. Cull states, the Queen Mother 're-make[s] England into a British image' and 'usurp[s] native British claims to legitimacy' by aligning England with 'Galfridian-inspired British tradition of ancient kings, and with a British legend of Trojan

descent'.¹³ Cull argues that the play's 'central narrative conceit' is 'to transfer the most admirable aspects of the Galfridian tradition to the English monarchy's hands'.¹⁴ Indeed, these early lines of Peele's play foreshadow much of its action: we see Scotland and (to a greater extent) Wales both attempt to establish their independence and insist on selecting their own rulers. And though Peele does not straightforwardly condemn these Scottish and Welsh 'rebellions' (as they are deemed to be by Edward and his English supporters), they are ultimately obstacles to a king whose reign and character are glorified throughout the play, and not just by his mother. The Queen Mother's early rewriting—or, perhaps, overwriting—of English and British identities into a new narrative of historical 'truth' exemplifies *Edward I's* preoccupation with insular politics and geopolitics. This preoccupation runs throughout all three *Edwards* plays, where queens' voices play a definitive role in both characterising and challenging such notions of a shared history of a unified Britain where England is the dominant party.

The Queen Mother plays a limited part beyond her early speeches, but her voice is the first we hear in this play about an English king whose reign is often celebrated as a success, particularly in terms of political expansion. She speaks with pride, passion, and power, and is clearly intended to be a commanding stage presence in the very first scene. However, it is Edward I's wife, Queen Elinor of Castile, who has the larger, more complex, and more confused role as the play's main female character.¹⁵ Her first lines are in response to the conversation around Edward's creation and funding for a 'colledge for [his] maimed men' (1.138). Just as he begins to 'toll the particulars', Elinor interrupts to say she hopes that Edward intends that she 'shal be a benefactor to my fellow souldiers' (1.177-179). Not

¹³ Marisa R. Cull, *Shakespeare's Princes of Wales: English Identity and the Welsh Connection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 97-98.

¹⁴ Cull, *Shakespeare's Princes of Wales*, p. 98.

¹⁵ I follow the play—and its spelling—in calling the current queen consort 'Queen Elinor', or simply Elinor. Indeed, I follow the play's spelling of character's names throughout, with any 'modernised' spelling used to distinguish between the plays' characters and the historical figures upon which they are based.

directly included in the appeals to ‘be liberall’ that are directed at Edward’s ‘lords’ (1.143), Elinor follows the Queen Mother’s example in offering her own contribution without invitation. Where the Queen Mother is the first to insist on her contribution—‘[o]ut of her dowrie, fiue thousand pounds of gold’ (1.146)—Elinor is the final benefactor. Elinor appeals to Edward’s will whilst also asserting her own with the rhetorical question-statement: ‘Why my lord I hope you meane, / I shal be a benefactor to my fellow souldiers’ (1.178-179). Here, Elinor draws attention not just to her status as Edward’s wife, but to her own independent financial means. She emphasises her dual royalty when she says she wishes to give ‘a gift worthie the king of Englandes wife, and the king of Spaines daughter’ (1.188-189). Elinor does just this as she goes on to make the largest contribution to Edward’s hospital and home for his soldiers.

Part of the motivation for this generosity, we can assume, comes from Elinor’s apparent affinity with the beneficiaries: she calls them her ‘fellow souldiers’, and again says the same of Edward later in the scene (1.239). Elinor’s claims are not merely rhetorical: she has returned from the crusade with Edward, who gives the audience the first information about his wife when he says:

Welcome sweete Queene my fellow Traueller,
 Welcome sweete *Nell* my fellow mate in armes,
 Whose eyes haue seene the slaughtered Sarazens,
 Pil’de in the ditches of Ierusalem. (1.89-92, emphasis original)

There is an emphasis on ‘fellowship’ that suggests a level of equality and mutual respect between the king and queen: Elinor is a ‘fellow’ traveller and ‘mate in armes’, a ‘fellow souldier’. However, Elinor has not just travelled to the Holy Land with her husband—as we know she did, even giving birth to their second daughter, Joan, in Acre in Palestine—but she has actively participated in battle alongside him and witnessed the horrific triumphs of his army. The Elinor of the beginning of *Edward I* is a queen consort who has been martially active and is apparently respected by her husband and ‘fellow souldiers’. Though this

celebratory portrait of Elinor does not last for the duration of the play (as I discuss further later), it nonetheless shows a queen consort who is somewhat transgressive yet not condemned for this, and a queen consort very much involved in the political-religious ambitions of her king.

As the play continues and the plot progresses, what is suggested to be Elinor's main role is more conventional for a woman and queen consort. Namely, there is an emphasis on her maternal identity and responsibility to provide an heir. When Edward and Elinor returned to England in the middle of 1274, they had two surviving sons and two surviving daughters, and would go on to have seven more children. Only one of their male heirs survived into adulthood: Edward of Caernarvon, later King Edward II, whose birth Peele dramatises in *Edward I*. Peele's emphasis is not on the production of a suitable male heir to inherit the English throne, but rather on creating a situation whereby this heir might also claim the title of Prince of Wales. As already mentioned and as discussed in more detail below, *Edward I* depicts the struggle for sovereignty between the English king and the 'last Prince of Wales', Llywelyn ap Gruffudd.¹⁶ Elinor's involvement in this insular conflict is as physical as her apparent contribution to the crusade, but in a different way: her role is not to fight, but to give birth to their son. When we see Elinor descend from her litter, 'sweat[ing]', 'faint', thirsty, and 'great with childe' in scene 6 (6.1107-1113; 6.1176), the audience realises why she has been—as she herself says—'inforst to follow' her husband into 'his ruder part of wales' (6.1115; 6.1178, *sic*). In the previous scene, Welsh soldiers agreed to be 'true liegemen vnto Edwards crowne' (5.1057) on the condition '[t]hat none be *Cambrias* prince to gouerne vs, /

¹⁶ Llywelyn ap Gruffudd is also known as Llywelyn ein Llyw Olaf, or 'Llywelyn the Last' because he was 'the last independent Welsh prince'. See John T. Koch (ed.), *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, A-Celti (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC CLIO, 2006), p. 1185. The anonymous author of the sixteenth-century *Tri Chof Ynys Brydain* ('Three Antiquities of Britain') wrote that 'there is noe History written by the Bards sythence the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffyth ap Llywelyn, the last prince of Cambria, for they had noe princes of their owne to sett foorth there acts'. See G. J. Williams, 'Tri Chof Ynys Brydain', *Llên Cymru*, 3 (1954-5), 234-39. J. Beverley Smith notes the 'sense of breach with the historical memory' that occurred after Wales had been 'thoroughly conquered by Edward I', in *Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, Prince of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998; repr. 2014), p. 589.

But he that is a Welshman borne in Wales' (5.1070-1071). Gilbert de Clare, the Earl of Gloucester, explains that Edward has indeed moved Elinor 'frō Englands pleasant courts' (6.1180) in attempts to prevent future Welsh rebellions by following their demands literally and having his son born in Wales and named Prince of Wales. Elinor has come to Wales to give birth, so that Edward can, as she explains, 'haue his sonne [...] a Welshman' (6.1187-1188). Elinor's double emphasis on Edward's possession of Wales and their unborn child (this is 'his [...] wales' and 'his son') detaches her from the Welsh aspect of her son's birth and subsequent title. Nonetheless, by the end of the scene, Elinor has gone into labour; when we see her again in scene 10, she is 'in her bed' and 'presents [Edward] with a louely boy' (10.1597; 10.1604). She fulfills her queenly responsibility by producing a male heir and—the play emphasises her 'labour' in transporting the heir to Wales—giving birth to him in the most politically apt place.¹⁷

The use of Welsh geographies and families as a way for the English to claim power and authority would have been a familiar political strategy in the play's late Elizabethan context. As Cull argues, '[l]ike the fictionalized Edward I of Peele's play, the Tudor and Stuart monarchs often manipulated the princedom of Wales in surprisingly strategic ways'.¹⁸ Henry Tudor's well-documented Welsh connections might be construed as one method of such manipulations. Gareth Elwyn Jones notes that '[t]o important Welshmen of his time, Henry VII was Welsh—it suited them well that he should be so'.¹⁹ Henry Tudor's landing at Milford Haven before the Battle of Bosworth was both strategic and symbolic; it was part of

¹⁷ Of course, Elinor's motherhood is not straightforward or uncomplicated. I discuss her maternal body in section 2 of this chapter.

¹⁸ Cull, *Shakespeare's Princes of Wales*, p. 18.

¹⁹ Gareth Elwyn Jones, 'Tudor Wales', in *Tudor Wales*, ed. by Jones and Trevor Herbert (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1988), pp. 1-9 (p. 1).

a series of gestures whereby the new king emphasised his Welsh links.²⁰ Philip Schwyzer argues:

Over more than a century, the Tudors had invited memorialization of their Welsh ancestry, had exploited it, had even made it the basis of a new kind of national community. But one step they had never taken. No member of the Tudor dynasty had ever claimed to be Welsh.²¹

There is a distinction to be made, then, between claiming to *be* Welsh and claiming Welshness, Welsh traditions, and Welsh lands. Tudor monarchs were more comfortable with the latter, using Wales and narratives of ‘Britishness’ when politically beneficial but never forgetting their English subjects and their own English identities.

Edward I spends more time in Wales than anywhere else, with almost half of the play’s twenty-five scenes set there. The play, too, attempts to balance the importance of Wales against the idea of Wales as other. When Queen Elinor arrives in Wales, her response is disparaging: even ‘the ground is al to base’ for her to walk on (6.1122). Gloucester also makes a value judgement about Wales compared with England when he says the queen has had to come from ‘Englands pleasant courts’ (6.1180). Despite these remarks, the play itself depicts neither Wales nor the Welsh in a wholly negative light. This refusal to straightforwardly condemn a land whose ‘rebellion’ against England dominates much of the play is perhaps due the fact that, as I have discussed, ‘Wales [was] the home of the Tudor dynasty’.²² Of course, when Peele wrote *Edward I*, the granddaughter of Henry Tudor—who claimed and ascended the throne through his Welsh ancestry and support—was on the throne of England. It is unsurprising that Peele should strike a balance by presenting Wales and Welshness with neither complete censure nor celebration.

²⁰ Philip Schwyzer details some of these iconographic gestures, including how Henry and his uncle ‘had used the bards to build support for their cause in Wales before 1485’, how he ‘presented the standard of the red dragon’, and how he named his first-born son Arthur which ‘unmistakably invok[ed] the famous prophecy that Arthur would return and lead the Britons to victory’. See Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 21.

²¹ Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism and Memory*, p. 126.

²² Lisa Hopkins, ‘*Cymbeline*, the *translatio imperii*, and the matter of Britain’, in *Shakespeare and Wales: From the Marches to the Assembly*, ed. by Willy Maley and Philip Schwyzer (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 143-156 (p. 143).

What Peele does do for his Welsh characters is what he also does for his queen characters in both *Edward I* and *Troublesome Reign*: he allows them space to speak for themselves and to articulate their own history. We are introduced to ‘Lluellen, alias Prince of Wales’ (2.294) in the stage directions at the start of scene two. Lluellen asserts himself in his purposeful first lines as he addresses his followers: ‘rouse thee for thy countries good, / Followe the man that meanes to make you great: / Follow Lluellen rightfull prince of Wales’ (2.297-299). He claims his title and means to claim his country; he also ‘hope[s] to clime these stonie pales’ and claim other British lands, beginning with London (2.305-306). As Cull again points out, Lluellen’s speech ‘parallels that of the Queen Mother’ in the first scene, as he ‘aligns himself with ancient British kingship’ and ‘compete[s] for the same ancestral tradition’ as Edward.²³ Lluellen claims that he is ‘[s]prong from the loines of great Cadwallader, / Discended from the loines of Troian Brute’ (2.300-301), the double reference to ‘loines’ emphasising the bodily, familial relationship Lluellen claims. Both the English and Welsh are given the space to claim ‘ancient Britons’ as their ancestors. Though Lluellen speaks for himself and Edward is spoken about by his mother in the matter of their ‘ancient’ bloodlines, and though Peele seems to be ‘offering his audience a choice of heroes’ in this early stage of the play, it is England who is ultimately victorious in conquering Wales and thus the English who claim British legend as part of their cultural history.²⁴

‘T’accomplish this’ Welsh assault on England and London, Lluellen says, he has brought his supporters ‘[d]isguise to Milford haven, [to] here attend, / The landing of the ladie Æliner’ (2.308-310). Milford Haven, a ‘dangerously vulnerable and penetrable’ part of Wales, was where Henry Tudor landed before marching on England to defeat Richard III in battle, and so Tudor Welshness is once again aligned with Lluellen.²⁵ But Lluellen is not landing at Milford Haven, but rather awaiting the arrival of his betrothed, Elinor de Montfort.

²³ Cull, *Shakespeare’s Princes of Wales*, p. 98.

²⁴ Cull, *Shakespeare’s Princes of Wales*, p. 98.

²⁵ Hopkins, ‘*Cymbeline*, the *translatio imperii*, and the matter of Britain’, p. 143.

He has assembled his followers—and, implicitly, his rebellion—around her: geographical expansion is aligned with an apparently tender love. Lluellen calls Elinor his ‘loue’ and ‘deereſt deare’ (2.313; 2.316), whilst Rice identifies that this is an ‘honorable matche, / [That] [c]annot but turne to *Cambrias* common good’ (2.317-318). Elinor was the daughter of Simon de Montfort who ‘in the Barons warres was Generall, / Was lou’d and honoured of Englishmen’ (2.320-321). De Montfort led the Second Barons’ War (1262-1267). J. R. Maddicot notes that de Montfort ‘allied [himself] with the Welsh’ against Henry III’s royalist forces in 1263, and briefly became, according to Adrian Jobson, the ‘unofficial ruler of the kingdom’.²⁶ In Peele’s play, Rice is confident that Lluellen’s union with Elinor would gain him support in England ‘[w]hen they shall heare, shees [his] espoused wife’ (2.322). It is Elinor’s identity as a de Montfort, a descendant of this successful rebel against the English crown, that the play frames as politically expedient: her identity as the granddaughter of England’s King John through the maternal line is not mentioned. Though Elinor’s royal blood would seem to strengthen the claim to the English throne that Lluellen could make through her, the play instead emphasises her own revolutionary ancestry.

Lluellen himself does not focus on the political pragmatism of his forthcoming marriage either, but on his love for his betrothed and on his own status as a ‘rebel’. Though Lluellen is leading an uprising against the English, the play often depicts Wales as a more romantic, whimsical place where there is time for jest, roleplay, and singing ballads. Peele associates the Welsh with ballads of Robin Hood, emphasising that these characters do not conform to traditional monarchical English authority. Indeed, Lluellen explicitly characterises himself as Robin Hood—‘ile be the maister of misrule, ile be Robin Hood’ (7.1299-1300)—and is often referred to as Robin Hood by English characters. As Edward and his men close in on Lluellen, the king states that ‘[a]s kings with rebels *Mun*, our right

²⁶ J. R. Maddicot, *Simon de Montfort* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 228. Adrian Jobson, *The First English Revolution: Simon de Montfort, Henry III and the Barons’ War* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 93.

preuails / We haue good Robin Hood' (10.1678-1679). After Lluellen is defeated, Mortimor states that 'Robin Hood is gone' (19.2419). The English king's 'right' is contrasted with the Welsh prince's status as a rebel against English authority. The references to both Robin Hood and the de Montfort family, then, connect the Welsh with (English) figures who have challenged the authority of the English monarchy that the character of Edward I suggests is an inevitable, inalienable 'right'.

Ultimately, of course, Lluellen is defeated and Wales is conquered. Lluellen characterises this defeat as a British loss as well as a Welsh one—he says that the 'angry Heauens frownd on Brittain's face / To Eclipse the glorie of faire Cambria' (17.2351-2352)—which once again suggests that the Welsh were the original Britons. However, Lluellen's defeat gave rise to the 1284 Statute of Rhuddlan, or Statute of Wales, which stated that England had now 'wholly and entirely transferred under our proper dominion, the land of Wales, with its inhabitants, heretofore subject unto us, in feudal right, all obstacles whatsoever ceasing; and hath annexed and united the same unto the crown of the aforesaid realm, as a member of the same body'.²⁷ The statute, then, legally annexed Wales to England until Henry VIII's Laws in Wales Acts overwrote it in 1535 and 1542. The legal unification of Wales and England represented a desire for imperial expansion that would result in a Britain unified under the English crown, a desire that was shared by a number of medieval and early modern monarchs and which would culminate, perhaps, in the ascension of James I/VI to the English throne.

Edward I also alludes to its particularly early modern contextual interest in a more unified idea of Britain with the Scottish subplot that runs parallel to the dramatised Welsh rebellion. The play shows Scotland's king, John Baliol, pledge Scottish support for Edward I of England; declare that 'Scotland disdaines to carrie Englands yoke' (9.1549); be captured

²⁷ Statute of Rhuddlan, 1284 (12 Edward I). Quoted in *The Statutes of Wales*, ed. by Ivor Bowen (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908), p. 2.

and again swear '[a]leageance as becomes a roiall king' to Edward (19.2491); then begin another uprising in Northumberland at the end of the play (25.2942). The Scottish subplot is not dramatised in as much detail as the Welsh, nor does it include any female characters or queens or queen figures. This play does not comment explicitly on the recent history of Mary, Queen of Scots' challenge to Elizabeth I's throne, nor on the possibility that James VI of Scotland could become king of England in this moment of uncertain succession. Instead, *Edward I* is concerned with negotiating the more distant Tudor dynasty's Welsh origins and the incorporation of Wales into England's historical narrative.

Though the play's chief focus is on insular (geo)politics and though its female characters are primarily positioned in relation to the role they play in these internal matters, Peele's play also strives to define Englishness against overseas identities. Primarily, Peele undertakes this interrogation of national identities through his engagement with Edward I's wife's Castilian identity. Where most queen consorts in early modern history plays are from culturally French regions, Queen Elinor is from the Spanish region of Castile. Her doubly royal status is referred to at the beginning of the play, when she says she wishes to contribute to Edward's hospital for wounded soldiers in a way 'worthie [of] the king of Englandes wife, and the king of Spaines daughter' (1.189-190). This parallelism draws attention to the fact that the queen of England is foreign by birth (as was usual, to cement international alliances), and that she has a royal identity independent of Edward I. This first reference to Elinor's foreignness is fairly innocuous, but the play gives an early suggestion of a threatening Spanish nationalism less than a hundred lines later. Elinor declares that she considers the king and his men 'headstrong Englishmen / But [she] shall hold them in a Spanish yoake' (1.281-282). The suggestion is that Elinor's power—and, perhaps, her threat—is both female and foreign. However, this early comment about Elinor's 'Spanish yoake' is not explored

throughout most of the play and does not come to anything until Elinor's sudden descent into the role of villain in the play's later scenes.

Though most of the play focuses neither explicitly nor extensively on Elinor's foreign Otherness, it does see Edward blaming her more cruel intentions and negative traits, which appear suddenly and most particularly in scene nine, on her Spanish blood. For example, when the Welsh people gift Edward and Elinor's new son with a 'mantle of frize richlie lined to keepe him warm' (9.1760), Elinor reacts negatively and claims that the prince should have better, richer robes. Edward acknowledges the danger of offending the Welsh—he 'would not for tenne thousand pounds the country should take vnkindness as [her] words' (9.1770-1772)—and says that Elinor's 'proude honor flaies [his] heart with grieve. / Sweete Queene how much [he] pittie[s] the effects, / This Spanish pride frees not with Englands prince' (9.1791-1793). Edward attempts to establish a sense of pan-insular solidarity against a more Other 'Spanishness'. Elinor, meanwhile, is both 'sweete' and 'proude', a Spanishwoman and the mother of 'England's prince'. When Edward promises to grant Elinor anything that will 'perfecte her content' (9.1801), she says:

Thankes gentle Edward, lords haue at you then,
 Haue at you all long bearded Englishmen,
 Haue at you lords and ladies when I craue,
 To giue your English pride a Spanish braue.

[...]

The pride of Englishmens long haire,
 Is more than Englands Queene can beare:
 VVomens right breast cut them off al,
 And let the great tree perish with the small

[...]

The rime is, that mens beards and womens breasts bee cutte off. (9.1804-1808; 1820-1823; 1826-1827)

This violent desire appears suddenly and inexplicably, and Edward pronounces it a 'Spanish fitte' (9.1810): the suggestion is that Elinor's violent desires and 'vngentle thoughts' (9.1860) are unavoidable urges borne of her Spanish heritage.

It is not only Edward who cites Elinor's Spanishness as the source of her more violent

tendencies; so too does the Mayoress (or ‘Maris’, as she is called in the play). Moments later in the same scene, after Edward tells Elinor to ‘put on a milder mind’ (9.1860), the Maris slights Elinor by claiming she was ‘[b]red vp in the court of pride, brought vp in Spaine’ (9.1870). After the strange incident where Elinor forces the Maris to nurse an adder (in scene 15, discussed in more detail below), Elinor is called ‘proud Queen the Autor of my death, / The scourge of England and to English dames’ (15.2340-41). Here, Peele echoes his earlier *Troublesome Reign*, where the queen mother, Eleanor, refers to ‘victorious Richard, scourge of infidels’ (*Troublesome Reign*, 1.3.3). *Troublesome Reign*’s Eleanor presents her son as a punisher of supposedly threatening ‘others’, but *Edward I*’s Elinor is herself the threatening other within, the ‘scourge of England’. Henry Hallam suggests that the ‘hideous misrepresentation of the virtuous Eleanor of Castile [was] probably from the base motive of rendering the Spanish nation odious to the vulgar’.²⁸ Even though the play’s anti-Spanish sentiments are infrequent and Elinor’s Spanish ‘threat’ does not come to full fruition, they nonetheless serve as a fairly heavy-handed, xenophobic reminder of the queen’s foreign otherness and recall the Spanish Armada that took place only five years before Peele’s play was published. Indeed, as I argue in the Introduction and again later in this chapter, references to Spain in early modern (history) plays frequently evoke the Armada and recall Anglo-Spanish enmity. Queen Elinor’s Spanishness is one aspect of her identity that is referred to in *Edward I*, but it is not given central importance. Instead, the queen serves almost as a nexus of anxieties surrounding women’s political influence, about succession, and about foreignness and English supremacy within the British Isles.

ii. Queens’ bodies, motherhood, and men

²⁸ Henry Hallam, *Introduction to the Literature of Europe in the Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Centuries*, vol. 2 (Paris: Baudry’s European Library, 1837), p. 4.

The first scene of *Edward I* opens with the Queen Mother's pronouncement on empire, while the last scene depicts the queen consort's deathbed confession about the illegitimacy of most of the king's offspring. The beginning and end of the play, then, both dramatise queenly voices and show how their words are so often bound up with their maternal identities: the Queen Mother implicitly reminds the audience of her maternal role in the creation and expansion of the English empire, while Queen Elinor's dialogue is accompanied by a very visible and talked-about onstage pregnancy and post-partum body that emphasises her motherhood. That they are mothers is central to both characters' queenship, and is a platform via which they navigate political landscapes.

Peele positions a queen mother at the very beginning of both of his plays about English history. In doing so, he emphasises the central role played by women in assuring the royal line and also allows female characters to articulate their own power and authority as figures who articulate a sense of history for the audience. After celebrating her son's crusading triumphs and imminent return to England in the earliest lines of *Edward I*, the Queen Mother faints when she actually sees her 'sweete sonnes' (1.56). Gloucester explains that 'this [is] but mothers loue' (1.60), and the Queen Mother also blames her 'abundant loue' (1.66) for her bodily response to Edward's and Edmund's safe returns. Even in the plays' earliest moments, then, motherhood is presented as both a means of commanding political respect and attention, and as something that can affect deep emotional responses. The Queen Mother is neither just a politically minded rhetorician nor an emotional, feeling mother: she is both.

However, despite the stylistic markers that recall *Troublesome Reign's* Queen Mother Eleanor, and despite the fact that Eleanor of Provence possessed a 'resourcefulness, intelligence and [...] conviction of her own authority [that] emphasised the power of English queenship', *Edward I's* Queen Mother has little influence on the action of the play beyond

the first scene.²⁹ When the stage direction ‘The Queene Mother being set on the one side, and Queene Elinor on the other, the king sitteth in the middest mounted highest’ is given midway through the first scene (1.117-19), the audience is perhaps invited to expect a certain conflict between the Queen Mother and her daughter-in-law. The first time Edward takes his throne onstage, he is physically positioned between two powerful Elinors: his mother and his wife. Though both women are seen to exert influence over the king, it is only the latter whose presence is felt throughout the play.

However, the nature of the younger Elinor’s presence varies, altering as the play progresses. In the earlier parts of *Edward I*, Peele depicts a loving relationship between Elinor and Edward. They call one another the familiar nicknames ‘Ned’ and ‘Nell’ respectively. They often use terms of endearment for one another: he calls her ‘sweete Nell’ (1.199; 6.1195-6.1250), ‘louely Queene, / Louelie Queene Elinor’ (3.725-26), ‘[s]weet of all sweetes, sweete Nell’ (3.787), and ‘Queene of king Edwards heart’ (3.799). In scene 6, he asks a kiss of her three times (6.1231-36), and in scene nine he addresses her using the anaphoric list ‘my Nell, mine owne, my loue, my life, my heart, my deare, my doue, my Queene, my wife’ (9.1600-02). Elinor refers to Edward as ‘braue Ned’ (3.779), ‘sweete Ned’ (3.781; 6.1603; 9.1844), and ‘Ned, my loue, my lord, and king’ (1.238). They both use affectionate language to refer to one another even during moments of tension between the pair (but before Elinor’s confession of infidelity at the end of the play). By showing the characters addressing one another with casual affection, Peele effectively constructs a relationship that goes beyond John Carmi Parsons’s identification of a ‘mutually constant and respectful’ marriage: it is very much depicted as a relationship based on love.³⁰

Indeed, Peele’s play allows the audience to witness the influence Elinor has over her husband. The first interaction between the king and queen sees her ask him two rhetorical

²⁹ Lisa Hilton, *Queens Consort: England’s Medieval Queens* (London: Phoenix, 2008), p. 220.

³⁰ John Carmi Parsons, *Eleanor of Castile: Queen and Society in Thirteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 50.

questions in turn: 'I hope you meane, / I shal be a benefactor to my fellow souldiers' (1.178-79) and '[y]ou will alowe what I do, will you not?' (1.183). Elinor insists on her contribution to Edward's college for wounded soldiers, and Edward indulges her rhetorical play as she announces this contribution. When Elinor is discontent to be in Wales before she gives birth in scene six, she becomes petulant and will not answer his question about her wellbeing. Instead, she tells him to let go of her hand five times (6.1198; 6.1203; 6.1205; 6.1211; 6.1235), wishing to detach herself from him physically as she has done verbally. Edward instructs their daughter Ione to ask 'how she dooth' (6.1214), to which Elinor purposefully responds and claims that she will not rest '[t]ill I haue set it soundly on hie eare' (6.1222). In this scene, Elinor commands Edward's full attention, withholds conversation from him, and insists that she will have the king listen to her. Indeed, this is a play in which Elinor's voice is repeatedly listened to: by Edward, by the earth or God himself when she calls for the earth to '[g]ape [...] and swallow' her' (20.2448), and even when she is ashamed to speak but makes her confession in the final scene. Elinor's characterisation may be read as inconsistent or complicated, but whichever reading we take, it remains that she articulates ideas that are often uncomfortable and infrequently seen in other forms of historical narrative.

Elinor fulfills her primary duty as queen by giving birth to a male heir during the play. But despite the political practicality of this familial relationship, Peele overtly shows the toll pregnancy and childbirth takes on Elinor's body. Heavily pregnant, she has been made to travel to Wales so her son will be Prince of Wales. She arrives sweating, faint, and thirsty (6.1109-1113), 'so great with childe' (1176), and, as discussed above, rankled enough to punish Edward for compelling her to come to Wales that she withdraws from him physically and verbally. Elinor is then presented in her childbed after giving birth in a forceful union of 'body natural' and 'body politic' in the figure of the queen (9.1597). As with the Queen

Mother earlier, Elinor's motherhood is neither simply political nor personal but a combination of both aspects of her queenly identity.

However, though Elinor conforms to the model of a good queen consort by giving the king several heirs as well as a prince born in Wales during a time of Anglo-Welsh conflict, her maternity is transformed into something threatening and transgressive by the end of the play. After she is swallowed by the sinkhole in one of *Edward I's* most puzzling and memorable moments (which I discuss below), Elinor reads her rescue from the earth as an opportunity to 'bewaile [her] sinfull life, and call to God to saue [her] wretched soule' (22.2552-53). The last scene is dominated by Elinor's confession—to Edward and his brother Edmund, disguised as French friars—to 'repent [her] sinnes' and clear a '[c]onscience loaden with misdeeds' (25.2674; 25.2683). It becomes physically difficult for Elinor to talk, and her speech becomes a 'faultring engine' in her weakness (25.2673). Additionally, 'shame and remorse doth stop [her] course of speech' (25.2729-30) when the 'friars' invite her confession. The play's previous emphasis on Elinor's voice gives way to a sense of labour and anxiety in articulating 'truth', perhaps suggesting that she is articulating a part of history that should remain silent. Indeed, she confesses that she cuckolded the king with '[h]is brother Edmund beautifull and young, / Vppon [her] bridal couch by my concent' (25.2752-2753), and says that her daughter, Ione of Acon, was 'baselie borne begotten of a Frier' (20.2774). Peele emphasises Elinor's own articulation of, and explicit consent in, her sexual infidelities. Elinor's ultimate confession that Edward of Caernarfon (who we all but saw born onstage) is the king's 'onlie true and lawfull sonne' (25.2776) was Peele's invention, and one that transforms Elinor's (maternal) body and voice into sites of transgression and sin to which she must confess. Peele seems to tap into contemporary anxieties about inheritance, succession, and validity of claims to descent in the latter years of the reign of a queen who

still refused to name an heir and who had herself often seen her legitimacy challenged and scrutinised.

Confessing to cuckolding the king is the culmination of Elinor's descent into villainy, but it is also the moment where she attempts to repent her sins. There are two other notable instances in the play in which the queen does (or attempts to do) violence on other female bodies in a manner that transgresses gender and social expectations. The first is in scene 9. After articulating her distaste for the Welsh frize, Edward promises to give Elinor whatever she wants 'to perfecte her content' (9.1801-1802). She replies:

The pride of Englishmens long haire,
Is more than Englands Queene can beare:
Womens right breast cut them off al,
And let the great tree perish with the small. (9.1820-23)

Despite lamenting her 'pride' three times earlier in the scene (7.1791-97), Edward is unable to understand this moment of cruelty: she translates, simply, that '[t]he rime is, that mens beards and womens breasts bee cutte off' (9.1826-27). Christopher Highley argues that Elinor's 'demand that all women cut off their right breasts in recognition of her power' is one that 'conjures an image of Scythian barbarism'.³¹ It also recalls the legend that Amazonian warrior women, who lived without men, cut off their right breasts in order to draw their bowstrings more efficiently.³² However, Peele gives neither psychological motivation nor full explication of the implications of Elinor's violent demand. Instead, Edward figures her as 'wood' (9.1831) or mad, and says that if she means to make 'many guiltless Ladies bleede' then '[h]ere must the law begin [...] at [her] breast' (9.1851-1852). Elinor's strange, sudden demand to 'cut' men's beards and women's breasts does not come to fruition, but serves to

³¹ Christopher Highley, *Shakespeare, Spenser, and the Crisis in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 79.

³² Cynthia Eller notes that '[t]he common notion that Amazons cut off their right breast [...] seems to stem from an etymological error: the ancient Greeks interpreted the word *amazon*—which doesn't seem to have been a Greek word after all—as deriving from the Greek roots *a-mazon*, meaning "without a breast". In actuality, Amazons are never depicted in ancient Greek art with fewer breasts than the standard two.' Eller, *Gentlemen and Amazons: The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory, 1861-1900* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), p. 17.

demonstrate a malice in the queen as she attempts to prove her power over the English people and their king.

The second instance where Peele dramatises Elinor's shocking cruelty is when she and her maid coerce the Mayoress ('Maris') of London to nurse an adder. Elinor says that she wishes to be 'reuenged vppon this London Dame' (15.2308), presumably for the insult done to her earlier in the play (9.1869-72). She figures the 'tortures for the Dame' as a way to 'purge' her 'melancholy' and 'choler to the vttermost' (15.2307; 15.2315). Elinor not only seeks revenge: she seeks enjoyment in revenging the Maris's slight against her in a manner that echoes Queen Margaret's gleeful torture of the Duke of York in Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part 3*. Elinor 'binde[s] her in the chaire' and 'draw[s] forth her brest [to] let the Serpent sucke his fil' (15.2327-2331). Even when the Maris begs for mercy, Elinor responds with callous indifference—'[d]ie or die not, my minde is fullie pleased' (15.2335)—before leaving the Maris alone to die. In a scene that anticipates *Anthony and Cleopatra*, Peele's Elinor perverts the image of natural, maternal breastfeeding and makes it a source of unnecessary, unfeminine cruelty, a cruelty that is also characterised as particularly 'un-English' when the Maris calls Elinor 'scourge of England' (15.2341).

Elinor's ahistorically negative characterisation was, as Dora Jean Ashe and Holger Nørgaard have suggested, likely inspired by undated ballads including *The lamentable fall of Queene Elnor*, *Queen Eleanor's Confession*, and *A Warning-Piece to England Against Pride and Wickedness*, the latter of which is a '20-line attack of Queen Elinor and her Spanish pride'.³³ But Elinor's worst demands do not go unpunished in the play. The (would-be) violence that she does on women's bodies culminates in her physical punishment and eventual death. In scene 20, Elinor's villainy is indicated with 'thunder and lightning when

³³ Dora Jean Ashe, 'The Text of Peele's *Edward I*', *Studies in Bibliography*, 7 (1955), 153-70. Holger Nørgaard, 'Peele's *Edward I* and two queen Elinor ballads', *English Studies*, 45.1-6 (1964), 165-168. Ashe argues that 'the scenes in which Elinor is most vilified' (p. 162) were added as part of a non-authorial, revised version of the play's manuscript.

the Queen comes in' (20.2329) and Ione's condemnation of her own mother's 'wicked deeds' (20.2436). The play's earlier anti-Spanish sentiments culminate in this scene, which depicts the 'sinking of Queene Elinor' mentioned in the play's title. The moment is strange—Edmund says he has never 'heard nor red so strange a thing' when it reported later (23.2590)—and strangely spectacular, as Elinor confidently, almost blasphemously, says:

Gape earth and swallow me, and let my soule sincke downe to Hell if I were Autor of that womens Tragedy, Oh Ione, helpe Ione thy mother sinckes. (20.2448-50)

Elinor does not finish her sentence before the earth does as it is bid and 'swallows' her. The moment is not explicitly framed as a miracle or divine intervention. However, Ione's earlier accusations—that Elinor's 'wicked deeds hath caused our God to terrifie [her] thoughts' (20.2436) and that 'London cries for vengeance on [her] head' for her the evil done to its Maris (20.2441)—and Edward's later assessment that 'this sincking is a surfet tane / Of pride' (23.2591-92) do suggest a sense of divine and natural punishment for cruelty and arrogance. Confused and contrite, Elinor 'rise[s] vp on Potters Hiue' to live long enough only to 'bewaile [her] sinfull life, and call to God to saue [her] wretched soule' (22.2543; 22.2552-53). The earth, at the epicentre of English politics in London, consumes Elinor, embeds her, and later spits her out. Her (misogynistic) violence is punished; when the audience next sees her, she is physically weak, shamed, and apparently rendered impotent as she is reduced to the conventional role of submissive woman.

Edward I is often referred to as a fragmented or 'bad' play. Despite its perceived shortcomings as a unified, theatrical work, it nonetheless participates in and contributes to the emerging traditions of the history play. It dramatises queens' bodies and voices as a way of exploring many of the issues with which the history play is preoccupied in the last decade-or-so of Elizabeth's reign, such as nation and empire and the relationship between maternal 'natural' bodies and political endeavours.

PART TWO: QUEENSHIP IN *EDWARD II*

Christopher Marlowe begins his history play with Gaveston reading a letter sent to him by the new King Edward II:

My father is deceased; come, Gaveston,
And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend.³⁴

At once, Marlowe both engages with and subverts dramatic conventions and audience expectations of the history play genre. Where earlier history plays often begin with a new order of kingship articulated by the new king himself (*King John*) or, more often, by a queen-figure (*Troublesome Reign; Edward I*), Marlowe begins his play with neither king, queen, prince, nor nobleman. Instead, the first character to speak is Edward II's controversial favourite, Gaveston. That Gaveston defies a relatively established dramatic convention to occupy the privileged position of speaking first immediately creates a sense that this new king's relationships and priorities are different. It also reveals that the playwright's approach to the genre is different. By speaking first, Gaveston occupies a role more usually assigned to a female character and thwarts the dramatic expectations that the genre had established by this point. Though Marlowe engages with various conventions of the history play—such as the king's relationship with overambitious noblemen and a problematic foreign queen—he rarely does so conventionally. Indeed, when Gaveston walks onto the stage and begins the play by reading the king's 'amorous lines' (1.1.6), the audience's expectations are shifted, realigned, queered. *Edward II* is a queering of dramatic conventions and characters alike. In this section, I first look at the insular geopolitics of *Edward II* before turning to sexual and familial politics, discussing how these comment on gender, genre, and power.

Edward II is a play in which the queen consort moves into the role of political opponent and rival to the king. Queen Isabella's political, martial independence motivates

³⁴ Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II* (c. 1593), in *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays*, ed. by David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.1.1-2. All further references to this play will be to this edition unless otherwise stated, and scene and line references will be given parenthetically throughout the body of the thesis.

much of the play's focus on insular politics, as the king is forced to rely on his insular relationships—particularly his relationship with Wales—to attempt to combat the queen when she moves against him. In the first part of this section, I explore how Isabella reveals and tests the state of insular geopolitics. Even when she is not entrenched in the play's dramatic action, the audience is reminded that it is often her (sometimes behind-the-scenes) rivalry that motivates much of the king's actions and geographical movements within the British Isles.

The queen is not only the king's political rival in this play: she is also his cuckold and love rival. In the second half of this section, I discuss Isabella's adulterous identity and sexual self-determination as she pursues an illicit relationship with Mortimer that patriarchal social mores would not condone. However, I argue that Isabella pursues this relationship not strictly because of a desire to overthrow her husband to increase her own power, but because the role of queen consort that she attempts to fulfill at the beginning of the play has effectively been usurped. Instead, the king's male favourite occupies the queen's role, in history and in the conventions of the history play genre. As we have seen, that Gaveston speaks first privileges him as much as does Edward's desire for him to 'share the kingdom' (1.1.2), whilst it also implicitly overthrows Isabella as she is made conspicuous by her absence. It is precisely this favouritism that is at the root of the trouble of Edward II's reign, not merely because Edward has a relationship with a male subject but because the pair attempts to transgress the boundaries of an acceptable—or overlookable—public relationship. As Stephen Guy-Bray argues, 'Gaveston is neither a minion nor a favourite: he is Edward's consort, and it is Edward's attempt to legitimize his relationship with Gaveston that causes the nobles to rebel'.³⁵ David Stymeist similarly suggests that 'what menaces [the nobles] is Edward's demand that Gaveston be politically recognized and given official status as royal

³⁵ Stephen Guy-Bray, 'Homophobia and the Depoliticizing of *Edward II*', *English Studies in Canada (ESC)*, 17.2 (1991), 125-33 (p. 131).

consort'.³⁶ Gaveston is a quasi-consort who cannot produce an heir. Criticism on *Edward II* often yields queer readings similar to Guy-Bray's and Stymeist's, but I focus on how such 'queerness' relates to women and particularly how the play might be read as a queering of the queen herself.

In the final part of this section, I examine Isabella's role as a mother to the English heir and how she attempts to utilise this identity to wield political power. She is a character who seeks power for her own sake but also as a means of reclaiming apparently misused power for her son. I argue that Isabella's relationship with Mortimer is in tension with her maternal identity, as the character fails to reconcile the roles of lover and mother. Isabella indulges her sexual appetite outside of her relationship with the king, and so it becomes a threat to dynastic stability. If queens in 1590s history plays are always implicitly commenting and reflecting on their contemporary queen, then Isabella's independent sexual pursuits are in stark contrast with Elizabeth's carefully crafted public image as the Virgin Queen and her prudent courtship of appropriate suitors throughout her reign. Further, where Elizabeth I's lack of heir may have engendered an increasingly persistent succession question in the 1590s, Marlowe uses the character of Isabella to explore a royal woman's troubling sexual relationships.

i. Queens and countries

Like *Edward I*, *Edward II* also dramatises the geopolitical conflicts of the British Isles during the reign of its titular king. Though Marlowe's play does not shift between locations with the same frequency and fluidity as Peele's *Edward I*, it nonetheless focuses on insular landscapes and politics and on the king's position within these political landscapes. We hear about England's conflicts with Scotland and about Ireland as a site of both exile and safety. We also

³⁶ David Stymeist, 'Status, Sodomy, and the Theater in Marlowe's *Edward II*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 44.2 (2004), 233-53 (p. 238).

see and hear about Wales as a place where the King of England—the former Prince of Wales—can find martial support and seek sanctuary. At the same time, like *Edward I* and like many late Elizabethan history plays, *Edward II* also demonstrates an interest in England's place on the international stage and especially in the geography of Western Europe. Marlowe navigates early modern English anxieties about foreignness—especially Frenchness—through the character of the queen, Isabella of France.

In this section, I discuss how *Edward II* shows the king attempting to navigate relationships with other countries of the Atlantic archipelago as well as his relationship with his wife and, through her, his relationship with France. The play's focus on insular politics reflects its contemporary moment as much as it depicts the English past. It also suggests that the main crisis of Edward II's reign is that he prioritises personal interests over 'appropriate' monarchical concerns, and that he prioritises a male quasi-consort over his queen. Indeed, the king's private relationships define his (geo)political identity. The character of Isabella is used to highlight the flaws in Edward's 'troubled' kingship, but her identity as a foreign woman who acts on her own desires seems also to invite the audience to redirect some of its criticisms onto her.

Marlowe establishes Edward II as a king more preoccupied with personal matters than political ones at the beginning of the play. As mentioned, Gaveston opens the play by reading aloud from the king's letter which has summoned him back to England from the exile imposed by the former king, Edward I. In the first two short lines that I quoted at the beginning of Part Two of this chapter, Marlowe suggests that the personal and the political are closely intertwined for his iteration of Edward II: Gaveston speaks the king's words, which in turn align rulership with 'friendship', companionship, and an amorous relationship. Here, we have a character who had been excluded from court returning and articulating the king's first command, an outsider who had been removed here recalled to the centre of

English political life. Gaveston is also the character who most thoroughly demonstrates Edward II's problematic conflation of the public, political, and personal: in being invited to 'share the kingdom with [his] dearest friend', Gaveston is invited not just to return to Edward's private life, but to partake in all aspects of Edward's new kingship. Being willing to 'share the kingdom with [his] dearest friend' epitomises Edward's inability—or unwillingness—to separate his private desires from his royal responsibilities.

Edward's invitation for Gaveston to share the kingdom becomes a hypothetical willingness to divide the kingdom a few scenes later. Though the play does not yet detail the reasons for Gaveston's first exile, Marlowe does suggest that the favourite's return will not prove unproblematic for the king and kingdom. Gaveston says '[f]arewell [to] base stooping to the lordly peers' (1.1.18) and claims to be able to use poetry and music to 'draw the pliant king which way [he] please' (1.1.52): he anticipates preventing the 'lordly peers' from averting his influence over Edward. Indeed, Gaveston's return and the king's social and political elevation of him—he is made an earl, 'Lord Chamberlain of the realm, / And Secretary too, and Lord of Man' (1.2.11-14)—garners widespread discontent amongst Edward's nobles, who 'subscribe [...] to his exile' and instruct Edward to do the same on his 'allegiance to the see of Rome' (1.4.52-53). When presented with a document to sign to agree to Gaveston's second exile, Edward states that '[t]he legate of the pope will be obeyed' and proceeds to decree which political roles the peers (who orchestrated this banishment) should take on (1.4.64-69). In lines that recall the legendary King Leir's division of his kingdom and that anticipate Shakespeare's dramatisation of this story a decade later, the king tells the peers that:

If this content you not
 Make several kingdoms of this monarchy
 And share it equally amongst you all,
 So I may have some nook or corner left
 To frolic with my dearest Gaveston. (1.4.70-73)

Of course, this instruction is theoretical and perhaps exaggerated to show Edward's extreme fondness for Gaveston. And of course, the peers are unlikely to disagree with Edward's division of responsibilities when he is ultimately complying with their wishes to exile Gaveston. Nonetheless, the king is willing to entertain the idea of dividing his kingdom in favour of pursuing personal pleasure with the favourite with whom he wanted to share this kingdom.

The mention of the 'several' theoretical 'kingdoms of [the] monarchy' (1.4.70) echoes the play's depiction of the 'several' realms of the British Isles and their conflicts with England. The escalating tensions between England and its nearest neighbours—particularly Scotland, Ireland, and France—converge in Act Two, scene two. Marlowe's characters offer exposition on these tensions, again referencing Edward's predilection for beauty, spectacle, and personal pursuits over more appropriate uses of his kingly time, authority, and coffers. Mortimer tells Edward that he has compromised himself financially and lost the respect of both commoners and noblemen: 'idle triumphs, masques, lascivious shows, / And prodigal gifts bestowed on Gaveston / Have drawn thy treasure dry and made thee weak, / The murmuring commons overstretched hath' (2.2.156-59). As such, Lancaster says, the king should '[I]ook for rebellion; look to be deposed' (2.2.160). The lines that follow detail Edward's—and, by extension, England's—waning influence and dwindling imperialist strength both internally and across the English Channel and North Sea because Edward has left his court 'naked, being bereft of those / That makes a king seem glorious to the world' (2.2.174). Though Mortimer says he 'means the peers' (2.2.175), the impression is of a more widespread loss, or 'nakedness'.

The first conflict on which Marlowe focuses is the one with Scotland. We are told that Mortimer's uncle is 'taken prisoner by the Scots' in Edward's wars (2.2.140), whilst Lancaster informs the king that '[u]nto the walls of York the Scots made road, / And

unresisted drave away rich spoils' (2.2.165-66). The Scots' invasion of York highlights the permeability of the border between England and Scotland as well as Edward's inadequacy in defending even a walled city: the Scots ransacked York 'unresisted', as no English forces were deployed to prevent them from doing so. Lancaster and Mortimer go on to remind the king of his loss to the Scots at Bannockburn in 1314 with the following mocking sequence:

Mortimer: When wert thou in the field with banner spread?
 But once, and then thy soldiers marched like players,
 With garish robes, not armour; and thyself
 Bedaubed with gold, rode laughing at the rest,
 Nodding and shaking of thy spangled crest,
 Where women's favours hung like labels down.

Lancaster: And thereof came it that the fleeing Scots,
 To England's high disgrace, have made this jig:
 'Maids of England, sore may you mourn,
 For your lemans you have lost at Bannocksbourn,
 With a heave and a ho!
 What weeneth the king of England,
 So soon to have won Scotland?
 With a rumbelow.' (2.2.181-94)

Mortimer and Lancaster articulate a sense of frustration with, or even embarrassment at, the king. They suggest that the English loss at Bannockburn was not due to Scottish superiority but the opportunity they seized that arose because of the English king's preoccupation with spectacle over substance. This preoccupation is explicitly framed in feminine terms, with the king laden with 'women's favours' and the Englishmen reduced from martial soldiers to effeminised 'lemans' of '[m]aids of England'. The loss at Bannockburn is described not only as frustrating, but as something that brings 'high disgrace' to the realm as Edward has failed to attend to matters befitting a king. In this case, what befits the king is to maintain control over his kingdom and, perhaps, to conquer, and particularly to conquer near neighbours that are perceived as 'weaker'.

In the same sequence in which Lancaster and Mortimer list Edward's failings in both internal and international politics, the former says that 'wild O'Neill, with swarms of Irish

kerns, / Lives uncontrolled within the English pale' (2.2.163-64). This clan of Irish rebels are 'uncontrolled' in the 'area around Dublin protected for the safety of English settlers'.³⁷

Edward has lost battles against the Scots and become in danger of losing territory in northern England to them, but his inaction also threatens the space that had previously been effectively colonised by the English in Ireland. Edward II, then, not only fails to meet the expectation that a king of England should seek to conquer and colonise, but he also fails to consolidate the power and land he holds both nationally and internationally. In this scene, noble characters address the fact that Edward rarely fights, and when he does his motivations are more spectacular than martial.

The relationship that the play depicts between England and Ireland is, however, more complex than simply the former seeking to control the latter. In *Edward II*, Ireland is a site of exile, a distant place to which Gaveston is banished. But Edward tells Gaveston that he should go there and '[b]e governor of Ireland in my stead' (1.4.125) in a line that swiftly acknowledges both the expectation that Edward should be acting as 'governor' and the fact that he is not actually doing so. There is a sense of inappropriate division here, of the English king divorcing himself from responsibility for one part of his 'kingdom of Britain'.

The location for Gaveston's second exile, then, suggests that it is not totally detached from English politics. Indeed, the play also suggests that Ireland is also a site of potential safety for the English king. When Edward and his men are losing a battle to the queen's forces (who pushes for her son's early ascension to the throne because of Edward II's perceived weaknesses), his new favourite, the young Spencer, advises the king that they should '[s]hape [their] course to Ireland, there to breathe' (4.5.3). According to Holinshed, Edward manoeuvred to Bristol when pursued by Isabella and her forces because 'if there were no remedie, he might easilie escape ouer into Ireland, and get into some mountaine-

³⁷ Bevington and Rasmussen, 'Explanatory Notes' in Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 479.

countreie, marish-ground, or other streict, where his enimies should not come at him'.³⁸ In *Edward II*, then, Marlowe describes Ireland as somewhere that is, paradoxically, both foreign and other, and safe and insular.

However, though Bristol offers the king a strategic position from which to escape to Ireland if necessary, the primary reason that Holinshed cites for Edward wishing to fight there was because of its proximity to Wales. From Bristol, Edward could 'raise a power of Welshmen in defense of himselfe against the quéene and hir adherents, which he had good hope to find amongst the Welshmen, bicause he had euer vsed them gentlie, and shewed no rigor towards them for their riotous misgouernance'.³⁹ Unlike the other countries of the British Isles, England's nearest neighbour is said to be a reliable source of martial support due to Edward's apparently relative 'lenience', which garners their goodwill. Though Marlowe does not explicitly refer to Edward II's identity as the first English heir to be named Prince of Wales, we cannot help but remember that the king of England was born in Wales and so he, like Henry VII almost 200 years later, has a symbolic link to and affinity with Wales. Indeed, the play itself depicts Edward retreating to an abbey in Wales for refuge.⁴⁰ The king is supposedly safe here, and though we quickly learn that he has been sighted and pursued, his betrayal is not figured as coming from the Welsh in general but from the single scythe-bearing mower. Unlike in *Edward I*, Wales is the insular realm with which England has the least problematic and most peaceful relationship in this play. It is difficult to separate the play's depiction of Wales's relationship with England from contemporary geopolitics, whereby Wales had been legally considered a part of England for many years by the time this play was written.

³⁸ Holinshed, *Chronicles*, p. 338.

³⁹ Holinshed, *Chronicles*, p. 338.

⁴⁰ Holinshed refers to 'the monasterie of Neith' specifically, and some editions of *Edward II* follow Holinshed and name Neath Abbey as the location for Act 4, scene 7. Holinshed, *Chronicles*, p. 339.

Because Edward II's wife does not physically manoeuvre between the play's different insular locations in the same way as, say, Elinor of Castile is in *Edward I*, it may at first seem that the king's relationship with his island neighbours has little to do with the queens on whom this thesis is focused. However, we know that it is Isabella who necessitates much of Edward's movement within, and dependence on, these geographies. Edward is also allegorised as the realm itself, and Isabella as the figure attempting to contain and claim this realm. In Act 2, scene 4, after Edward instructs his niece and Gaveston to 'fly [...] away to Scarborough' because 'the earls have got the hold' (2.4.4-5) and bids them farewell, Isabella asks '[n]o farewell to poor Isabel, thy queen?' (2.4.13). Edward accuses her of adultery ('[y]es, yes, for Mortimer, your lover's sake', 2.4.14), to which she makes this passionate response:

Heavens can witness I love none but you.--
 From my embracements thus he breaks away.
 O, that mine arms could close this isle about,
 That I might pull him to me where I would,
 Or that these tears that drizzle from mine eyes
 Had power to mollify his stony heart,
 That when I had him we might never part! (2.4.15-21)

The earliest extant edition—the 1594 octavo—prints the stage direction '*[e]xeunt omnes, manet Isabella*' immediately after Edward's line and most modern editions follow this, but it would make more sense, dramatically and emotionally, if the action came between Isabella's direct address to Edward ('I love none but you') and her comment that 'thus he breaks away' from her. Either way, Isabella speaks most of these seven lines as a short soliloquy, as a moment of interiority. Though she privately expresses an interest in 'sweet Mortimer' just fifty lines later (2.4.59), Isabella's words here are nonetheless framed as being derived from genuine feeling. She refers to Edward as an 'isle', identifying him both as solitary—or at least independent of his wife—and as a representation of the realm itself. Isabella wishes to contain Edward, and the implied country itself, within her arms. Violent images straddle this

protective one: he ‘breaks away’ from her embrace whilst she wishes to ‘pull him’ in whichever direction she desires. As we have seen, however, Isabella’s influence has the opposite effect and instead pushes Edward to make different political and geographical moves.

If Edward is an embodiment of ‘the isle’ itself, as the ‘body politic’ of England, then he is an embodiment found wanting by his subjects and by his queen. A number of Marlowe’s characters identify that England’s international power is waning due to the weakness and inactivity of its king. Mortimer says that the ‘haughty Dane commands the narrow seas, / While in the harbour ride [Edward’s] ships unrigg’d.’ (2.2.167), while Lancaster notes that Edward’s ‘garrisons are beaten out of France’ (2.2.161). Later in the play, Isabella informs her husband that her ‘brother, king of France, / Because [Edward] hath been slack in homage, / Hath seizèd Normandy into his hands’ (3.2.62-64). King Edward’s ineptitude is not limited to his internal politics, which saw his embarrassing defeat at Bannockburn, but has also become apparent in his relationships across the English Channel as his enemies capitalise on his inertia and preoccupation with more frivolous matters.

Indeed, aside from Scotland, the most immediate challenge to Edward’s authority comes from its neighbor across the Channel: France. Nobody embodies this threat more than the queen. Though Edward’s movements and insular relations are at least sometimes reactions to Isabella’s military and political advances, the play suggests that the space she occupies in British (geo)politics is less troubling than her French identity. The first time we see the king and queen onstage together, Edward calls his wife ‘French strumpet’ and instructs her to ‘[f]awn not on me [...] get thee gone’ (1.4.145). At this moment in the play, Edward’s insult ‘French strumpet’ and callous dismissal of his wife seems unmotivated and

unwarranted, but it effectively foregrounds the dual aspects of the queen that cause concern for other characters and the audience: her French identity and her sexual identity.⁴¹

Let us first address the issue of Isabella's French identity. *Edward II* taps into the anti-French sentiment prevalent in early modern England. As Jean-Christophe Mayer writes, '[f]or the English [in the early modern period], the French take on the face of mutability perhaps more than other foreigners. So construed they exemplify the complete opposite of the Elizabethan motto *semper eadem* – the queen being conceived of as "always the same".'⁴² Marlowe's Isabella of France defies any sense of Elizabethan constancy as she plays different roles and prioritises different concerns throughout the play. For Susan McCloskey, Isabella 'tries on a series of new identities', whilst Andrew Duxfield notes 'the much-levelled criticism that Isabella's metamorphosis from virtuous and wronged wife to adulterous and ambitious harpy is dramatically implausible'.⁴³ Perhaps Isabella's changeability is not a result of Marlowe's inconsistency but his engagement with early modern stereotypes of what it is to be French.

And certainly, Marlowe frequently reminds his audience that the English queen is French by birth and has powerful familial connections in France. Isabella herself is the first to mention her Frenchness, when, addressed cruelly by Edward, she laments that she had not been transfigured or poisoned 'when [she] left sweet France and was embarked [to England]' to marry Edward (1.4.171). Shortly after, Lancaster invites his companions and the audience to look on the distress of 'the sister of the king of France' (1.4.187). Lancaster also calls her 'sole sister to Valois' (2.2.171). Both lines anticipate Isabella's plea for French aid, reminding us that the queen has her own international connections and influences. Isabella's

⁴¹ It is worth noting here that Gaveston is othered for similar reasons: he is sexually transgressive and nationally other because he, too, is French. Gaveston's social ambition is also troubling. Elizabeth Woodville faces similar critique for her apparent social ambition in Shakespeare's first tetralogy.

⁴² Jean-Christophe Mayer, *Representing France and the French in Early Modern English Drama* (2008), p. 27.

⁴³ Susan McCloskey, 'The Worlds of *Edward II*', *Renaissance Drama*, 16 (1985), 35-48 (p. 44). Andrew Duxfield, *Christopher Marlowe and the Failure to Unify* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), p. 132.

close familial relationship with the King of France is mentioned at several points in the play. However, as Isabella's future ally Sir John of Hainault notes, 'the ungentle king / Of France refuseth to give aid of arms / To this distressed queen his sister here' (4.2.61-63). Edward claims that '[t]he lords of France love England's gold so well / As Isabella gets no aid from thence' (4.3.15-16), which suggests that France values money over kinship and is therefore a nation that can be bought. Isabella's French connections are effectively politically neutralised as France refuses to support her cause against her husband.

Isabella's potentially threatening Frenchness, then, does not actualise into any political strategy in Marlowe's play. Michael R. Evans writes that Isabella is 'one of the most notorious medieval queens. By overthrowing her husband, Edward, and becoming de facto ruler of England alongside her lover, Roger Mortimer, Isabella rebelled against her husband, her king, and prescribed gender roles, earning the post-medieval sobriquet 'the She-Wolf of France'.⁴⁴ In the play's rendering of Isabella, the gendered epithet 'she-wolf' seems to refer more to her transgressive assumption of 'masculine' political and military leadership than any animalistic cruelty. Though Isabella is, at times, cold and calculating, manipulative and ambitious, she is not shown to be overtly ruthless in the same way as the queen-character with whom she is often compared: Queen Margaret from Shakespeare's first tetralogy. A. J. Hoenselaars says that Shakespeare and Marlowe use 'stock national traits' to describe Isabella and Margaret, and argues that 'the queens' nationalities and their adulterous relationships with Suffolk and with Mortimer respectively unite them, as do their ambitious drives against their husbands'.⁴⁵ But Marlowe's dramatisation of Isabella leaves a lot of her motivations deliberately vague, a lot of her supposed-worst actions and instructions open to interpretation. Indeed, the most problematic aspect of Isabella's character here is not that she

⁴⁴ Michael R. Evans, 'Queering Isabella: The 'She-Wolf of France' in Film and Television', in *Premodern Rulers and Postmodern Viewers: Gender, Sex, and Power in Popular Culture*, ed. by Janice North, Karl C. Alvestad, and Elena Woodacre (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 263-82 (p. 263).

⁴⁵ Hoenselaars, *Images of Englishmen and Foreigners in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, p. 37.

is French, but that she engages in an adulterous relationship with the overreaching, ambitious Mortimer.

ii. *Queens' bodies, motherhood, and men*

The queen cuckolds the king in *Edward II*: she conducts an adulterous relationship with one of his noblemen relatively openly. But before I discuss this, it is pertinent to mention *why* Marlowe suggests that Isabella pursues this controversial and potentially dangerous relationship: the king cuckqueans the queen. As discussed previously, *Edward II* begins with Gaveston, called back from exile by the 'amorous lines' of a king who wishes to 'share the kingdom' with him (1.1.1-6). Gaveston is not a royal figure but a favourite, whose dramatic positioning and speech establish him as a love rival to the queen. On Gaveston's return to court, Edward bestows upon him extravagant wealth and titles, 'creat[ing him] Lord High Chamberlain, / Chief Secretary to the state and me, / Earl of Cornwall, King and Lord of Man' (1.1.153-55) to the anger of his nobles and humiliation of his wife. Though 'the representation of sodomy in the play is strategically ambivalent', Edward and Gaveston's close personal (if not overtly sexual) relationship is conducted publicly and so effectively cuckqueans Isabella.⁴⁶

Isabella expresses her 'grief and baleful discontent' at being neglected and unwanted because of Edward's preoccupation with Gaveston early in the play (1.2.48). The public nature of the two men's relationship is clear when Isabella tells the Mortimers, Lancaster, Warwick, and the Archbishop of Canterbury that she plans to retreat into the forest because, she says:

[N]ow my lord the king regards me not
But dotes upon the love of Gaveston.
He claps his cheeks and hangs about his neck,
Smiles in his face and whispers in his ears,

⁴⁶ Stymeist, 'Status, Sodomy, and the Theater', p. 237.

And when I come he frowns, as who should say,
 'Go whither thou wilt, seeing I have Gaveston.' (1.2.49-54)

Isabella describes Edward and Gaveston's tactile relationship frankly and openly, and describes Edward as being similarly forthright about his relationship with his favourite in front of his queen. Evidently, Isabella has noticed and noted Edward's affection for Gaveston and appears hurt by it. She articulates this same hurt and frustration at being unable to (re)gain Edward's affection again later, when, alone onstage, she says '[i]n vain I look for love at Edward's hand, / Whose eyes are fixed on none but Gaveston' (2.4.61-62). Duxfield suggests that, though 'Isabella is the first to express a grievance about the erotic aspect of Edward and Gaveston's friendship, [...] this grievance might be said to be more centred on Edward's infidelity and lack of attention bestowed on her than the gender of his paramour'.⁴⁷ The issue is not necessarily that Edward has this paramour, but that he 'demand[s] that Gaveston be politically recognized and given official status as royal consort'.⁴⁸ Isabella's jealousy is not sexual but socio-political and emotional, as she expresses melancholy and frustration at being a devoted wife who has been excluded by the king's preference for a favourite.

Isabella and Gaveston are described in the play as love rivals and rival consorts. Guy-Bray briefly discusses these parallels, identifying that both are French and both derive power in England from their relationship with the king. He says that 'Marlowe not only underlines these historical parallels but also introduces verbal ones, as when Isabella interrupts Edward and Gaveston near the beginning of the play: "*Queene*: Villaine, tis thou that robst me of my lord. / *Gaveston*: Madam, tis you that rob me of my lord" (1.4.160-61). Here, Isabella's and

⁴⁷ Duxfield, *Christopher Marlowe and the Failure to Unify*, p. 132.

⁴⁸ Stymeist, 'Status, Sodomy, and the Theater', p. 238. Stymeist notes that Mortimer Senior's speech in Act One, scene four, gives a 'list of great men who engaged in homoerotic relationships [which] serves to legitimize the king's love for Gaveston' (p. 239). Stymeist goes on to say that Isabella's spurned statement that 'never doted Jove on Ganymede / So much as he on cursed Gaveston' (1.4.180-181) suggests that she is frustrated that, unlike Jupiter, Edward is allowing his homoerotic relation to take 'precedence over his heterosexual, military, and political obligations' (p. 242).

Gaveston's opposing claims to Edward are brought into direct competition'.⁴⁹ But if Isabella and Gaveston are in competition for Edward's affection, then Gaveston is the winner: Edward neglects Isabella and favours the man who rivals her for the king's love and companionship. This disdain eventually manifests in Isabella cuckolding the king in turn. However, Isabella has her 'honour [...] called in question' (2.4.55) before we actually see any such evidence of the infidelity of which she is accused, first by Gaveston—who says that, instead of the king, she should fawn on Mortimer, 'with whom, ungentle queen— / I say no more; judge you the rest, my lord' (1.4.147-48)—and later by Edward who calls Mortimer her 'lover' (2.4.14). What the play shows, to this juncture, is a queen vying for her king's attention and lamenting his disinterest in her.

If this is a performance, then Marlowe does not deem it necessary to offer any interiority to Isabella to demonstrate this act. At face value, what we are presented with is a queen who appears to love her husband. Left alone onstage at the end of Act Two, scene four, Isabella does not take the opportunity to soliloquise a devious ambition. What she does suggest is a willingness to think affectionately about Mortimer; when he tells her to 'think of Mortimer as he deserves', she takes her first moment of privacy to say '[s]o well hast thou deserved, sweet Mortimer, / As Isabel could live with thee for ever' (2.4.59-60). In the space usually assigned for secret revelations made to the audience, Isabella does not articulate an illicit sexual desire of her own but instead reiterates her yearning for Edward's love:

In vain I look for love at Edward's hand,
 Whose eyes are fixed on none but Gaveston;
 Yet once more I'll importune him with prayers.
 If he be strange and not regard my words,
 My son and I will over into France,
 And to the king my brother there complain,
 How Gaveston hath robbed me of his love:
 But yet I hope my sorrows will have end,
 And Gaveston this blessed day be slain. (2.4.61-69)

⁴⁹ Guy-Bray, 'Homophobia and the Depoliticizing of *Edward II*', p. 131.

The private revelation here is not the affair of which she is suspected and accused: she first states her intention to seek help and comfort in her native France should Edward continue to ‘be strange’, and then wishes for Gaveston to be killed and so removed as a factor in her marriage and rival for her identity as queen consort. There is a sense here of a woman offering her husband ‘one last chance’ before pursuing her own interests. Edward’s continued ill treatment exculpates Isabella’s adulterous pursuits somewhat, as she is unable to fulfill her more licit desires for the husband who does not requite her apparent affection.⁵⁰

The king and queen’s relationship also inverts reified notions of expected gendered behaviour, with Marlowe queering intercessory practice in the play. When Gaveston is banished for a second time, Edward insists that Isabella plead with the nobles for his favourite’s recall. He sends Isabella away from him—which she characterises as her own kind of ‘banishment’ (1.4.210)—until she ‘sue unto [the nobles] for [Gaveston’s] repeal’ (1.4.201). Though Isabella makes it clear that it is against her wishes, she intercedes on her husband’s behalf (1.4.200-27). This action is queered not only in the sense that she is pleading for the king’s male favourite, but in that she intercedes *for* the king rather than *to* the king. If queenly intercession ‘could be used in male politics as a device to enable a king to change his mind or become reconciled with his subjects’, Isabella’s intercession here has the opposite effect of reconciling Edward with the court.⁵¹ His insistence on pursuing a contentious relationship with an unpopular favourite serves only to further alienate him from his subjects. It also engenders what might be construed as the beginning of a private

⁵⁰ Edward does demonstrate more affectionate behaviour that is reminiscent of courtly love traditions late in the play. When he is imprisoned at Kenilworth, Edward sends Isabella a tear-stained and sigh-dried handkerchief to try to ‘move’ her (5.1.118). In the penultimate scene, Edward remains imprisoned, is bedraggled and is about to be murdered, but he again invokes a sense of courtly love. He asks Lightborn, his murderer, to ‘[t]ell Isabel, the queen, I looked not thus, / When for her sake I ran at tilt in France’ (5.5.68-69). Since *Edward II* has focused on dramatising the conflict between the royal couple and the king’s prioritisation of his favourites, it is difficult to read such moments of apparent fondness as more than perfunctory or performative.

⁵¹ Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens*, p. 7. See also Paul Strohm’s chapter on ‘Queens as Intercessors’ in *Hochon’s Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 95-120.

relationship between the queen and the nobleman, who ‘talk apart’ here and later rebel against the king together (1.4.225-229).

The point at which Isabella and Mortimer’s affair began—whether it was before Gaveston returned to court or induced by it—is ambiguous, but what Marlowe shows is not a relationship motivated by romance, physical attraction, or love. In fact, little of the queen and Mortimer’s relationship is staged, and we hear very few of their private conversations and inward feelings towards one another. At no point does Mortimer express his love for Isabella. Isabella professes her love for Mortimer only once, when she says he should be ‘persuaded that [she] loves [him] well’ (5.2.16). The idea that he should be ‘persuaded’ that she loves him, rather than shown, demonstrates how the personal is in service of the political here. Further, her expression of love is framed by her ‘willing[ness] to subscribe’ to Mortimer’s will, so long as ‘the prince [her] son be safe’ (5.2.17-20). The political nature of love is not explicitly explored in the play, nor does Marlowe appear to be making a wider commentary on love in general. Isabella articulates her love for Edward. Edward speaks passionately to and about Gaveston. But Isabella and Mortimer’s relationship is inextricable from its political motivations. Marlowe does not give us insight into the nature of their private relationship as, instead, Mortimer takes on the public role as Protector to the prince and almost-substitute husband to the queen. Isabella’s cuckoldry is troubling not because she lasciviously enacts a shameful sexual identity that causes doubt about the heir’s legitimacy, but rather because it claims a threatening political power for both herself and her ambitious lover.

The power they derive from their rebellion against the king and protectorship over the minor prince is not equal, as Mortimer himself notes on several occasions. By the end of the play, he claims to ‘command’ the queen (5.4.48). He also undermines her when they make their first move against the king. In Act Four, scene four, Isabella and Mortimer are assembled with Prince Edward, Kent, and Sir John when the queen delivers a passionate

speech that begins ‘[n]ow, lords, our loving friends and countrymen, / Welcome to England’ (4.4.1-2). Her words echo kingly speeches made by Shakespeare’s Henry V and Mark Antony, by Eleanor at the beginning of Peele’s *Troublesome Reign*, and supposedly by Elizabeth I at Tilbury on the eve of the Spanish Armada in 1588.⁵² In welcoming these men (back) to England and claiming that ‘[m]isgoverned kings are cause of all this [civil] wrack’ (4.4.9), Isabella implies that England is her land as she situates herself as an alternative to the ‘loose’ Edward who ‘hath betrayed [his] land to spoil’ (4.4.11). Where language, convention, and popular history invite us to here expect a warrior queen, Mortimer—the man who the loyal Kent claims Isabella ‘kiss[es], while they conspire’ (4.6.13)—cuts her off: ‘Nay, madam, if you be a warrior, / Ye must not grow so passionate in speeches’ (4.4.15-16). At this first (and perhaps only) moment where Isabella gestures towards the attitude of a military warrior, Mortimer claims that she is not playing the part appropriately and implicitly transforms her ‘passionate [...] speech’ into a womanly shortcoming.

Isabella begins the rebellion against the king in her son’s name and undertakes the initial diplomatic manoeuvres to gather internal and foreign support, but Marlowe shows Isabella’s waning influence as Mortimer’s own increases. After Isabella first separates herself from Edward because ‘[c]are of [her] country called [her] to this war’ (4.6.65), many of the peers including Rice, Leicester, and Kent note that many martial actions are made ‘in the name of Isabel the queen’ (Leicester, 4.7.59). Isabella has the authority to make such decrees, but—as Leicester also notes—‘the queen’s commission’ is often ‘urged by Mortimer. / What cannot gallant Mortimer with the queen?’ (4.7.50-51). Isabella’s relationship with Mortimer is no secret, and neither is the fact that Mortimer can direct her choices. However, when facing the question about how to treat Edward once deposed, Isabella defers to her subjects

⁵² Henry V encourages his soldiers: ‘[o]nce more unto the breach, dear friends, once more’ (*Henry V*, 3.1.1). In *Julius Caesar*, Mark Antony addresses ‘[f]riends, Romans, countrymen’ (3.2.70), whilst Brutus similarly speaks to people he calls ‘Romans, countymen, and lovers’ (3.2.13). Queen Eleanor addresses the ‘[b]arons of England, and my noble lords’ (*TR*, 1.1.1). Elizabeth I references her ‘loving people’ in the ‘Tilbury speech’ (1588), Harley MS 6798.

and advisors: '[d]eal you, my lords, in this, my loving lords, / As to your wisdoms fittest seems in all' (4.6.29). Her ambiguity here is probably deliberately designed to absolve herself of accountability. In Holinshed, on the other hand, we are told that the 'queene and the bishop of Hereford wrote sharpe letters vnto [Edward's] keepers, blaming them greatlie, for that they dealt so gentlie with him'. Though it is the bishop of Hereford who uses the 'sophisticall forme of words [...] wrapped in obscuritie', Holinshed implicates Isabella by having her involved in the earlier letter-writing.⁵³

Marlowe declines to follow his chronicle source's more direct suggestion of an accusation linking the queen to Edward's death. Instead, Marlowe locates more of the responsibility for the king's eventual violent fate in Isabella's lover than in 'the iron virago' herself.⁵⁴ Though Mortimer claims that Edward's fate is 'not in her controlment, nor in ours, / But as the realm and Parliament shall please' (4.6.35-36), alone onstage in Act Five, scene four, he tells the audience that 'the king must die' and he will 'do it cunningly' to avoid later persecution by the prince (5.4.1-5). He does not write the letter, but he knows and approves of its content and personally delivers it to Lightborn, Edward's eventual murderer. It is shortly after this that Mortimer tells the audience, '[t]he prince I rule, the queen do I command' (5.4.48). Mortimer knows that he can derive political power by influencing the queen consort, and even more so if they are able to overthrow and dispose of an ineffectual king so that she becomes queen mother to a minor son. Despite the reputation Isabella has acquired amongst historians and literary critics as a 'she-wolf', Marlowe does not actually dramatise her as overtly ruthless nor does he show her affair with Mortimer making her particularly powerful in a sustained way.⁵⁵

⁵³ Holinshed, *Chronicles*, p. 341.

⁵⁴ Geoffrey le Baker calls her 'the iron virago' in his chronicles of Edward II and Edward III's reigns. See *The Chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker of Swinbrook*, trans. by David Preest (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2012).

⁵⁵ The poet Thomas Gray applied this epithet to Isabella in his 1757 poem 'The Bard'. Alison Weir discusses the origin and endurance of referring to Isabella as the 'she-wolf of France'. She argues that, '[s]ince 1327,

Much of Isabella's authority and ability to rebel against the king and maintain some aristocratic support derives from her status not as queen consort but queen mother. Though the prince sometimes voices concern about what will become of his father, there is little evidence of a familial affection between himself and the king. The first—perhaps the only—indication of King Edward's fatherly affection comes when he learns that Mortimer has escaped, his brother 'Edmund gone associate' (4.3.39), and John of Hainault joined forces with the queen: he says 'nothing grieves me but my little boy / Is thus misled to countenance their ills' (4.3.48-49). Edward II's articulation of the loss of his 'little boy' to his mother and her faction draws attention to the troubling cyclical nature of monarchical power: monarchy 'makes sense by virtue of being hereditary' and the king's heir is both 'an aspect of himself' and also 'his structural enemy, in the exact sense that the prince's rise is the same thing as the king's fall'.⁵⁶ Edward II ascends the throne because his 'father is deceased' (as we are told in the very first line of the play); the prince will eventually become king for the same reason. In this sense, Isabella's threatening maternity derives from her 'claiming' their son and directly situating him as his father's structural, political enemy.

Prince Edward is very much considered Isabella's son in *Edward II*. He is closely aligned with his mother and frequently referred to as 'her son' (Holinshed also calls him 'hir son' several times) by other characters. But young Edward's relationship with his mother is not simply something imposed on him: he firmly aligns himself with his mother. Having been at the French court for some time, Sir John asks the prince whether he will stay with his 'friends' (that is, his mother's allies) and 'shake off all our fortunes equally' (4.2.19-20).

Prince Edward replies:

So pleaseth the queen my mother, me it likes.
The king of England nor the court of France
Shall have me from my gracious mother's side. (4.2.21-25)

[Isabella] has been more vilified than any other English queen'. See *Isabella: She-Wolf of France, Queen of England* (London: Vintage, 2012), especially pp. 1-3.

⁵⁶ Peter Womack, *English Renaissance Drama* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 293.

The prince refers to his mother's dual maternal and queenly identities whilst his father is just 'the king of England'. Prince Edward chooses to remain with his mother, prompting her to reply, 'my sweet heart, how do I moan thy wrongs, / Yet triumph in the hope of thee, my joy' (4.2.27-28). Though Isabella perhaps manipulates her status as queen mother and uses her son's princely status to challenge her husband's reign, Marlowe nonetheless shows that their relationship is affectionate.

Prince Edward's emotional attachment to his mother is shown again at the play's denouement. When news of his father's death reaches the new King Edward III, Isabella says to him: 'for my sake, sweet son, pity Mortimer' (5.6.55), and '[a]s thou received'st thy life from me, / Spill not the blood of gentle Mortimer' (5.6.69). Edward reads her entreaty as proof of the rumour that she 'spilt [his] father's blood' (5.6.70-74), which Isabella denies. 'I do not think her so unnatural' (5.6.76), Edward confesses, yet heeds the advice of his lords (in a manner we do not see in his father) and 'commit[s her] to the Tower / Till further trial' (5.6.79-80). Isabella says she would prefer to be sent to her death than her 'son think[] to abridge [her] days' (5.6.84). Whether these words are a performance designed to manipulate her son or whether they demonstrate her genuine emotion, they are affecting enough for Edward and make him weep: 'Her words enforce these tears / And I shall pity her if she speak again' (5.6.85-86). In these closing moments, Edward is torn between his resolution to do his duty as the new king and be neither 'slack [n]or pitiful' if his mother is found guilty (5.6.82) and a desire to have her removed from his sight quickly so as not to be affected by her entreaties. Even as he accuses his mother of murder and treason, it is as if he does not want to believe these accusations. Isabella's final statement '[s]tay, I am his mother' is said to 'boot[] not', and so she says '[t]hen come, sweet death, and rid me of this grief' (5.6.90-92). If she cannot be Edward's mother and if her relationship to him is made irrelevant then, she says, she does not wish to live.

Whether Isabella's suicidal thought process is inspired by maternal love or anguish at her diminished power is, once again, open for debate, but her language here does not seem to chime with McCloskey's assessment that Isabella's referral to her maternal identity is a 'role of last resort [that] fails her'.⁵⁷ For Joyce Karpay, too, Isabella is 'a clear example of the duplicitous mother' who 'does not even consider the effect that Mortimer's rise and Edward's demise will have on her son'.⁵⁸ In this view, Prince Edward is simply a pawn in Isabella's plan to be revenged on her inattentive and probably unfaithful husband. Karpay argues that '[f]or Isabella (and perhaps even more for Catherine de Medici in *The Massacre at Paris*), a conflict occurs between the woman's role as mother and her desire for power. These mothers are unable to find a space for both'.⁵⁹ We do not see the same level of affective maternal emotion from Isabella as we do from *Troublesome Reign's* Eleanor or the first tetralogy's Elizabeth Woodville and Margaret, but Isabella is by no means depicted as devoid of such emotion. She speaks to her son gently, of him fondly, and is willing to be used by Mortimer to ensure the prince's safety. In Karpay's view, Isabella cannot be both a good mother and a powerful rival queen to Edward II's kingship. But Marlowe's play invites a more complicated, fraught assessment than this: her husband Edward is both a potential source of power for Isabella and the figure that ultimately enforces her social and political downfall. Isabella manipulates her son to claim power in English politics at the same time as she takes him to France to protect him from these politics, striving to ensure his safety. Isabella is less duplicitous than she is multi-faceted. The Marlovian iteration of this character does not simply rely on female stereotypes or archetypes, but rather shows her complexities and contradictions in a manner that is perhaps more familiar—or at least more frequently

⁵⁷ McCloskey, 'The Worlds of *Edward II*', p. 45.

⁵⁸ Joyce Karpay, 'A Study in Ambivalence: Mothers and Their Sons in Christopher Marlowe', in *Placing the Plays of Christopher Marlowe: Fresh Cultural Contexts*, ed. by Sara Munson Deats and Robert A. Logan (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 75-92 (p. 88).

⁵⁹ Karpay, 'A Study in Ambivalence', p. 88.

studied—in male characters.

PART THREE: QUEENSHIP IN *EDWARD III*

Shakespeare and Kyd's *Edward III* is a play that seems, in many ways, to conform to Nashe's desire for history plays to revive 'our fore-fathers valiant acts' for the stage, but one that also stages these fore-fathers' reliance on royal women.⁶⁰ The play does not show 'the slow collapse of Edward III's military and political regime' and the 'crisis of leadership' that accompanied his ill health in the 1370s.⁶¹ It is not concerned with showing the influence his mistress, Alice Perrers, had over the king following his wife's death, nor with the internal political struggles that emerged when England was, as Holinshed puts it, 'euill guided by euill officers'.⁶² Although this material was available in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, the playwrights do not show how the king 'waxed feeble and sicklie through langor (as some suppose) conceiued for the death of his sonne', the play's glorious, victorious Edward, 'the Black Prince', nor how the king 'appointed the rule of the relme to his sonne the duke of Lancaster', the contentious John of Gaunt.⁶³ As Lois Potter writes, *Edward III* 'dramatizes only the most glorious part of the reign, the victories of the king and his son, the Black Prince, in France. It gives no hint that the prince will die young, leaving behind only a very young son, the future Richard II, to succeed his grandfather'.⁶⁴ Though the play briefly hints at the possibility of catastrophe for the English when it is reported that Prince Edward appears to be losing a battle at Poitiers, the prince emerges victorious, the Scots and French kings are captured, and Brittany is won. Opponents to Edward III's reign are conquered in this play, and the English king is—despite a section dramatising his distracted, lustful pursuit of the Countess of Salisbury—ultimately presented as an effective ruler. Moments of

⁶⁰ Nashe, *Pierce Penniless*, p. 212.

⁶¹ W. Mark Ormrod, *Edward III* (London and New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 549.

⁶² Laura Tomkins's 2013 thesis argues that Alice Perrers 'extend[ed] the scope of her power and influence to the point that she became a 'quasi' or 'uncrowned' queen' after the death of Queen Philippa. See Tomkins, 'The uncrowned queen: Alice Perrers, Edward III and political crisis in fourteenth-century England, 1360-1377' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 2013). Holinshed, *Chronicles*, p. 410.

⁶³ Holinshed, *Chronicles*, p. 411.

⁶⁴ Lois Potter, *The Life of William Shakespeare: A Critical Biography* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 167-68.

potential crisis are quickly overcome in a play that celebrates and emphasises English triumphs. Neither are the later, more ‘troublesome’ aspects of Edward III’s reign addressed, as this play ends not with the death of its titular king, but at a relatively early moment of his reign. In *Edward III*, the king’s reign is poised at a moment when he and his empire are ascendant.

If *Edward III* dramatises the victorious actions of valiant, royal men, it is also a play that is framed by a reliance on royal women as it begins and ends with reference to queens: at the beginning of the play, Edward III’s claim to the French throne through his mother is articulated, whilst the final scene depicts the arrival, intercession, and maternal identity of Edward’s wife, Philippa of Hainault. Even when these women are absent from or silent in the dramatic action—as indeed they are for much of this play—their voices, actions, and royal identities motivate the narrative and influence their outcomes. Queens in *Edward III* are, to use Howard’s phrase, ‘at the edges of the text’. This peripherality, however, only manifests in the amount of time queen characters actually spend onstage, as they remain a present absence, influencing—and, to an extent, determining—the course and outcomes of the political action.

The interdependent relationship between queens’ bodies and countries is even more inextricable in this play than in any of the plays examined earlier in this study, perhaps because *Edward III* was written in around 1595 and so dates slightly later than many Elizabethan history plays. By this time, Elizabeth I was 62 years old and still with no named successor. It was from around the mid-1590s that James VI of Scotland became ‘relentless in advancing the presentation of his claim to the succession’, clearly acknowledging the increasingly apparent fact of the queen’s ageing.⁶⁵ The intersecting relationship between politics and the queen’s body was bound even more closely together by 1595, and *Edward*

⁶⁵ Richard A. McCabe, ‘The poetics of succession, 1587-1605: the Stuart claim’, in *Doubtful and Dangerous: The Question of Succession in Late Elizabethan England*, ed. by Susan Doran and Pauline Kewes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), pp. 192-214 (p. 205).

III's interest in succession questions is conspicuous by its unfaltering emphasis on the 'certainty' of a succession that would actually never be.

Because of the close relationship between queenly bodies and political action in *Edward III*, the sections on 'countries' and 'bodies' are not wholly discrete. Instead, I begin by arguing that, despite her physical exclusion from the play's action, Isabella of France is a significant present absence. Edward III's claim to the French throne is contingent on the queen mother's direct blood relationship to the previous kings of France, and so she gives legitimacy to her son's—and England's—pursuit of this political ambition. Similarly, the queen consort, Philippa, is absent for much of the play. She does not appear onstage until the final scene, during which she speaks only seventeen lines of a fairly conventional register. Her less conventional martial action—performed against Scottish troops whilst her husband is undertaking his French battles—happens offstage, as battles often do in early modern plays. But its brief description is not condemned but celebrated, because it is accompanied by an emphasis on her maternal body. The heavily pregnant Philippa assumes a princely role in England's conflict with Scotland in Edward's absence, and the audience is invited to see her action as praiseworthy in a way that is not afforded to Margaret of Anjou's generalship in Shakespeare's first tetralogy.

I next consider the Countess of Salisbury, who is constructed, through Edward's attempts to seduce her, as a potential mistress. The Countess's body is read alongside descriptions and reminders of Philippa's body, which effectively constructs her as a distorted reflection of the queen consort. Finally, this section examines Philippa's motherhood (as opposed to pregnancy) in more detail, concluding by considering *Edward III*'s last scene as a case study where the play's emphases on the interwoven relationship between queenship, countries, and queenly bodies come together.

i. Queens and countries

Unlike *Troublesome Reign* and *Edward I*, *Edward III* does not begin with a queen-figure introducing the action, but with the king welcoming a banished French traitor, Robert of Artois, and instructing him to ‘now go forwards with our pedigree’ (1.5).⁶⁶ Shakespeare and Kyd immediately introduce ideas of lineage, succession, and Anglo-French relations. Edward asks Artois to confirm ‘[w]ho next succeeded Philip le Beau’, former king of France and father to the recently deceased Charles IV of France (1.6). Artois confirms that three of Philip le Beau’s sons became king, though each died and ‘left no issue of their loins’ (1.9). Seeking to establish his claim to the throne of France, Edward asks if his ‘mother [was] sister unto those’ former French kings (1.10). Artois replies:

She was, my lord, and only Isabel
Was all the daughters that this Philip had,
Whom afterward your father took to wife;
And from the fragrant garden of her womb
Your gracious self, the flower of Europe’s hope,
Derived is inheritor to France. (1.10-16)

Artois’s affirmation of ‘Isabel’s’ identity is the play’s only mention of Isabella of France, the queen who effectively deposed her husband, Edward II. The play does not engage with the ‘contradictory rumours’ surrounding Isabella’s reputation and relationships.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, it is this mention of the former queen consort and regent that launches the main action of the play and, indeed, that launches the Hundred Years’ War (1337-1453). Artois’s explanation explicitly outlines the origin of Edward’s claim for the audience, and also foregrounds the fact that this claim is derived from his mother: the French throne was Isabella’s father’s, rather than Edward’s grandfather’s. Artois also implies a singularity to Isabella (and therefore

⁶⁶ William Shakespeare and Thomas Kyd, *King Edward III*, ed. by Richard Proudfoot and Nicola Bennett (London and New York: Arden, 2017). All further references are to this edition unless otherwise stated, and scene and line numbers are given parenthetically in the body of the essay.

⁶⁷ The *Lanercost Chronicle* (1346) states that, in 1326, ‘[t]here were contradictory rumours in England about the queen, some declaring that she was betrayer of the king and kingdom, others that she was acting for peace and the common welfare of the kingdom, and for the removal of evil counsellors from the king’. Quoted in Laura Slater, ‘Rumour and reputation management in fourteenth-century England: Isabella of France in text and image’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 47.2 (2021), 257-92 (p. 257).

her son's) claim, as she was 'all the daughters that this Philip had' and Edward's 'gracious self' came from her fertile, 'fragrant' womb, the description of which offers a very different depiction of Isabella than the forceful, sexual, transgressive queen of Marlowe's *Edward II*. The earliest lines of the play introduce the main crisis of Edward III's reign: his attempt to expand his dominion by claiming his apparent blood right to the French throne. They are also permeated with tensions surrounding succession, and particularly succession of or via the female line.

Shakespeare and Kyd begin this play with an image of growth, fertility, and fragrance that specifically foregrounds the queenly body. Artois notes that Edward, the 'flower or Europe's hope', has come from the 'fragrant garden of [his mother's] womb' (1.14) in a line reminiscent of Queen Eleanor's early assertion that 'from this womb hath sprung a second hope' in Peele's *Troublesome Reign* (*TR*, 1.1.6). In both plays, the playwrights draw explicit attention to the maternal body. In *Edward III*, the matrilineal claim is accentuated through its description of the maternal body as something apparently beautiful and aromatic. But such favourable portrayals of wombs and emphases on them as sites of 'hope' are not usual. Wombs in history plays are often described as dark places, responsible for evil in the child. For example, in Shakespeare's *King John*, Constance says that Eleanor has a 'sin-conceiving womb' (*KJ*, 2.1.182). In *Richard III*, the Duchess of York laments her 'accursèd womb, the bed of death' for producing Richard (*R3*, 4.1.53). Margaret similarly calls Richard 'slander of thy mother's heavy womb', a 'hell-hound' that has 'crept' from his mother's womb (*R3*, 1.3.228; 4.4.47-48). Richard himself expresses a wish to 'bury' Elizabeth Woodville's murdered children in her 'daughter's womb' in an image that combines fertility with death (*R3*, 4.4.354). Premodern discourses about the womb were often similarly negative or steeped in anxiety. The *Penitential of Theodore* (c. 700) suggests that the menstruating and childbearing female body is unclean, as 'women shall not in the time of impurity enter into a

church' and should 'do penance who enter a church before purification after childbirth, that is, forty days'.⁶⁸ Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* also comments on the 'interval that must elapse after childbirth before a woman may enter church' and the 'Old Testament rule: that is, for a male child thirty-three days and for a female, sixty-six'. Though Bede claims that this is 'an allegory', the emphasis on women's impurity and uncleanness remains.⁶⁹ Amy Kenny's *Humoral Wombs on the Shakespearean Stage* consults a wealth of evidence in order to suggest that 'cultural anxiety around women's bodies pervades the womb' in the early modern period as in the medieval, while Ursula A. Potter discusses 'the womb's fearsome reputation' and 'association with the devil'.⁷⁰ We often see such anxieties in history plays, particularly around the queen's body, as much responsibility for the security and longevity of the kingdom depends on her. However, at the beginning of *Edward III*, Isabella's womb is described as beautifully fertile, not least because of the political, legalistic claim to France that can be derived from her physical maternal body.

If the womb was, as a 1656 tract on 'all diseases indigent to women' suggests, 'the matrix [that] is the cause of all those diseases which happen to women', then the queen (and her womb) was 'the matrix of future kings': in a linear model of succession, all kings descend from (and depend on) the queen mother.⁷¹ This idea of the queen as a 'matrix of future kings' is particularly pertinent to discussion of Isabella of France, as not only do Edward III and his descendants come from her, but it is via her that all the subsequent kings of England derive their claim to France. Indeed, the play makes no mention of any other part of Isabella's identity except for the claim to the French throne that she transfers to her son by virtue of

⁶⁸ The *Penitential of Theodore*, quoted in *Love, Sex and Marriage in the Middle Ages: A Sourcebook*, ed. by Conor McCarthy (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 44-53 (p. 49).

⁶⁹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation, Book I* (731), quoted in *Love, Sex and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, pp. 53-60 (p. 55).

⁷⁰ Amy Kenny, *Humoral Wombs on the Shakespearean Stage* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 6. Potter, *The Unruly Womb in Early Modern English Drama*, p. 19.

⁷¹ *The compleat doctress: or, A choice treatise of all diseases indigent to women* (London: for Edward Farnham, 1656), pp. 2-3. John Carmi Parsons, 'The Pregnant Queen as Counsellor', pp. 39-61 (p. 44).

having given birth to him: her most important trait becomes her possession of a womb. The play detaches the idea of Isabella's womb from any sense of Isabella herself, perhaps in part due to early modern discourses around the figure of Isabella of France. 'The evil odour of her reputation was rife in France, and had been a source of deep mortification to [Edward III]' during Isabella's lifetime, and this 'she-wolf' reputation was only reinforced through Marlowe's depiction of the cuckolding, ambitious, manipulative queen consort in the early 1590s.⁷² Though *Edward III* does not seem to be in direct dialogue with *Edward II*, it is likely that the writers of the later play would have been familiar with the earlier, and therefore would have been aware of Isabella's theatrical representation amongst the playgoing public. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Shakespeare and Kyd make no mention of any other part of Isabella's identity aside from her unclaimable claim to the French throne that her son subsequently inherits and claims for himself.

It is because Edward's ambition for dynastic expansion is contingent on the matrilineal claim that war breaks out between France and England. Artois explains to Edward that '[t]he French obscured your mother's privilege' (1.20) because they claim they '[o]ught not admit a governor to rule / Except he be descended of the male' (1.24-25). Artois is referring to Salic law, which excluded women from dynastic succession in France. As Christopher Allmand states, Edward had 'perhaps the best claim' to succeed Charles IV of France, but because a woman could not 'pass on a claim which, as a woman, she could not herself exercise' it actually 'worked against Edward's ambition'.⁷³ Anne Curry, however, notes that '[a]lthough women had been excluded from the succession in 1317, nothing had been said about their right to transmit a claim to their male offspring. There is no proof that

⁷² Agnes Strickland and Elizabeth Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England from the Norman Conquest*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 530.

⁷³ Christopher Allmand, *The Hundred Years War: England and France at War c.1300 – c. 1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 10.

the French were at this time consciously following ‘Salic Law’.⁷⁴ Curry argues that the ‘idea that Salic Law prevented women even transmitting claims was, it seems, largely invented by the French in late fourteenth and early fifteen century as retrospective justification for Valois tenure of the throne’.⁷⁵ The playwrights articulate this justification at the same time they remind the audience of the strength and immediacy of Edward’s claim. Derby, for example, states that ‘Edward’s great lineage by the mother’s side / five hundred years hath held the sceptre up’ (6.133-34), but it is not only English characters who are shown to acknowledge and even support his claim. The First Frenchman says that Edward’s claim is ‘rightful’ (5.35); Gobin guides Edward safely across the Somme (6.1-3); Charles, King John of France’s son, praises Edward’s hospitality and honour, and allows Salisbury to pass through his land unharmed despite his father’s advice to the contrary (13.97-102). Such French support undoubtedly has a propagandist element, serving to reinforce both the narrative of Edward’s claim and to once again cast the French as mutable, traitorous, ‘turning Frenchmen’, as Artois himself ironically puts it (8.14).

An undercurrent of such anti-French sentiment runs through *Edward III*, seemingly with the purpose of further justifying the English king’s pursuit of his claim to France that he derives from his mother. Prince Edward calls King John of France a ‘tyrant’, who ‘tears [the realm’s] entrails with [his] hands / And like a thirsty tiger suck’st her blood’ (6.118-21) in a simile that recalls Margaret of Anjou’s French ‘tiger’s heart wrapt in a woman’s hide’ (3H6, 1.4.138). In scene 15, John notes the confusion, dismay, and fearfulness of the French army (15.1-2) when they recall the prophecy predicting that they will lose this battle, whilst Prince Charles reports that ‘the French do kill the French’ because they are afraid and ‘[c]owardly’ (15.11-16). Kyd and Shakespeare do not simply put awareness of the prophecy into the mouths of French characters, but show these characters lamenting the French army’s fear of

⁷⁴ Anne Curry, *The Hundred Years War*, 2nd edn (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 40.

⁷⁵ Curry, *The Hundred Years War*, p. 40.

the prophecy. Charles even exclaims: ‘O, that I were some other countryman! / This day hath set derision on the French, / And all the world will blurt and scorn at us (15.26-28).

Following further English victory and French defeat, John says it is ‘fortune, not truly force’ that conquers (17.10). Charles responds that this is ‘an argument that heaven aids the right’ (17.11): again, a French character suggests implicit belief in the legitimacy of Edward’s claim.

We can also read the ready support of a matrilineal claim in light of *Edward III*’s mid-1590s context. First, England had had two queens regnant for forty years (and two alternative would-be queens in Lady Jane Grey and Mary, Queen of Scots) and so was invested in the possibility and legality of female succession. Second, England’s possession of French territory had diminished significantly since the Hundred Years’ War, and culminated in the loss of their final French territory, Calais, in 1558.⁷⁶ *Edward III*, then, seems to suggest that the loss of France was the result of unlawful Valois succession to the throne, engendered by the application of misogynistic French Salic law. As such, the late-sixteenth century English audience may have felt both indignation at the loss of their continental possessions and reassurance that such a loss was ‘unlawful’.

Indeed, Anglo-French enmity runs through *Edward III*, and the play often shows characters talking about the battles that take place between the two countries. One of the most striking descriptions is of the ‘batell on the see before Sluse in Flaunders’, which recalls the 1588 Spanish Armada.⁷⁷ Proudfoot and Bennett explain that the Battle of Sluys was ‘the only significant French naval defeat in Edward’s reign’, after which Edward adopted the title

⁷⁶ Susan Rose offers a detailed account of Calais under English rule, and of the movements that led to the ‘end of the story’ for England’s possession of Calais in 1558. *Calais: An English Town in France, 1347-1558* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2008).

⁷⁷ *The Chronicle of Froissart Translated out of French by Sir John Bourchier, Lord Berners, Annis 1523-25*, ed. by W. P. Ker, vol. 1 (1901), p. 146.

‘Sovereign of the Sea’.⁷⁸ The details of the battle are recounted—to the French king and his company, as well as the audience—by a French mariner, who describes the ‘proud armado of King Edward’s ships’ (4.71) as colorful, ‘glorious’, and ‘majestical’ (4.65ff). Eric Sams argues that the Mariner’s description was ‘no doubt intended to evoke the Armada of 1588’.⁷⁹ The Armada, according to Muir, was a source of ‘national pride’ that fed into English appetite for patriotic history plays.⁸⁰ English triumph over the Spanish Armada has been cast, in English historiographical traditions, as an against-the-odds victory that proved God’s favour for Protestantism, and as a stunning success for England and its queen. Not only does *Edward III*’s description of English victory recall the Spanish Armada, but so too does John’s earlier assessment (articulated before French defeat is described) that ‘all the mightier that their [England’s] number is, / The greater glory reaps the victory’ (4.31-2). The play’s naval battle is aligned with the Spanish Armada, and in turn Elizabeth I and Edward III are aligned with one another, which perhaps accounts for the play’s more propagandist content and outcomes.

Edward III begins with Edward articulating his main political ambition—to claim the French throne—but it is a threat closer to home that draws the English king’s focus and which he first moves to counter. *Edward III*’s insular politics revolve around conflict between England and Scotland after the ‘league’ between them is ‘[c]racked and dissevered’ (Montague, 1.123): the Scots move south, invade ‘bordering towns’ (1.127), and besiege the Castle of Roxborough in the Scottish Borders. The Scots are subsequently described as ‘treacherous’ by Montague (1.124), ‘traitorous’ by Edward (1.155), and ‘vile [and] uncivil’ by the Countess of Salisbury (2.12). Such anti-Scottish sentiment has contemporary

⁷⁸ *The Chronicle of Froissart*, p. 146. Proudfoot and Bennett, *Edward III*, n. 4.0, p. 228. Graham Cushway, *Edward III and the War at Sea: The English Navy, 1327-1377* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011), p. 99. Donna N. Murphy, *The Marlowe-Shakespeare Continuum: Christopher Marlowe and the Authorship of Early Shakespeare and Anonymous Plays* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), p. xviii.

⁷⁹ Eric Sams, *Shakespeare’s Edward III* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 164.

⁸⁰ Muir, *Shakespeare as Collaborator*, p. 31.

Elizabethan resonance (as I discuss below), but it also reflects the tumultuous relationship between Scotland and England in the play's fourteenth century setting. As Rémy Ambühl writes:

If the wars between England and Scotland do not stand at the heart of the Hundred Years War, the fate of the three kingdoms – France, England and Scotland – were closely intertwined at that period. (The 'auld alliance' between France and Scotland had been sealed against their common enemy, England [in 1295].)⁸¹

The Franco-Scottish Auld Alliance—'a mutual, defensive, military alliance against the might of England'—made Scotland an implicit third party in the Hundred Years War.⁸² The Alliance, whether symbolic or otherwise, remained in place until the Treaty of Edinburgh in 1560 and continued 'to threaten England, on and off, until a king of Scotland, James VI, became king of England in 1603'.⁸³ *Edward III's* parallel dramatisations of Anglo-Scottish and Anglo-French conflicts suggests the Alliance's ability to divide England's strength, and so potentially conquer England itself. Whilst Edward appoints his son and nobles to gather support for their impending 'famous war' with the French (1.139-152), he himself will use the forces already at his disposal to 'once more repulse the traitorous Scot', King David (1.155). The Scottish threat, then, is suggested to be more immediately pressing for England.

But despite the Treaty of Edinburgh, conflict between England and Scotland continued and was still a recent reality in the late Elizabethan era in which *Edward III* was first penned and performed. Perhaps *Edward III's* criticism of Scotland signifies a desire for a unified 'Britain', but with England as the dominant party: Scottish attempts to expand or rebel against England would therefore be an overly ambitious and inappropriate encroachment. However, the idea of a Scotland infringing on English lands and monarchy seems to invite a more direct comparison between the play's interest in Scotland and its

⁸¹ Rémy Ambühl, *Prisoners of War in the Hundred Years War: Ransom Culture in the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 55.

⁸² Siobhan Talbott, *Conflict, Commerce and Franco-Scottish Relations, 1560-1713* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 15.

⁸³ Curry, *The Hundred Years War*, p. 119.

contemporary moment: the spectre of Mary, Queen of Scots. As discussed in the Introduction, Mary had been used as a figurehead for the Catholic opposition to Elizabeth I and was subsequently executed less than a decade before this play's likely first public performance. As I have been arguing, any reference to Scotland would elicit memory of this still-recent cultural context. It would also engage with the increasing likelihood of Elizabeth I's successor being James VI of Scotland, Mary's heir, thereby making the notion of a unified 'Britain' seem evermore possible.

Mary, Queen of Scots is recalled through the play's depiction of Anglo-Scottish conflict, and Elizabeth I is recalled by the play's apparent reference to the Spanish Armada. But the idea of active queenship is depicted through the figure of Philippa, Edward III's queen. When Edward travels to France to support this campaign, his queen fills in the gaps that his 'absen[ce] from the realm' leaves (10.42). Philippa's actions are not mentioned directly until the play's tenth scene, when Lord Percy reports to Edward that David of Scotland

Is by the fruitful service of your peers
And painful travail of the queen herself –
That, big with child, was every day in arms –
Vanquished, subdued and taken prisoner. (10.43-46)

The queen's role as regent takes an intensely physical strain as her unconventional martial action is framed by the 'painful travail' it takes on her maternal body. Rackin notes that '[t]he report of Queen Philippa's pregnancy at the Battle of Newcastle, unprecedented in Holinshed's or Froissart's chronicles, seems to be the playwright's invention'.⁸⁴ This image of female fecundity conflated with one of martial valour is unexpected, but 'seems designed to associate [Philippa's] best-known role in English history, the 'fruitful service' she provided as the mother to Edward's famous seven sons, with her service to England at the

⁸⁴ Phyllis Rackin, 'Women's roles in the Elizabethan history plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 71-85 (pp. 81).

battle where the Scots king was captured'.⁸⁵ The play itself reminds us that Philippa is mother to several sons, as, when Prince Edward is in danger, the king says '[w]e have more sons / Than one to comfort our declining age' (8.23-24): he can afford to offer the prince the opportunity to prove himself a 'fit heir unto a king' (8.93) because Philippa has provided him with more than one viable male heir. Philippa's martial endeavours are not presented as transgressive, but rather as admirable—even extraordinary—in the king's absence. They are also rendered more appropriate by her pregnancy because she is carrying a potential heir (should Prince Edward die before the king and without issue), and so is literally embodying her role as maternal queen and her connection to the king.

The depiction of Philippa fighting alongside English soldiers and leading an army against the Scottish is not presented as overtly transgressive, but it is still far from 'Shakespeare's [usual] version of the English past, [where] the valour of women is a monstrous anomaly'.⁸⁶ Indeed, where Eleanor of Aquitaine, Isabella of France, and Margaret of Anjou each lead an army in the *John* plays, *Edward II*, and the first tetralogy respectively, their military involvement (particularly the involvement of Isabella and Margaret) is described as much more troubling. Perhaps the celebratory description of Philippa's martial involvement derives from the fact that not only is it decidedly female (she is a visibly pregnant queen who, by and large, seems to conform to her expected roles as consort), but because it does not challenge the loyalty a wife supposedly owes a husband nor that which a queen owes a king. Where Eleanor's, Isabella's, and Margaret's military endeavours are designed to advance their own interests or their children's claim to the English throne (even if it means the deposition of that child's royal father), Philippa's serves only the good of her king and country. Perhaps, then, we might consider how Philippa's martial action here evokes images of Elizabeth I at Tilbury before the Spanish Armada. Like Elizabeth, Philippa leads an

⁸⁵ Rackin, 'Women's roles in the Elizabethan history plays', pp. 81-82.

⁸⁶ Rackin, 'Women's roles in the Elizabethan history plays', p. 78. Many early modern plays also fit with this assessment of Shakespeare's treatment of female valour.

army for her country. Unlike Elizabeth, Philippa is pregnant, and so she embodies the iconography of Elizabeth as the ‘benevolent and loving virgin mother of her nation’ in a more literal, visible—but certainly less virginal—way.⁸⁷

It is not only Philippa’s military leadership and fighting that prevents a successful Scottish uprising: her identity as a Hainaulter was also important for averting potential Scottish uprising. Laynesmith explains that Philippa

was initially considered in 1319 as a possible bride for the future Edward III as a means of allying England with the Low Countries, perhaps to prevent Scotland from making a similar alliance. Edward II subsequently decided that a French or Aragonese bride would be more valuable, but in 1326 his queen, Isabella, invaded England to overthrow Edward II and in this process she required foreign troops, among them Hainaulters, whose support was bought with her son’s marriage to Philippa.⁸⁸

Philippa’s queenship, then, was intensely political, deployed with the express purpose of facilitating support for certain claims to the throne. Indeed, Edward’s marriage to Philippa facilitated ‘a series of important political and personal connections between England and the Low Countries’.⁸⁹ Lisa Benz St. John states that ‘Philippa’s natal ties to the Low Counties were an advantage to Edward III [...] who manipulated them to gain support for the Hundred Years War’.⁹⁰ Marion Turner discusses how other countries and territories also became part of the conflict, noting the fluctuating and porous borders—and political structures—in medieval Europe.⁹¹ Turner also says that ‘the culture of the Hainault court infused the court of Edward and Philippa’, whilst Louise Tingle argues that royal women such as Queen Philippa used (literary) patronage to ‘transmit their natal culture to their marital home and maintain links with their birth families’.⁹² During the Hundred Years’ War, then, England sought and nurtured an alliance with Hainault that gave them a Continental ally against France and that,

⁸⁷ Ronald G. Asch, ‘A Difficult Legacy: Elizabeth I’s Bequest to the Early Stuarts’, in *Queen Elizabeth I: Past and Present*, ed. by Christa Jansohn (Munster: Lit, 2004), pp. 29-44 (p. 35).

⁸⁸ Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queenship*, p. 37.

⁸⁹ John A. Wagner, *Encyclopedia of the Hundred Years War* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 2006), pp. 252.

⁹⁰ Lisa Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens*, p. 168.

⁹¹ Marion Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

⁹² Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life*, p. 99. Louise Tingle, *Chaucer’s Queens: Royal Women, Intercession, and Patronage in England, 1328-1394* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 191.

in turn, influenced English politics and culture. There was also Tudor interest in the Hainault line: Henry VII derived his claim to the throne as a descendant of John of Gaunt, the third son of Edward and Philippa. Though her character is absent for much of *Edward III*, Philippa's importance remains a quiet presence in the play.

Despite not being physically present for much of the play, Philippa is consistently described in physical terms, as an active queen. We learn that she is travelling to Calais to meet Edward. Edward, hearing news of her travel, pitches a tent and 'wait[s] her coming' (10.60). Though this might be a demonstration of his kingly prerogative, it nonetheless conjures an image of a strong, (pro)active female body: the king is in stasis, waiting for his queen to come to him. The purpose of her travel, we learn, is to report her army's success against the Scottish king and, it seems, to protest John Copeland's refusal to surrender David to her in the king's stead (10.59). Percy reports that she 'entreat[s]' Copeland to 'surrender [...] his prize' and is 'grievously displeased' when he refuses to do so '[t]o any but unto [King Edward] alone' (10.49-53). She is so displeased, indeed, that she is still talking about this slight when she first appears on stage in the final scene, as I discuss in more detail below. Philippa's anger responds to Copeland's apparent refusal to accept her as an adequate regent, which intimates that Philippa sees herself in a prince-like capacity in a manner reminiscent of Elizabeth I. Where Philippa has been offstage for much of the play's action, her voice here is forceful and insistent on her ability to make decisions and lead independently.

ii. Queens' bodies, motherhood, and men

History plays often discuss and dramatise queens' bodies, sexual viability, and their potential to be appropriate consorts who can provide an heir. In *Edward III*, however, it is not the king's wife who is the initial subject of his sexual gaze: it is the Countess of Salisbury. At the beginning of the play, we see Edward attempt to recast the Countess as an alternative

queen—possibly as an effort to justify his adulterous lust for her—for whom he claims to be willing to cast off (and even murder) his wedded queen consort. Queen Philippa thus becomes a present absence in the early parts of the play, particularly in the Edward's wooing of the Countess. Indeed, despite Edward's diplomatic concerns and expansionist ambitions—he notes 'we shall have wars / On every side' (1.156-157)—and despite his assertion that he will lead the response to the Scots' movement south, Edward becomes distracted from his military and political endeavours. The first woman we see onstage—and that we see the king interacting with—is the Countess, with whom Edward quickly becomes enamoured.

Proudfoot and Bennett note that, in the first part of the play, Edward 'seesaw[s]' between his 'two projects, amatory and military'.⁹³ This distraction is immediately acknowledged onstage by Lodwick, who notes how the king's 'eye in her eye [is] lost' (2.167) and bids 'Scottish wars, farewell' because he 'fear[s] 'twill prove / A lingering English siege of peevish love' (2.188-89). Edward's infatuation is later cited by King John of France during a speech to his '[I]ords, and loving subjects' (6.140; 6.155-57), showing that Edward's distraction is both well-known and disparaged.

When Edward meets the Countess, he attempts to woo her in a manner similar to Edward IV's attempts to woo Elizabeth Woodville in *3 Henry VI* and Richard III's attempts to woo Anne Neville in *Richard III*. But the audience knows that this king will not (and cannot) marry the target of his affections because he is already married. Potter argues that these scenes—the scenes most often attributed to Shakespeare—'seem partly an expansion of Edward IV's brief and stichomythic courtship of Elizabeth Woodville in *3 Henry VI* and partly a rewriting of *Lucrece* with a happy ending'.⁹⁴ Indeed, there is the sense that it is more than just the castle under siege. When we first meet the Countess in the second scene, she notes that she fears '[e]ither to be wooed with broad unturned oaths / Or forced by rough

⁹³ Proudfoot and Bennett, *Edward III*, n. 3.102-04, p. 217.

⁹⁴ Potter, *The Life of William Shakespeare*, p. 168.

insulting barbarism' (2.8-9) when the Scottish king and Douglas discuss their attempts to claim the castle (2.40-47). Even before her encounter with the king, the Countess is introduced as a sexually attractive woman to be 'conquered'.

However, Edward's attempted courtship of the Countess is expressed in a more romantic manner, and does not seem to chime explicitly with Potter's 'Lucrece' reading. Edward articulates his affection using language of love, not just lust. He says the Countess is 'all the treasure of our land' (2.211) and 'the queen of beauty's queen' (2.223), to whom he wishes to direct poetry. He instructs that Lodwick write poetry for the Countess on his behalf, and address it '[t]o one that shames the fair and sots the wise, / Whose body is an abstract or a brief / Contains each general virtue in the world' (2.247-49). There is an emphasis on ink and paper in Edward's poetic instruction, as meaning is written—and read—on the Countess's body. Further, unlike Edward IV and Richard III's wooings of their respective queens, Edward III's attempted courtship of the Countess (and consequent cuckqueaning of his queen) is accompanied by moral introspection. The king calls it 'a shameful love' (2.117) that 'shoots infected poison in [his] heart' (2.129). His attraction to the Countess is 'the ground of his infirmity' (2.224), which refers to both his lovesickness and moral failure in seeking to pursue this attraction.⁹⁵ There is a sense of shame in Edward's pursuit: he notes how the 'nightingale sings of adulterous wrong' (2.276) and characterises himself as a 'poisonous spider' (2.450) who needs to '[m]aster this little mansion of [himself]' (3.94).

The Countess is the first character to mention Philippa directly, as she says that Edward cannot give her his love because 'Caesar owes that tribute to his queen' (2.418). She tries to redirect Edward's attention towards his queen whilst also emphasising the link between her body's purity and her soul's safety (2.401-8). When Edward is still not deterred, she attempts to call his bluff by suggesting that they must 'remove those that stand between'

⁹⁵ Proudfoot and Bennett comment on the duality of the word 'infirmity' here. See *Edward III*, n.2.224, p. 175.

them (3.133-34). Less than ten lines after she explicitly tells him '[y]our Queen, and Salisbury, my wedded husband' need to die for their love to be realised (3.139-41), Edward agrees and tells her '[n]o more; thy husband and the Queen shall die' (3.148). By referring to Philippa by her title 'the Queen', Edward depersonalises her whilst also suggesting a singularity and immutability to the identity of the queen consort. Edward's lust has the potential to destroy all three parties, and his callousness here is emphasised by the Countess. Edward only 'awakes from this idle dream' (3.196) when the Countess resorts to threatening suicide if he does not cease his solicitation. He recovers from his infatuation as quickly as he agreed to murder his wife and Salisbury: he makes no further mention of the Countess.

But Edward's inappropriate attempts to seduce the Countess are discussed not just in relation to the abstract concepts of honour, fidelity, and chastity, but also in relation to Queen Philippa. She is depicted as an ideal queen consort: she is virtuous, loyal, fertile, and the mother to a good heir to the throne (as Prince Edward proves himself to be throughout the play, despite the fact that we know that he—like Margaret of Anjou's son, Edward of Lancaster—is an heir who will never reign). Indeed, the first time Edward himself mentions Philippa is in the context of her maternal identity. When their son, Edward the Black Prince, arrives at Roxborough, his resemblance to his mother almost dissuades Edward from pursuing the Countess. The king comments on this resemblance twice: 'O, how his mother's face / Modelled on his corrects my strayed desire' (3.74-79) and '[s]till do I see in him delineate / His mother's visage: those his eyes are hers' (3.85-86). Though this connection is ultimately not enough to stay Edward's desire—news that the Countess has come to visit him reminds him how 'black' and 'foul' Philippa supposedly is by comparison (3.106-07)—both he and the play emphasise the mother's link to the heir; the Prince's relationship to Philippa is written and readable on his body. Like the opening reference to Isabella's 'fragrant womb', this moment emphasises the matrilineal inheritance of physical attributes as well as of virtue.

Philippa, then, is on the edges of this play. She is described, remembered, and readable on the face of her son. She is a character who talks, fights, travels, and mothers. She is also physically absent from the play until the final scene. Nonetheless, the play foregrounds her actions and her voice. Having discussed the reporting of her actions and the comparisons in which she is invoked, it is to her voice that I now turn. When Philippa finally appears onstage, she speaks only seventeen lines, and these lines are in a largely conventional register in that they do not transgress expected boundaries for the queen consort. The play's final scene begins with Edward addressing her: 'No more, Queen Philippe, pacify yourself' (18.1). During her first appearance in this scene, she is immediately told to be quiet, but in such a way that the audience is in no doubt about the presence and force of her voice offstage. We do not hear the voice that prompts Edward's instruction (or perhaps request), but the very fact of this line demonstrates that Philippa articulates herself and her annoyances to the king offstage. We do not necessarily need to hear the queen's voice to know that it is influential.

However, we do see some of her influence enacted in the first eight lines she speaks: she pleads for her husband to 'be more mild unto those yielding men' and show the defeated French citizens mercy (18.39-46). 'It is a glorious thing to stablish peace', she advises the king (18.40), and he responds by agreeing with her and acceding to her intercession: 'Philippe, prevail, we yield to thy request' (18.53). As Strohm notes, a queen's intercession was 'a "sponsored" activity, an activity that—for all its tacitly corrective and admonitory content—seems to have been entirely congenial to male monarchs and to the whole system of relations that maintained them on their thrones,' indicative of 'male zest for female intercession'.⁹⁶ Theresa Earenfight suggests that this acceptance of (and desire for) the performance of queenly intercession was '[l]ess threatening than displays of outright political control' as it 'was seen as feminine pleading that made it permissible for a king to change his

⁹⁶ Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, p. 102.

mind. It was socially constructed femininity but, even as it celebrated the triumphant king, it also served as a critique of male behaviour. Ultimately, it is not about women, but about men'.⁹⁷ Even if Philippa's intercession is chiefly about allowing Edward to show mercy, it is difficult to know the extent to which the intercession was performative and whether the playwrights would have shown the king changing his mind without the queen here. As such, Philippa's intercession gives her a voice here and allows her to demonstrate an acceptable, expected form of queenly expression. Further, Parsons suggests that intercession is a 'maternal function' for a queen and an opportunity for a king to 'reveal his paternal magnanimity'.⁹⁸ Such 'parental' functions appear even more literal when we remember that Philippa is still 'big with child' in this scene, as she is described earlier (10.45). Philippa's pregnancy during '[t]he Calais incident' (this intercessory moment) was 'embellished if not fabricated' by Froissart, and followed in Shakespeare's and Kyd's dramatisation of Edward III's reign.⁹⁹ If the postpartum body exists in an 'exclusively female space', as Kenny argues, then the pregnant body is very much displayed for all to see in this play as it is in *Edward I*.¹⁰⁰ We see the spectacle of Philippa's female, maternal body, but it is now accompanied by her voice to create an appropriate but powerful intercessory effect.

Philippa only speaks seven more lines after her intercession, but these lines are used again to insist on her (maternal) authority. First, despite the fact that her irritation with Copeland's refusal to yield King David to her custody had already been reported and Edward had already said she should 'pacify herself', two of Philippa's seventeen lines are given to her own articulation of her 'displeasure' (18.88) with Copeland for 'scorn[ing] the King's command [by] / Neglecting our commission in his name' (18.83-84). Philippa insists on her own authority in legalistic, directive terms, calling attention to Copeland's attempt to resist

⁹⁷ Earenfight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe*, p. 11.

⁹⁸ Parsons, 'The Pregnant Queen as Counsellor', p. 53.

⁹⁹ Parsons, 'The Pregnant Queen as Counsellor', p. 41.

¹⁰⁰ Kenny, *Humoral Wombs*, p. 100.

this delegated authority in the king's absence. Her final five lines return our attention to her motherhood, as she laments her son's (falsely) reported loss at Poitiers (18.157-61). These final two lines return her to silence, as she gives him 'a token to express [her] joy / For inward passions will not let [her] speak' (18.190-91): she kisses her husband and then is silent, which parallels the silencing of women common to the endings of many of Shakespeare's comedies. However, this silencing is (re)cast as maternal joy, and does not seem to be the play's final word on either women or queenship.

The final word of the play, indeed, is 'queen'. Edward III says they will return to England as '[t]hree kings, two princes, and a queen' (18.243). He refers to the captured kings David of Scotland and John of France, to Prince Edward and the French Prince Philip, and to Queen Philippa. This conclusion is a strange way to end the narrative, especially given the play's exploration of legitimacy and rightful inheritance, as it suggests future disruption and civil unrest in its unusual multiplicity of kings. It is more typical for history—and history plays—to allow for many queens: potential queens, rival queens, queen mother, consorts, and regents, but one true, legitimate king. Here, Philippa's queenly singularity is instead suggested, once again aligning her with, and offering an 'extra-theatrical allusion to', England's reigning monarch, Elizabeth I.¹⁰¹ Having 'queen' as the very last word of the play implicitly reinforces the idea that this play is about queens' actions, bodies, and voices, even in their absence. *Edward III* begins by discussing the queen mother's body—her womb—and ends with reference to the pregnant queen consort's voice and body. The play politicises fecundity, daringly dwelling on images of queenly wombs. But if Philippa's 'prominence in [the final] scene' is the 'extra-theatrical allusion to Queen Elizabeth I' that Proudfoot and Bennett argue it is, then the fact that this allusion is loaded with images of fertility and motherhood makes it pointed and problematic.

¹⁰¹ Proudfoot and Bennett, *Edward III*, n. 18.0.4, p. 335.

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In *Edward III*, as in other history plays discussed here, references to Elizabeth I—whether oblique or overt—are never one-dimensional. Indeed, *Edward I*, *Edward II*, and *Edward III* are plays that are framed by queens who are on the edges of the narrative, but in ways that give the plays meaning and endow the men's actions with legitimacy. The three plays were not conceived as a set, but they are a group united not just by chronology but also by a shared interest in using depictions of different types of queenly bodies and voices to navigate questions about insular geopolitics, nation, succession, and female rule, in both the medieval past and in the plays' late Elizabethan present.

Chapter III

Queens in the Wars of the Roses Plays: the first tetralogy and *The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV*

RICHARD PLANTAGENET: Since you are tongue-tied and so loath to speak,
 In dumb significant proclaim your thoughts.
 Let him that is a true-born gentleman
 And stands upon the honour of his birth,
 If he suppose that I have pleaded truth,
 From off this briar pluck a white rose with me.

SOMERSET: Let him that is no coward nor no flatterer,
 But dare maintain the party of the truth,
 Pluck a red rose from off this thorn with me.¹

In *The First Part of Henry VI*, Shakespeare creates a symbolic, visual moment of origin for the conflicts that would become known as the Wars of the Roses.² The series of civil wars took place between 1455 and 1487, and were fought by rival branches of the Plantagenet family, the House of Lancaster and the House of York. The term ‘Wars of the Roses’ emerged retrospectively because of the badges of each warring faction: the Lancastrian red rose and the Yorkist white rose.³ In the scene above, Shakespeare imagines an exact moment in which powerful men pluck either a red or white rose to symbolise their allegiance. Women are omitted from this moment, but this absence is not characteristic of the four plays that Shakespeare dedicates to the Wars of the Roses. Between 1591 and 1593, early in his years as an active playwright, Shakespeare wrote four plays that are now known by the unifying epithet ‘the first tetralogy’: *Henry VI, Part One (1 Henry VI)*; *Henry VI, Part Two (2 Henry*

¹ William Shakespeare, *The First Part of Henry the Sixth* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, pp. 475-538 (2.4.25-33). Further references will be to this edition unless otherwise stated. I will henceforth refer to this play as *1 Henry VI*.

² John A. Wagner’s *Encyclopedia of the Wars of the Roses* gives an overview of the ‘naming of the Wars of the Roses’, citing Walter Scott’s novel *Anne of Geierstein* (1829) as the source usually credited with coining the term. Wagner also notes that ‘Sir John Oglander had published a 1646 pamphlet entitled *The Quarrel of the Warring Roses* and David Hume had written in his 1762 *History of England* about “the Wars of the Two Roses”.’ Megan G. Leitch also notes that, in addition to Shakespeare, ‘earlier Tudor propagandists such as Stephen Hawes and John Skelton (writing for Henry VII and VIII respectively) deployed the symbolism of red and white roses’, and that ‘contemporaries, from the relative hindsight of Henry VII’s reign, did accept the conceptual instrumentality of the Roses’. Wagner, *Encyclopedia of the Wars of the Roses* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 2006, pp. 294-95. Leitch, *Romancing Treason: The Literature of the Wars of the Roses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 17.

³ It is likely that Henry VII reclaimed the red rose as a Lancastrian symbol on his ascension, so the symbolism of the two roses is anachronistic.

VI); *Henry VI, Part Three* (3 *Henry VI*); and *Richard III*. *1 Henry VI* begins with the funeral of Henry V, and *Richard III* concludes with the newly crowned Henry VII ‘unit[ing] the white rose and the red’ by marrying Elizabeth of York.⁴

Despite the Wars of the Roses conjuring images of men on the battlefield, and despite the fact that the first tetralogy telescopes sixty years of history and thirty years of conflicts, Shakespeare cultivates significant dramatic space for queens. The presence of these queens in the tetralogy is not always contingent on their husbands. They also have dialogue with one another, their conversations often satisfying the rules of the Bechdel test: they do not only discuss men, but also talk about one another and their positions as mothers and queens. These interactions generate some of the plays’ most insightful comments about the nature of queenship and royal rivalries. Though female characters are absent from the imagined moment in which the floral emblems are first evoked as markers of allegiance, the stories and actions of queens run parallel to, are intertwined with, and are involved in the resolution of Shakespeare’s dramatisation of the Wars of the Roses. By including representations of feminine spaces and voices, the first tetralogy interprets the Wars of the Roses in a way that recasts history to allow for greater emphasis on women’s voices and political involvement. As such, the plays are situated in dialogue with late Elizabethan concerns about gender roles and female rule. I argue that Shakespeare uses queens’ voices to question, oppose, and rearticulate history, as well as to comment on the contemporary 1590s moment.

The other 1590s history play that is set during the Wars of the Roses does not place as much emphasis on the political and martial strife that accompanied the conflicts. *The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV*—which has, since the Restoration, usually been attributed to Thomas Heywood—does not seek to negotiate issues of national and international politics, inheritance and lineage, and the role of the queen in the management of

⁴ Shakespeare, *Richard III*, 5.8.19.

court and country in the same way as some of its predecessors in the genre.⁵ A late example of the early modern history play, *Edward IV* seems, instead, to follow a style explored in Shakespeare's second tetralogy (particularly in the two parts of *Henry IV*): focus shifts to include lower ranking characters and comedic subplots, leaving less space for the realities of political struggles and, crucially, for queens' voices, actions, and political agency. However, Heywood also demonstrates an awareness of how such political struggles and queenly interventions were dramatised in earlier history plays, both engaging with and subverting many of these traditions.

In this chapter, I examine how the five plays set during the Wars of the Roses feature networks of queens who talk to one another in ways that suggest, variously, friendliness, kinship, respect, and rivalry. The first, longer part of the chapter focuses on representations of Margaret of Anjou, Elizabeth Woodville, and Anne Neville in the first tetralogy. The second and final part of the chapter looks at Heywood's *Edward IV*, exploring how it responds to and rewrites many of the conventions of the history play genre that Peele established in *Troublesome Reign* and that his contemporaries subsequently incorporated into their historical dramas. *Edward IV*'s main focus is not on historical events and political action, but on urban life and relationships between lower-ranked characters in a way that engages with elements of the incipient city comedy genre.⁶ This shift in emphasis reflects both a stylistic change in the history play genre and its late 1590s moment, when anxieties and uncertainties about who would succeed Elizabeth I would likely have waned as James VI of Scotland emerged increasingly strongly as the probable heir to the English throne. The last part of this chapter discusses the succession question in more detail. It also considers the depiction of

⁵ Following critical tradition, I treat *Edward IV* as one play. Richard Rowland discusses the attribution of *Edward IV* to Thomas Heywood. See 'Introduction', in Thomas Heywood, *The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV*, ed. by Rowland (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 1-77 (p. 9).

⁶ Brian Gibbons argues that 'the conventions of city comedy proper [were] established by about 1605', by which time they were 'widely recognised'. Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 1980), p. 2.

Edward IV's Elizabeth Woodville, and how Jane Shore (the king's mistress) threatens Elizabeth's queenly influence. The play begins by discussing the queen consort's body and ends with a depiction of failed intercession. The diminishing of queenly voices we see in *Edward IV* is indicative of the end of the decade, the end of Elizabeth I's reign, and the end of the history play as the dominant dramatic genre.

PART ONE: QUEENSHIP IN SHAKESPEARE'S FIRST TETRALOGY

Shakespeare spent many of his formative years as a dramatist writing 'intensely nationalistic' history plays concerned with England's 'glorious' and often bloody past.⁷ Culminating in the victory of the first Tudor king, Shakespeare's earliest history plays seem ultimately to contribute to the genre's politically expedient, propagandist aims to 'support the right of the Tudors to the throne'.⁸ However, the first tetralogy does not simply glorify and celebrate the Tudors, but also explores a number of complex issues that Shakespeare would continue to return to throughout his career: what is the nature of divine providence and what happens when it is meddled with? What makes a ruler effectual or ineffectual, just or unjust? And what role do (and should) women play in political and social action? Each of these questions had particular relevance in the late Elizabethan moment, when a woman had ruled England as Queen Regnant for over four decades and refused to name an heir. When Shakespeare addresses the matter of queenship and the role of the 'king's wife' in the first tetralogy, it is difficult to divorce such depictions from the knowledge that they were rendered in a moment of longstanding, independent female sovereignty: that these plays' representations of queens comment as much on their contemporary moment as they do on the history they dramatise.

I have thus far referred to the 'first tetralogy', but it is important to note that considering these four plays as a cogent 'tetralogy' is somewhat misleading. They did not emerge in the 'correct' chronological or sequential order and were probably never performed as a 'series' until the twentieth century.⁹ Though the (re)ordering of the four plays in the First Folio (from which many subsequent editions took their cue) was, as Holderness argues, an editorial decision, it was not too great a leap: largely, the four plays do tell the story of a

⁷ Ribner, *The English History Play*, p. 2.

⁸ Ribner, *The English History Play*, p. 2.

⁹ Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories*, p. 1. Holderness explores the probable compositional dates of the 'first tetralogy', arguing that 'recent research indicates that each play was independently and individually shaped by contemporary cultural pressures' (p. 1). See also the 'Introduction to *The First Part of Henry the Sixth*', in *The Norton Shakespeare*, pp. 465-74 (p. 473).

particular historical period—the Wars of the Roses.¹⁰ The purpose of this study is not to join the debate about whether Shakespeare planned his historical ‘tetralogies’ as sequences.¹¹ Instead, Part One of this chapter follows the usual critical and editorial convention of examining the tetralogy, broadly, in the order of the historical events they chronicle, rather than in compositional order. Yet in whichever order the plays might be treated, the first tetralogy, as a whole, considers discourses of queenship through (perhaps) different iterations of the same historical figures.

Despite the compositional disjunctions, there are, of course, continuities in terms of both characters and concerns in the first tetralogy. As mentioned, the first part of this chapter focuses on the depiction of the three queens who appear in these four plays: Margaret of Anjou, Elizabeth Woodville, and Anne Neville. The first, Margaret, was the daughter of René, Duke of Anjou, the titular king of Naples. In 1445, at the age of fifteen, she married the twenty-three-year-old Henry VI as part of a treaty agreement between a warring England and France. A condition of their marriage was that England forfeit Margaret’s dowry and surrender control of the provinces of Maine and Anjou to France. Shakespeare explores the enmity this union engendered amongst Henry VI’s subject throughout the first tetralogy. The character of Margaret is depicted as contentious, threatening, and disparaged by many of her onstage rivals, not least because she is foreign, her union with the king was unplanned, she is an adulteress, and she is an active participant in politics and war.

The second queen taking centre stage in this chapter, Elizabeth Woodville, was the eldest daughter of Richard Woodville and his socially superior wife, Jacquetta de St Pol (the

¹⁰ The three *Henry VI* plays were probably written between 1591 and 1592, with *2 Henry VI* written first, *3 Henry VI* second, and *1 Henry VI* third (possibly in collaboration with an unknown dramatist). It is thought that *Richard III* followed sometime in 1592-3.

¹¹ Nicholas Grene suggests that the first tetralogy constituted the ‘first serialisation of the fifteenth-century English chronicles for the stage’. *Shakespeare’s Serial History Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 23. Neema Parvini, on the other hand, suggests that it would have been unlikely for a young Shakespeare to ‘plan four plays in advance’. See Parvini, *Shakespeare’s History Plays: Rethinking Historicism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 168.

widow of Henry V's brother and Henry VI's uncle, John of Lancaster, the Duke of Bedford). Elizabeth felt the effects of the Wars of the Roses prior to becoming queen: her first husband, Sir John Grey, died in the second battle of St Albans in 1461, fighting on the Lancastrian side. By the time she met and secretly married the victorious Yorkist claimant to the throne, Edward IV, in 1464, the twenty-seven- or twenty-eight-year-old Elizabeth (five years Edward's senior) was the widow of a prominent Lancastrian knight and mother of two sons under the age of ten. The Woodvilles' Lancastrian associations, coupled with their status as only mid-ranking aristocracy—Elizabeth was technically a commoner—resulted in Edward's personally-motivated, 'politically inconceivable' choice of queen becoming the cause of great controversy.¹²

The final queen I discuss, Anne Neville, was the daughter of Richard Neville, the Earl of Warwick. Warwick was dubbed 'the Kingmaker' because of his central role in the deposition of Henry VI in favour of Edward IV, and later in the brief readeption of the former. In Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Anne is depicted as the queen who is least unsettling of the three, not least because she is English, a member of a well-regarded noble house, and in many ways a more demure, conventionally 'feminine' woman.

The three queen consorts of the Wars of the Roses are introduced in similar ways—in wooing scenes that share some intriguing parallels—but once they share the same royal title, they follow different scripts for queenship. These scripts emerge through, for example, the ways the characters act and speak with royal men, subjects, and one another. The queens often move between subject positions that pertain to a queen consort, a queen regnant, or even a prince and/or princess, throughout the tetralogy (itself not a cogent whole) and within individual plays. The queens' level of involvement in the dramatic-political action—whether they lead armies, facilitate royal unions, or have intercessory power, for example—is

¹² Castor, *She-Wolves*, p. 386.

contingent on the type of queenship they perform, which in turn depends on their nationality and/or geographic background and their status as mother, particularly to royal heirs. My analysis of Shakespeare's first tetralogy follows a similar trajectory to these queenly characters: it begins with a discussion of their commodified sexual bodies, before considering their maternal identities, their 'otherness', and, finally, their relationships with one another.

Queens' Sexual Bodies

As in history plays addressed in previous chapters, queens' bodies shape their identities, and the amount and nature of the agency they are able to exercise depends on their physical, bodily identities. In this chapter I examine how, throughout the tetralogy, Margaret, Elizabeth, and Anne move between identities such as sexual, marriageable woman, mother, foreigner, and outsider. The sexual identities of all three characters are foregrounded during their first appearances, their sexual bodies depicted as much a motivating factor behind their selection to become queen as their political usefulness or appropriateness.¹³ In this first section, I show how the three queens are introduced following the same dramatic and linguistic patterns: powerful men attempt to woo them, and they attempt to resist, but each queen is ultimately seduced (by the Duke of Suffolk on behalf of Henry VI, by Edward IV, and by Richard III respectively). However, Shakespeare also shows how queens can use their sexual identities to claim a form of agency: they do not simply surrender to their seductions, but articulate an awareness of their self-worth and (sexual) appeal to claim some control over—and power in—their new relationships.

These shared wooing patterns, I argue, establish the expectation that these queens will play similar roles: Margaret, Elizabeth, and Anne are all introduced as objects to be won, as

¹³ The sexual identities of Margaret and Elizabeth are certainly much greater motivators for Suffolk (ostensibly on behalf of Henry VI) and Edward IV respectively. Anne is slightly different, as Richard plans to seduce her for a 'secret close intent'—to strengthen his claim to the throne later—in the scene prior to their meeting. *Richard III*, 1.1.158.

women conquered by rhetorical pursuit. But they are pursued to become queen, and it is suggested that their acquiescence will allow them to gain royal power. Shakespeare explores the appropriateness of this power and influence. He casts aspersions on the notion of a ruler marrying for love or (worse) lust by showing the audience the problems that can arise when the monarch weds for reasons that are not always the most politically advantageous. Such caution against hasty or 'inappropriate' marriage might resonate with Elizabeth I, who balanced potentially expedient courtships against the careful construction of her Virgin Queen iconography.

i. Margaret

Margaret, as the daughter of the impoverished, nominal King of Naples and Duke of Anjou, makes her first appearance in the first tetralogy as the Duke of Suffolk's prisoner and object of his lust. Following her introduction in one of the final scenes of *1 Henry VI*, Margaret becomes an important, forceful and problematic presence throughout the rest of the tetralogy.¹⁴ She is afforded a significant amount of textual space: she has the second greatest number of lines in *2 Henry VI* (after Richard, Duke of York) and the fifth most in *3 Henry VI* (after four highly politically active men: the Earl of Warwick; Edward (later Edward IV); Richard (later Richard III); and Henry VI himself). In *Richard III*, only Richard, Queen Elizabeth, and the Duke of Buckingham speak more lines than the former queen consort. Margaret is introduced only at the end of *1 Henry VI*, so her role in this play is minimal, but the character of Joan la Pucelle (whose actor may have also played Margaret) anticipates her later dynamism and contentious political position. Joan's warlike patriotism prefigures Margaret's own generalship, and also echoes Elizabeth I's adoption of a military general identity. In addition to her substantial number of lines—which make her 'one of

¹⁴ It is important to note that Margaret's appearance here was not necessarily her first staged appearance or the first appearance of Margaret written by Shakespeare. See the discussion of the compositional chronology of the 'first tetralogy' above.

[Shakespeare's] most rhetorically powerful female characters', according to Liberty S. Stanavage—Margaret is also frequently the subject of other characters' discussions and is involved in several important political and martial actions offstage.¹⁵

But Margaret's first appearance in the tetralogy is not as the powerful queen we see influencing and commenting on the action of the chronologically later plays, but as a prisoner of war following an English victory over the French. Shakespeare invents a narrative background to Margaret becoming queen quite distinct from the historical facts. Historically, she was a fifteen-year-old 'compromise bride serv[ing] to patch together a compromise treaty' between England and France. She escorted from France by Henry VI's representative, William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk, who was thirty-three years her senior.¹⁶ Shakespeare transforms this story into one of Suffolk's improper desire and personal ambition, and Margaret's response to Suffolk's advances. Critical emphasis tends to focus more on Margaret's transgressive behaviour after she becomes queen and in later plays of the tetralogy, but her relationship with Suffolk poses an early threat to the legitimacy and security of the Lancastrian dynasty.

In the antepenultimate scene of *1 Henry VI*, the audience is introduced to Margaret. However, the emphasis is not on her words or actions, but on her physical beauty. When Suffolk brings Margaret on stage 'in his hand' and reminds her that 'thou art my prisoner' (5.5.1), his action and words anticipates the power he tries to exert over Margaret in the

¹⁵ Liberty S. Stanavage, 'Margaret of Anjou and the Rhetoric of Sovereign Vengeance', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Shakespeare's Queens*, pp. 163-82 (p. 163). Stanavage suggests that Margaret 'plays a historically disproportionate role in shaping both the political landscape and the attitudes of those around her' in Shakespeare's iteration of the Wars of the Roses. 'Margaret of Anjou and the Rhetoric of Sovereign Vengeance', p. 163. This apparent inflation of Margaret's role demonstrates how Shakespeare foregrounds queenly voices and actions to reflect on history and comment on his contemporary moment. Charlene V. Smith discusses the amount of attention the first tetralogy's Queen Margaret has attracted, from both critics and producers seeking to adapt and perform the first tetralogy, since around the mid-twentieth century. 'Margaret of Anjou: Shakespeare's Adapted Heroine', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Shakespeare's Queens*, pp. 455-73.

¹⁶ Castor, *She-Wolves*, pp. 324-25.

ensuing action.¹⁷ Suffolk ‘gazes on her’ (5.5.2 stage direction), praises her ‘fairest beauty’ (5.5.2), and reveals his desire to ‘woo’ (5.5.21; 5.5.34) and ‘win’ (5.5.35) her for his ‘paramour’ (5.5.38) in a sequence of asides. Because he is already married, Suffolk transposes his own desire to ‘win this Lady Margaret’ (5.5.44) onto another: he will ‘win’ her for the king, rationalising that his ‘fancy may be satisfied, / And peace established between these realms’ (5.5.48). His verbal prioritisation of his own ‘fancy’ over the potential for peace reflects his intention to prioritise it in reality. Suffolk pursues his plan to woo Margaret on Henry’s behalf and ‘make her a queen’ (5.5.67), despite correctly predicting the nobles’ dissatisfaction with the union (5.5.49-52).¹⁸ Far from being the pre-approved diplomatic mission of a trusted noble, Suffolk is motivated by sexual desire for the beautiful Margaret, the object of his gaze and his unauthorised, vicarious wooing and marriage proposal.

Margaret performs a perfunctory modesty when first responding to Suffolk’s plans, declaring herself ‘unworthy to be Henry’s wife’ (5.5.79). Sandra Logan argues that Margaret ‘evinces no hubristic or inappropriate self-inflation’ here, but there is the sense that Margaret’s response—though appropriate—will not prevent her acquiescence.¹⁹ Indeed, she consents to the union (if her ‘father please’ (5.5.82), of course) just three lines after her initial reticence and ten lines after Suffolk reaches the crux of his purpose to ‘undertake to make [her] Henry’s queen’ (5.5.73). Shakespeare does not elaborate on whether her assent was motivated by ambition, diplomacy, desire for Suffolk, or knowledge that it would elevate her father out of poverty. Nonetheless, though she accepts the proposal relatively quickly, she is not the active party here. She first attempts to gain nothing but her freedom, and then follows

¹⁷ This stage direction is taken directly from the First Folio text, the only extant version of *1 Henry VI*. Sandra Logan argues that Margaret becomes subordinate to Suffolk as, ‘lacking other supporters’, she becomes ‘increasingly dependent’ on him. Logan, ‘Margaret and the Ban: Resistances to Sovereign Authority in *Henry VI 1, 2, & 3* and *Richard III*’, in *Shakespeare’s Foreign Queens: Drama, Politics, and the Enemy Within* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 209-60 (pp. 212-13).

¹⁸ The first tetralogy shows us how the nobles’ discontent with Margaret becoming Henry VI’s bride is because she comes from a destitute father with no dowry, she is French, and the union comes with the condition that the English surrender Anjou and Maine. I discuss the political unrest caused by Margaret’s marriage to Henry VI in more detail later in this chapter.

¹⁹ Logan, ‘Margaret and the Ban’, p. 211.

Suffolk's cues in initiating the match with Henry. Though this union is presented as dangerous and disadvantageous for England, there are few indicators that Margaret *herself* could pose a threat here.

Rather than being an overtly forceful or sexualised presence, Margaret stresses her purity and inexperience in matters of love. After she and her father have given their assent to a union with Henry, Margaret tells Suffolk to send 'such commendations as becomes a maid, / A virgin, and his servant' (5.5.133-34) and 'a pure unspotted heart' (5.5.138) to the king. This propriety is somewhat problematised when she responds to Suffolk's kiss (and indeed, the First Folio's stage directions make it plain that Suffolk is to 'kisse her')—supposedly to represent her affections for Henry—with 'that for thyself' (5.5.141).²⁰ The extent to which Margaret reciprocates or is receptive to Suffolk's interest is unclear at this stage. Is Margaret coquettish, reluctant, stoic, or pragmatic in accepting this offer? Is she the isolated, vulnerable foreign bride who is unable to anticipate the 'deep divisions among the peers of the realm' and the 'tensions' her marriage will create?²¹ The text allows no certainty.

Margaret is not sexually assertive, though her sexual responsiveness to Suffolk is explored in *2 Henry VI*. It is also the foreboding note on which *1 Henry VI* ends: with Gloucester (Henry's uncle and Protector) fearing that the match will generate great grief (5.7.102), Suffolk remains alone onstage to boast the successful execution of his will to bring Margaret to England's court and crown:

Thus Suffolk hath prevailed, and thus he goes
As did the youthful Paris once to Greece,
With hope to find the like event in love,
But prosper better than the Trojan did.
Margaret shall now be queen and rule the King:
But I will rule both her, the King, and realm. (5.7.103-08)

²⁰ Shakespeare, *Richard III*, Bodleian Arch. G c.7. Available at: firstfolio.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/book.html. Stage direction at 5.5.140. [Accessed July 2018].

²¹ Logan, 'Margaret and the Ban', p. 212.

Not yet guilty of adultery, Margaret is decisively ‘cast in the role of adulteress’ through both Suffolk’s reference to Paris (who abducted the married Helen of Troy in Greek mythology) and his insistence that he ‘will rule’ her.²² And though ‘whatever genuine political power Margaret may have becomes necessarily tainted by her identification as an adulteress’, there is nonetheless an acknowledgement here of the potential power and influence a queen could exert over her king, and an anticipation of Margaret’s personal strength.²³ However, Suffolk’s courtship and final words make it difficult to divorce Margaret from her sexual identity. Her insistence on her purity might be technically true, but it is implied that she will not long remain the appropriately chaste, faithful wife of the king.

The relationship between Suffolk and Margaret anticipated in *1 Henry VI* is shown in greater detail in *2 Henry VI*.²⁴ In Act One, scene three, the newly crowned Queen Margaret discloses her discontent with the English court and the king himself to Suffolk in a 23-line speech (1.3.46-69). She wonders, ‘shall King Henry be a pupil still / Under the surly Gloucester’s governance?’ (1.3.50-51), and laments that his ‘mind is bent to holiness’ so wholly that the ‘triple crown’ (the papal tiara) would suit the king better than the English crown (1.3.59-68). Margaret’s disappointment with the tractable and pious Henry is heightened by his contrast with Suffolk. Margaret tells Suffolk that she had ‘thought King Henry had resembled [him] / In courage, courtship, and proportion’ (1.3.59), ‘but’ the reality of Henry was much different (1.3.61). Suffolk’s masculine courage, manners, and physique are presented in direct opposition to Henry, whose religious focus might be admirable were it not for the fact that it interrupts his martial expectations and responsibilities as king.

²² Jankowski, *Women in Power*, p. 100.

²³ Jankowski, *Women in Power*, p. 100.

²⁴ Shakespeare, *The First Part of the Contention of the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster (The Second Part of Henry VI)*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, pp. 240-316. Further references will be to this edition unless otherwise stated, and act, scene, and line references will be given parenthetically throughout the body of the thesis. I will henceforth refer to this play as *2 Henry VI*. The title *The Second Part of Henry VI* was given to the play in the First Folio (F1). The first quarto version of 1594 was about a third shorter and entitled *The First Part of the Contention of the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster*.

Margaret's wish that her husband should be more like Suffolk gives voice to her desire and evidences an amorous relationship between the pair. Her speech is littered with chivalric imagery that builds on her initial assessment that 'he seems a knight' (*IHVI*, 5.5.57): we are presented with images of a Suffolk who 'rann'st a-tilt in honour of [her] love' (1.3.55), and of a king unable or unwilling to participate in such courtly rituals (1.3.61-64). Thus, while the king seems more suited to hagiography or exegesis, Suffolk is cast as the champion to Margaret's queen in a manner reminiscent of medieval courtly romance.²⁵

But the relationship between Margaret and Suffolk does not end with the romance's conventional happy ending: Suffolk is permanently banished for suspected treason and involvement in Gloucester's death (3.2.245-90), and is subsequently murdered by pirates (4.1).²⁶ When the king announces Suffolk's banishment, Margaret immediately begs that Henry 'let [her] plead for gentle Suffolk' (3.2.291). Henry responds with an uncharacteristic display of will:

²⁵ We might consider, for example, Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* (1485), which depicts Lancelot as Queen Guinevere's champion and lover. This relationship has particular resonances for this discussion of a problematic love triangle: the adulterous relationship between a knight and the queen, and the consequent cuckolding of the king, are also features we see *1 Henry VI* and *2 Henry VI*. See Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, ed. by Stephen H. A. Shepherd (New York: Norton, 2004). In Act Four, scene four of *2 Henry VI*, Margaret's demonstrative anguish at Suffolk's death—manifesting in her talking to his decapitated head and cradling it to her breast—is reminiscent of the late fifteenth century romance *The Squire of Low Degree* (c. 1475). In the poem (which itself engages with and satirises romance conventions), the princess embalms and keeps the mutilated body of a man she believes to be her lover, performing daily ritualistic kisses on it. See *The Squire of Low Degree*, in *Sentimental and Humorous Romances*, ed. by Erik Kooper (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005). When Suffolk is banished in Act Three, scene two of *2 Henry VI*, Margaret's and Suffolk's parting dialogue again resembles that of (courtly) lovers: she kisses his hand and 'dew[s] it with [her] mournful tears' (3.2.341-45), breathes 'a thousand sighs' for him (3.2.347), is torn between wanting him to leave quickly and to 'embrace, and kiss, and take ten thousand leaves' (3.2.356). Suffolk responds in kind, declaring that her words banish him more than the king could (3.2.360), that he would be content to live in the wilderness if he only had her 'heavenly company, / For where [she is], there is the world itself, / With every several pleasure in the world' (3.2.362-65). Their exchange becomes increasingly fraught with conventional romantic imagery: Suffolk is her 'soul's treasure' (3.2.384); he cannot live without her (3.2.390); she will find him again, wherever he is in the world (3.2.408-9); he takes her heart with him as 'a jewel, locked into the woefull'st cask' (3.2.411-12). Suffolk also makes overt sexual inferences during this conversation. He tells her that to die in her sight would be 'like a pleasant slumber in thy lap' (3.2.390-92), and that 'by thee to die were but to die in jest' (3.2.402). The word 'die' is, of course, an early modern pun for reaching orgasm. The Quarto text also has 'she kisseth him' written into the stage directions as they part, Margaret now actively furthering the connection where in *1 Henry VI* she could be read as the passive recipient.

²⁶ Helen Cooper argues that the happy ending is central to the romance genre. See *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 9-10; pp. 361-407. K. S. Whetter, similarly, states that 'romance's defining generic features are love, ladies, adventure and a happy ending', in *Understanding Genre and Medieval Romance* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), p. 155.

Ungentle Queen, to call him gentle Suffolk,
 No more, I say! If thou dost plead for him
 Thou wilt but add increase unto my wrath. (3.2.291-92)

Margaret's attempt at intercession is decisively denied. As I have discussed previously, intercession was an 'official influence [...] accepted as part of queenship as office' where the queen could undertake 'pre-emptive pleading' or appeal for 'a post facto change of course'.²⁷ However, Henry not only refuses Margaret's intercessory endeavour, but catalogues it as something less than noble, as inappropriate: performing queenly intercession here evokes Henry's ire and makes Margaret an 'ungentle Queen'. Indeed, Margaret does not try to persuade the king to take a different course in an appropriate, Esther-like fashion: she does so because of a personal, romantic interest in Suffolk.²⁸ The context suggests that her sexual desire motivates her performance (and bastardisation) of this conventional queenly role.

It is unclear whether Margaret's and Suffolk's onstage romance is matched by an offstage sexual relationship, but Shakespeare demonstrates that the queen desires a man who is not her husband. Though she is not a sexual aggressor who consciously weaponises her femininity to further her political power—unlike, say, Tamora in another of Shakespeare's earliest plays (*Titus Andronicus*) or even Cleopatra a decade later (in *Antony and Cleopatra*)—she is a woman with sexual desires that have ramifications for the English court. The queen's sexuality exists outside of her husband's chamber and apart from the purpose of creating an heir to the throne: Margaret cuckolds the king and, thus, a succession problem could arise. However, despite the fact that 'the theme of succession permeates Shakespeare's oeuvre', he does not explore this potential in great detail in the first tetralogy.²⁹ Phyllis Rackin argues that 'Margaret's adultery has no real impact on the action of the *Henry VI*

²⁷ Earenfight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe*, p. 11.

²⁸ Lois Huneycutt discusses the 'Esther topos' in 'Intercession and the High Medieval Queen: The Esther Topos', in *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. by Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), pp. 126-46.

²⁹ Cathy Shrank, 'Counsel, succession and the politics of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*', in *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought*, ed. by David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 101-18 (p. 108).

plays', and indeed, it does not change what happens or even how Margaret is discussed by other characters.³⁰ However, Margaret's relationship with Suffolk—and its implicit threat to the Lancastrian dynasty—does suggest an impact in its Elizabethan connections.

Indeed, childlessness, illegitimacy, and anxieties surrounding succession are issues that recur in many of Shakespeare's plays, and that continued to permeate Elizabethan society. Before becoming queen, a young Elizabeth had been declared the true heir to the English throne (*Succession to the Crown Act 1533*), declared illegitimate and removed from the line of succession three years later just as her sister had been (*An Act concerning the Succession of the Crown, 1536*), and reinstated as a legitimate heir with the 1543 *Succession to the Crown Act*. Unsurprisingly, questions and concerns about Elizabeth's succession were enduring and extensive. Elizabeth's lifelong childlessness resulted in several hereditary strands claiming the right to be her heir, and a number of politically dangerous succession tracts were produced throughout Elizabeth's reign.³¹ Succession, then, was not simply a longstanding historical matter but a very real contemporary concern, and one that is reflected in Shakespeare's early history plays. In the first tetralogy, Margaret's sexual body is threatening not only because she enacts a taboo female desire but also because, in doing so, she creates a potent potential threat to the Lancastrian dynastic continuation in a way that may have resonated with Elizabethan audiences.

³⁰ Rackin also argues that 'the women's sexual transgressions seem almost gratuitous—dramatically unnecessary attributes, at best added to underscore their characterization as threats to masculine honor, at worst unwarranted slanders'. Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 158.

³¹ Early modern succession tracts, though never completely suppressed or banned in their own right, were dangerous and contentious. In 1563, John Hales wrote a complex tract entitled *A Declaration of the Succession of the Crowne Imperiall of Englande*, which supported the claim of the descendants of Henry VIII's sister, Mary (she was also the grandmother of Lady Jane Grey, who briefly took the throne in 1553). Hales was imprisoned for three years and subsequently held under house arrest. See *A Declaration of the Succession of the Crowne Imperiall of Englande, 1563*, in *The Hereditary Right of the Crown of England*, ed. by Francis Hargrave (London, 1713), pp. xx-xliii. In 1581, *An Act against Seditious Words and Rumours Uttered against the Queen's most excellent Majesty* made circulating any words or material deemed slanderous or seditious a punishable offence.

ii. Elizabeth

Queen Margaret's successor, Elizabeth Woodville, is introduced in *3 Henry VI* as 'Lady Gray'. Her first scene follows a similar pattern of wooing as seen between Suffolk and Margaret. King Edward tells his brothers, and the audience, that Elizabeth is a widow petitioning for her slain husband's lands to be restored after they were 'seized on by the conqueror' at the Second Battle of Saint Albans (3.2.1-4). Shakespeare dramatises an origin point for Edward's and Elizabeth's courtship, establishing a distinctly sexual motivation behind Edward's eventual marriage proposal (as, indeed, we also saw with Suffolk's wooing of Margaret). Like in Heywood's *Edward IV*, Edward's choice of bride is presented as definitively his choice. His personal 'will' (4.1.16) contrasts what we see with his predecessor, Henry VI, who agrees to marry Margaret in apparent acquiescence with Suffolk's will. However, in Shakespeare's rendering, both unions are motivated by men's physical desire, and both unions cause unrest at court and political insecurity. Nonetheless, Shakespeare shows that Elizabeth is not simply a beautiful but passive object of Edward's sexual desire by emphasising her voice and will throughout *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III*.

Elizabeth's swift social transition—from commoner, widow, and subject to Queen of England—is motivated by Edward's sexual desire, but her own opinions are emphasised at each juncture. Her first appearance in Act Three, scene two sees Edward declare that she 'shalt be [his] queen' (3.2.106). In the next scene, news of their matrimony reaches the French court. When Elizabeth returns to the stage in Act Four, it is as Edward's queen.³² The

³² When she is first directly addressed, it is by Edward as 'widow' (3.2.16), a title which is reiterated a further eight times throughout the scene by both Edward and Richard, both directly to Elizabeth and in asides (ll. 21, 26, 33, 82, 99, 102, 109, 123). The First Folio assigns Elizabeth's speeches to 'Wid.', making this her chief identifier. Shakespeare, *3 Henry VI*, Bodleian Arch. G c.7. Available at: firstfolio.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/book.html [Last accessed July 2018]. Even when she has married Edward and become queen consort, the Folio's stage directions and speech allocations continue to list Elizabeth as 'Lady Gray'. Though some modern editions have sought to clarify potential confusion by adding '[Edward's queen]' or similar to directions for Elizabeth's entries, exits and speeches, and though Elizabeth is referred to as the queen at several points during the spoken action following *3 Henry VI* 3.2, it is only in the play's final scene that the Folio lists Elizabeth as simply 'Queene'. It is not until the Lancastrian forces and their coordinator, Margaret—who is 'Queene Margaret' in most of the Folio's stage directions—are defeated that Elizabeth ceases to be listed as 'Lady Gray' and begins to

quick succession of scenes reinforces the notion of Edward and Elizabeth's union being, as Richard says, a 'hasty marriage' (4.1.18). Though Shakespeare presents Elizabeth as being aware of the social capital her beauty affords her during her first interaction with a powerful man who is sexually attracted to her, she is not portrayed as a seductress. Instead, Shakespeare places the emphasis on Edward's sexual appetite, and allows Elizabeth to use her voice to refuse Edward's advances until he offers her a better social and political prospect. Indeed, Edward quickly agrees with Richard that it would be 'dishonour to deny' Elizabeth's 'suit [...] to repossess [her husband's] lands' (3.2.9-10; 3.2.4), but he decides to 'yet [...] make a pause' (3.2.10).³³ His brothers, Richard and George of Clarence, read his intentions as sexual without hesitation, which seems to add credence to Edward's reputation as a 'seducer' who, according to Dominic Mancini's account of monarchical affairs, 'pursued with no discrimination the married and unmarried, the noble and lowly'.³⁴ Thomas More also wrote that Edward was 'given to fleshly wantonness' in his youth.³⁵

Edward explicitly articulates his sexual desire when he seeks to gauge how 'much' Elizabeth will do to reclaim her late husband's lands for her sons (3.2.36-49). The 'service' she must offer to regain the lands, he says, is 'an easy task—'tis but to love a king' (3.2.44; 3.2.53). Edward's and Elizabeth's ensuing exchange is stichomythic, the rhetorical device producing 'the effect of a verbal duel' which echoes the language of the hunt employed by Richard and Clarence earlier in the scene.³⁶ The result is a tense tête-à-tête, where Edward's intentions become clear and Elizabeth's ignorance recedes and is replaced by her refusal to

be listed as 'Queene'. For much of the play, the play script's references emphasise Elizabeth's former marital status (and, by extension, her fertility) before the royal identity she derives from her union to the king.

³³ Edward says it would be dishonourable not to grant Elizabeth her request because her husband died 'in the quarrel of the house of York' (3.2.6). This rewriting of history is corrected in *Richard III*, when the Grey/Woodville association with the House of Lancaster is rearticulated.

³⁴ Dominic Mancini was an Italian priest and scholar who visited England in 1482-83 and wrote an account of monarchical affairs. *De Occupatione Regni Anglie per Riccardum Tercium (The Usurpation of Richard III)*, ed. by C. A. J. Armstrong (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 83.

³⁵ Thomas More, *The History of King Richard III and Selections from the English and Latin Poems*, ed. by R. S. Sylvester (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 5.

³⁶ Patrice Pavis, *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*, trans. by Christine Shantz (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1998), p. 370.

comply with his advances. Though this exchange could be read—and played—as loaded with sexual tension, Elizabeth is not More’s opportunistic temptress who ‘perceived’ Edward’s ‘appetite’ and deliberately ‘kindled his desire’ so that she may refuse to be his mistress and therefore become queen.³⁷ Though there are direct echoes of More in this ‘wooing’ scene—for example, More’s ‘too simple to be his wife [and] too good to be his concubine’ becomes Shakespeare’s ‘I am too mean to be your queen, / And yet too good to be your concubine’ (3.2.97-98)—Shakespeare does not directly follow More’s representation of a sexually manipulative Elizabeth.³⁸

The playwright offers no explicit condemnation of or commentary about Elizabeth’s personal desires or ambitions during her earliest appearance, but he does emphasise her voice and will by showing her resisting Edward’s sexual advances. First, she says ‘[m]y mind will never grant what I perceive / Your highness aims at, if I aim it aright’ (3.2.67-68). When he forthrightly continues, ‘[t]o tell thee plain, I aim to lie with thee’ (3.2.69), Elizabeth’s refusal is again swift and immediate: ‘To tell you plain, I had rather lie in prison’ (3.2.70). Edward’s proposal is an ultimatum, whereby she will have the lands ‘if [she] wilt say ‘ay’ to [his] request; / No, if [she] dost say ‘no’ to [his] demand’ (3.2.79-80). Elizabeth says she will not ‘purchase’ the lands with her ‘honesty’, seeking to reject the sense of mercantile exchange and even prostitution surrounding Edward’s clumsy wooing and exercising of his authority over her property and fate.

It could indeed be argued that Elizabeth’s ignorance of Edward’s desires and subsequent refusal are both acts, as the audience is given even less insight into her psychological processes than we saw with Margaret when she refused Suffolk’s similar advances in *1 Henry VI*. However, Edward and Richard each make a comment which suggests a genuineness behind Elizabeth’s reactions: Richard says to Clarence, ‘[t]he widow

³⁷ More, *The History of King Richard III*, p. 62. Stephen Greenblatt offers a brief discussion of Shakespeare’s use of More in his ‘Introduction to *Richard III*’ in *The Norton Shakespeare*, pp. 539-44 (p. 539).

³⁸ More, *The History of King Richard III*, p. 62.

likes him not—she knits her brows’ (3.2.82), whilst an aside by Edward claims that ‘her looks doth argue her replete with modesty’ (3.2.84). Presumably, Elizabeth is not to be understood as such a consummate actress as to fool both brothers not only with her words but her expression. Whether we read Elizabeth’s rejection of Edward as a calculatedly coy performance or an honest and appropriate refusal, it is difficult to deny her strength here: her voiced resistance is itself a form of agency, and it in turn gains her more power by generating Edward’s altered offer to marry Elizabeth rather than simply make her his mistress. Not only does she launch her ‘suit to repossess those lands’ lost by her late husband apparently independently (3.2.4), she (at least initially) fervently denies the advances of the king himself, the country’s most powerful individual who is exercising his immediate authority over the future of both herself and her sons.

Elizabeth, then, balances an appropriate modesty with a determined insistence of self-worth. In an aside, Edward praises Elizabeth’s modesty, wit, and ‘all her perfections [which] challenge sovereignty’ (3.2.84-86), deciding that ‘she is for a king; / And she shall be my love or else my queen’ (3.2.87-88). Having observed her aversion to becoming his ‘love’—‘lover’ or ‘mistress’ being more accurate epithets for the arrangement he initially seeks—Edward changes course to pursue the latter option. ‘Say that King Edward take thee for his queen?’ (3.2.89), he questions, as if testing the idea aloud and her receptivity to his revised proposal. Just as Margaret protests her unworthiness to be queen when Suffolk woos her, Elizabeth tells Edward that she is ‘a subject fit to jest withal / But far unfit to be a sovereign’ (3.2.92-93), ‘too mean to be your queen, / And yet too good to be your concubine’ (3.2.97-98). She twice acknowledges that her modest social standing makes her an unsuitable candidate for queen—recalling historical anxieties about her queenship and anticipating these anxieties manifesting in the remainder of the tetralogy—though she is not so humble as to then accept Edward’s alternative. Following her first assertion that she is ‘far unfit to be a

sovereign', Edward reiterates that his intention is to 'enjoy [her] for [his] love' (3.2.95), but his offer of marriage notably absent. It is Elizabeth's second refutation which prompts Edward to insist on his proposition with greater certainty: '[y]ou cavil, widow—I did mean my queen' (3.2.99). Edward makes light of Elizabeth's reminder that she already has sons, and closes down the one hundred line verbal struggle to definitively conclude that she should '[a]nswer no more, for thou shalt be my queen' (3.2.106). Interestingly, Elizabeth does indeed 'answer no more', the text itself leaving her consent dubious. Despite the attention this scene gives to a woman's will, this silencing after a man's insistence on marriage prefigures the problematic endings of many Shakespearean comedies, of Olivia being claimed as 'Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen', of Benedick 'stop[ping Beatrice's] mouth' with a kiss.³⁹ The next time Elizabeth appears onstage, it is as Edward's wife and queen.

Though Elizabeth herself does not return to the stage until midway through Act Four, the political ramifications of Edward's hasty choice are made clear in the next scene. Margaret has arrived at the French palace to ask King Louis's 'just and lawful aid' against the Yorkist 'usurp[ers]' (3.3.21-37). The Earl of Warwick has also travelled to France on Edward's behalf to ask that 'the virtuous Lady Bona, [Louis's] fair sister' be granted '[t]o England's King in lawful marriage' (3.3.56-57). A union between Edward and Lady Bona would 'sinew both these lands together' (2.6.91) and 'confirm that amity' between England and France (3.3.54), and, as Margaret laments in an aside, strengthen the Yorkist hold on the crown ('[i]f that go forward, Henry's hope is done', 3.3.58). Louis and Lady Bona come to agree to Warwick's proposal, their allegiance and support shifting to the Yorkist faction. Despite Margaret's insistence that she will not leave until Louis's mind has changed in her favour (3.3.158-161), there is a sense that this new French alliance with the Yorkists will solidify the latter's claim to the English throne.

³⁹ Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* (5.1.375); *Much Ado About Nothing* (5.4.96).

When a decisive end to the civil wars seems to be in sight, a post arrives at the French court to disrupt this conclusion: it brings news of Edward's marriage to 'the Lady Grey' at precisely the time and place where it can do most damage to his security on the throne. 'Dare he presume to scorn us in this manner?', Louis demands, the 'us' referring to the national insult to France and personal insult to Louis (3.3.178). Warwick also feels Edward's betrayal keenly, as Edward has broken his promise to always require Warwick's 'counsel and consent' (2.6.102). At the French court facing dishonour, shame, and French wrath, Warwick promises to put aside his 'former grudges' with Margaret and the Lancastrians in order to 'revenge [Edward's] wrong to Lady Bona / And replant Henry in his former state' (3.3.181-98). Warwick, Margaret, and her son, Prince Edward, agree that the latter should marry Warwick's eldest daughter to secure their allegiance. Edward's marriage to Elizabeth elicits a convergence of discontent to be levied against the English king: an insulted French king, seeking revenge, will join his army with the martial forces of Edward's Lancastrian rivals, whilst one of his most powerful allies has been alienated and therefore shifts his allegiance.⁴⁰

Edward's decision to marry Elizabeth instead of Bona, and the consequent political discontent, mirrors the events surrounding Henry's union with Margaret. Both sexualised wooing scenes signify poor decision-making and tactless changes of course by men who either influence England's government (Suffolk) or are directly responsible for this rulership (Edward). They do not make the best decisions for England, in stark contrast, perhaps, to Elizabeth I's abstaining from marrying even her favourite, Robert Dudley. As with Edward's planned union with Bona, Henry had also first agreed a politically superior match: marrying

⁴⁰ As mentioned above, Edward had previously acknowledged Warwick's influence when he told him that 'in thy shoulder do I build my seat, / And never will I undertake the thing / Wherein thy counsel and consent is wanting' (2.6.100-02). Margaret, too, calls Warwick 'proud setter-up and puller-down of kings!' (3.3.157), whilst Warwick himself declares that he will 'uncrown' Edward (3.3.232), that he 'was the chief that raised him to the crown / And [he'll] be the chief to bring him down again' (3.3.262-263). Coupled with Warwick's later role in the play, these statements all anticipate the epithet 'Kingmaker' that would come to be applied to Warwick for his influence on monarchical affairs. They establish a clear sense that Warwick will be as powerful an enemy as he was an ally.

the Earl of Armagnac's only daughter would have ensured 'a goodly peace' between England and France (*1 Henry VI*, 5.1.5-6). But as Suffolk (who, we remember, arranged the union of Henry and Margaret) points out, though Margaret comes without a dowry from a poor father, that father is a king *and* of good standing in France. As such, an international alliance is established. The same is not true of Edward and Elizabeth: she is English. Not only was she a bride chosen without counsel, she was a widow and a commoner, and so marrying her affords England no additional political security: as the Marquis of Montague reminds Edward, 'to have joined with France in such alliance / would more have strengthened this our commonwealth / 'Gainst foreign storms than any home-bred marriage' (*3 Henry VI*, 4.1.35-37). But Edward insists on his authority as king and his resulting right to have his 'will' (4.1.16; 4.1.48-49), the decision very much his own. This is unlike Henry, who was entirely malleable, even disinterested, when it came to selecting his queen. Both unions arose as a result of lust, the first Suffolk's and the latter Edward's. However, Suffolk's lust was coupled with his ambition, his desire to 'rule the king' through Margaret. Edward, meanwhile, compromises his authority and respectability to satiate his amorous desires; as Warwick says, Edward has 'match[ed] more for wanton lust than honour, / Or than for strength and safety of our country' (3.3.210-11).

However, though Edward's language is not conventionally 'romantic' and his wooing, according to Clarence, some of the 'bluntest [...] in Christendom' (3.2.83), his later relationship with Elizabeth is presented as fairly affectionate. Where Henry's and Margaret's relationship seems largely perfunctory in the first tetralogy, Edward's and Elizabeth's appears more genuine. Laynesmith explains that Edward's choice of bride effectively

rejected all the potential endorsements of his kingship that a wife could bring: the strength of diplomatic alliance, the opportunity to display his majesty in a public wedding, and the validating role by which a foreign, noble, virgin queen could make his sovereignty more 'whole'. That Edward was willing to take this gamble is still

most convincingly explained by accepting that he had fallen in love.⁴¹

Laynesmith continues to argue that the ‘love explanation’ was the predominant view of Edward’s contemporaries, citing the Milanese ambassador’s assertion in 1464 that ‘it is publicly announced here that the King of England has taken to wife an English lady, they say out of love’.⁴² Another letter, also from the Milan Calendar State Papers of 1464, similarly writes of Edward’s ‘determination’ to marry Elizabeth, ‘having long loved her, it appears’.⁴³ Love, Laynesmith and contemporary accounts seem to argue, is the only logical explanation for Edward’s marriage to Elizabeth and subsequent disregard for the potential problems that might arise from the union. Certainly, Edward was unlikely to have had great qualms about pursuing an amorous relationship with a woman to whom he was not married, particularly given his reputation for licentiousness (and, later, his taking of many mistresses).

Shakespeare’s representation of this relationship seems, to an extent, to follow such contemporary accounts where the match is rationalised as one not only of lust, but also of love. For Edward, selecting a queen is not simply about pursuing political advantages: it becomes a way to exercise his own authority and ensure he fulfils his own desires. It is Elizabeth’s sexual body that attracts Edward, but it is her voice that induces Edward to translate his lust for her into the offer of marriage that elevates her status and affords her political power. Indeed, it is Elizabeth’s rhetorical skill and political astuteness that she later utilises, in *Richard III*, to help bring the Wars of the Roses to an end.

iii. Anne

Anne’s introduction in *Richard III* follows the same dramatic and linguistic pattern as the introductions of Margaret and Elizabeth in the earlier plays, but this patterning is used to

⁴¹ Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens*, p. 62.

⁴² Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens*, p. 62. For the full quotation from the Papers, see ‘Milan: 1464’, in *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts in the Archives and Collections of Milan 1385-1618*, ed. by Allen B. Hinds (His Majesty’s Stationery Office: London, 1912), pp. 110-14.

⁴³ ‘Milan: 1464’.

quite a different effect. Where we see men become sexually attracted to Margaret and Elizabeth, Richard's attraction to Anne is less physical than political: he tells the audience that he wishes to marry her 'not all so much for love, / As for another secret close intent' (*Richard III*, 1.1.157-58). Like her predecessors and parallel queens, Anne's first appearance is not as queen: she is 'Lady Anne', daughter of the Earl of Warwick and widow to Henry VI's and Margaret's son, Prince Edward. Anne's character is also introduced when misfortune has brought her low. Similar to the way in which Margaret's first (chronological, in terms of the order of history with which the tetralogy is concerned) appearance depicts her as a prisoner, and in which Elizabeth's first appearance shows her as a relatively powerless widow petitioning for the return of her husband's lands, Anne's first appearance is characterised by a sense of loss and desperation. Like Elizabeth's, Anne's widowhood renders her sexually available, which Richard knows and aims to exploit in order to strengthen his alliances and, later, his own kingship.

Anne's initial rejection of Richard is violently condemnatory and vehemently unforgiving. She is not self-effacing or coy in the way we might interpret Margaret and Elizabeth as having been, nor does she protest her unworthiness. Nonetheless, her attitude toward Richard becomes a soft sort of doubt and a willingness to be 'wooed' and 'won', as Richard mockingly figures it when Anne leaves the stage (1.2.215-16). Though her capitulation is thorough, the dramatic structure of it is not surprising when read in the context of the tetralogy. Being 'won over' from an initially hostile or resistant position directly parallels Margaret and Elizabeth, who are both 'won over' for amorous purposes by men to whom they are initially opposed. Anne's introduction in *Richard III*, then, follows a familiar 'pattern of wooing' in which we have also seen her queenly predecessors become engaged.

Further, just as Margaret and Elizabeth are not passive objects of men's desires, nor is Anne immediately receptive to Richard's attempts to woo her. She is first shown onstage

with Henry VI's corpse as she mourns the former king and his son (her first husband) and curses their murderers. When Richard (still Duke of Gloucester here) enters, Anne calls him a 'dreadful minister of hell' (1.2.45) and rebuffs his apparent attempts at conciliation. Their interaction follows a similar pattern of wooing as Margaret's and Suffolk's, and Elizabeth's and Edward's, albeit a more antagonistic one: the two engage in a stichomythic back and forth, in which Anne hurls vitriolic insults at Richard as Richard plays at pacification, flattery, self-sacrifice, and love. Their exchange lasts for around 150 lines, before Anne, refusing to kill Richard, begins to doubt her assessment of him. Though she 'fear[s] [...] both [his heart and tongue] are false' (1.2.182), and though she claims that 'to take' his ring 'is not to give' herself to him (1.2.190), she nonetheless takes the ring ('[I]ook how my ring encompasseth thy finger', Richard says, a verbal directive which suggests that Anne indeed accepts and wears the ring, 1.2.191), and so effectively, tacitly, consents to become his wife. Anne enters mourning her husband and leaves, less than 200 lines later, wearing his enemy's ring.

Stephen Greenblatt writes that the 'theatrical power' of their exchange 'rests less upon a depiction of [Anne's] character than upon the spectacle of Richard's restless aggression transformed during the rapid-fire exchange of one-liners [...] into a perverse form of sexual provocation and of Anne's verbal violence transformed, in spite of itself, into an erotic response'.⁴⁴ A case can certainly be made for reading this moment as one that is driven by sexual tension (especially as it progresses), just as with Margaret and Elizabeth and their first interactions with their respective suitors. Though the playwright again offers no certainty here, there remains the sense that Anne may be a queen who experiences transgressive sexual desire. Anne's dramatic change of attitude has attracted plenty of critical attention. Greenblatt characterises Anne's 'spectacular surrender' as evidence of a 'shallow, corruptible, naively

⁴⁴ Greenblatt, 'Introduction to *Richard III*', in *The Norton Shakespeare*, pp. 539-44 (p. 543).

ambitious, [...] frightened' character, which perhaps diminishes Anne's receptiveness to Richard's advances as well as Richard's rhetorical power.⁴⁵ Indeed, as Rackin argues:

For the audience as for Anne, the seduction requires the suspension of moral judgement and the erasure of historical memory, since Shakespeare's contemporaries would have entered his theater well aware of the demonic role that Richard has been assigned in Tudor historiography; but the sheer theatrical energy of Richard's performance supersedes the moral weight of the hegemonic narrative.⁴⁶

Rackin suggests that Anne responds in the same way that the audience is invited to respond: she is seduced in spite of her suspicions that Richard is a 'dissembler' (1.2.172). Joel Elliot Slotkin, on the other hand, says that 'Richard's seduction of Anne is not a beautiful example of courtly love that just happens to be insincere. Rather, his rhetorical strategy depends on forcing Anne, and the audience, to confront and embrace his murderous nature'.⁴⁷ Slotkin argues that the play's 'sinister aesthetics' makes Richard appealing *because* he is evil and ugly, even as this conflicts with her—and our—moral ideals.⁴⁸ Indeed, Anne's self-directed curses in Act Four, scene one add credence to Slotkin's notion of a 'sinister aesthetics'. Where Margaret's and Elizabeth's voices gain them power earlier in the tetralogy, Anne's voice does exactly the opposite: on learning that she is to be crowned queen (and so that either Richard's nephews have died or he has usurped the throne), Anne laments her fate and (inadvertently) curses herself. But even as she curses Richard and any future marriage, she says, '[w]ithin so small a time, my woman's heart / Grossly grew captive to his honey words' (4.1.79). Anne here encapsulates a sense of resistance and captivation, of abject revulsion and a contradictory receptiveness to Richard's advances in a way that supports both Rackin's idea of Richard's superlative 'theatrical energy' and Slotkin's theory of sinister aesthetics.

⁴⁵ Greenblatt, 'Introduction to *Richard III*', p. 543.

⁴⁶ Rackin, 'History into Tragedy: The Case of *Richard III*', in *Shakespearean Tragedy and Gender*, ed. by Shirley Nelson Garner and Madelon Sprengnether (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 31-53 (p. 42).

⁴⁷ Joel Elliot Slotkin, *Sinister Aesthetics: The Appeal of Evil in Early Modern English Literature* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 91.

⁴⁸ See Slotkin, *Sinister Aesthetics*, especially chapter three, 'Honeyed Toads: Sinister Aesthetics in *Richard III*', pp. 79-124.

While Anne is dramatically and linguistically paralleled to Margaret and Elizabeth, then, she is also marked out (by both herself and the playwright) as somehow weaker or more pitiable because she falls for Richard's amorous language and submits to a figure that is (or should be) less appealing. Shakespeare uses Richard's soliloquy at the end of the play's first scene to rearticulate his lead character's unpleasantness and the potent threat he poses to the kingdom. Alone onstage, Richard mocks Anne for falling for his advances despite the 'bars against' the likelihood of his achieving his suit: his physical deformities and complicity in her first husband's death (1.2.215-25, 1.2.222). Richard's famous '[w]as ever woman in this humour wooed? / Was ever woman in this humour won? / I'll have her, but I will not keep her long' (1.2.215-17) invites the audience to criticise Anne for her perceived weakness, to pity her, and to fear for her life.

In her introductory scene, Shakespeare conjures and complicates expectations about the type of character Anne will be both by following familiar dramatic-linguistic patterns of 'wooing and winning' and by making the difficulty of Richard's suit far greater. Because the likelihood of Anne's surrender seems lesser, the fact that she does cede proves Richard's uniquely persuasive rhetorical power. But Shakespeare is dramatising a moment out of keeping with history. In reality, Anne and Richard had known one another for much of their lives. Amy Licence explains that Richard 'spent several years living as Warwick's protégé at the [Neville] family home of Middleham Castle'.⁴⁹ She argues that, since the children would have regularly met in informal and ceremonial circumstances, 'it is not impossible that an early friendship had blossomed between them, surviving Anne's arranged marriage with the enemy'.⁵⁰ In any case, by the time Richard claimed the throne in 1483, Anne and Richard had been married for over a decade and, Laynesmith argues, 'there was no question at the time

⁴⁹ Amy Licence, *Anne Neville: Richard III's Tragic Queen* (Amberley: Stroud, 2013), p. 11.

⁵⁰ Licence, *Anne Neville*, p. 11.

about her right to be queen beside her husband'.⁵¹ Shakespeare exaggerates his depiction of Anne as the grieving widow of a Lancastrian prince, to whom she had actually been married briefly and for her father's political advantage. However, unlike with Elizabeth Woodville—the widow of a Lancastrian supporter, in Shakespeare—Anne's widowhood does not prove to be a contentious factor facing Anne's queenship.

Perhaps Shakespeare does not need to explore the matter of Anne's status as queen here—whether she is a good candidate for the royal role, whether her familial credentials are strong enough—because her husband who claims the throne is very clearly a villainous usurper and, by extension, her queenship can never be 'rightful'. But Anne, historically and in these plays, does not embody the same threats of 'otherness' as the queens who are established as her rivals/alternatives. She is an Englishwoman from one of England's foremost noble families, so she brings no threat from foreign powers and there is no real sense of 'inappropriate' upward mobility. Not only is her background one of the most acceptable 'types' for a queen consort, her character is also less forceful, less threatening. Though a rival/alternative queen to the characters of Margaret and Elizabeth, Anne occupies a fundamentally different role. In contrast to either of her immediate predecessors, she is more definitively consort than quasi-regnant, and her purpose in *Richard III* is to become a casualty of Richard's ruthless ambition. Anne is given significantly less space to establish herself as a forceful character than either Margaret or Elizabeth; instead, she becomes a martyr, another of Richard's victims, a character whose own curses backfire on her. Queen Anne acts as a foil for her fellow queens who appear in this play alongside her. In *Richard III*, then, Shakespeare continues to explore a theory of queenship by juxtaposing Anne's model of submissive queen consort to that of the independent, quasi-regnant queens we see in her predecessors.

⁵¹ Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens*, p. 80.

In the first tetralogy, Shakespeare introduces the three queens of the Wars of the Roses using the same dramatic and linguistic patterns. Anne is an alternative queen who becomes the new consort in *Richard III*, and the audience is invited to compare her with the two forceful women who preceded her. Her more submissive, victimised model of queenship is juxtaposed with the presentation of Elizabeth as loving companion-consort and Margaret as aggressive quasi-regnant. Shakespeare, then, seems to be exploring different theories of queenship in his presentation of how and why men are first attracted to the queens they choose. Margaret and Elizabeth are both introduced as physically attractive women who use their voices to challenge men and claim additional power. Anne—who Richard pursues out of political, rather than physical, desire—begins the play with a similarly forceful rhetorical presence, is rendered inert, before finally reclaiming agency through her posthumous cursing. The queens, then, follow diverging paths and different scripts for queenship after their unions with the powerful men who are, or will become, king, but all three of these scripts emphasise the power and potential for women’s voices to challenge men and claim political influence.

Queens’ Maternal Identities

Once a royal wife has been selected and becomes queen in the early modern period, her first—and most important—office is to produce an heir, preferably a son. The emphasis shifts from her sexual body to a different physical role: motherhood. A lack of heir is a dangerous prospect for the country and for the queen herself, as England realised especially during the reign of Henry VIII. Since the role of queen was the highest social position for a woman in this period, and ‘the early modern English maternal role offered a subject position more empowered than other female roles’, a queen’s maternal identity renders her uniquely

influential and secure (insofar as her husband's kingship is itself secure).⁵² Luce Irigaray argues that 'the culturally, socially, economically valorised female characteristics are correlated with maternity and motherhood: with breast-feeding the child, restoring the man'.⁵³ Irigaray conceives the maternal body as having nourishing properties, a physiological element that can also be interpreted metaphorically: having a child makes a woman a mother, but it also has a restorative effect on masculinity.

In the first tetralogy, maternal identities provide queens with both agency and motivation to challenge perceived injustices and threats to their children, themselves, and their dynastic line. Margaret derives much of her strength from her maternal identity, even continuing to insist on this identity as mother to the heir to the throne when Henry VI concedes defeat to the Yorkists and fails to uphold his kingly duty to install his son as his successor. Elizabeth, similarly, often acts on behalf of her children, defying the dangerous Richard III after the loss of her two young sons in order to protect both her daughter and her country. Anne's motherhood, on the other hand, is erased in Shakespeare's play: her son with Richard, Edward of Middleham (who was nine when his father took the throne, but died the following year), is not mentioned.⁵⁴ There is a sense that Anne is easier to dispose of when she has not produced an heir: when Anne proves to be less politically useful than a potential marriage to his niece, Richard 'give[s] out / That Anne [...] is sick and like to die' (4.2.59). When attempting to convince Elizabeth to arrange his marriage to her daughter, Elizabeth of York, Richard says that he will 'bury' her sons in 'her daughter's womb' so 'they will breed / Selves of themselves' (4.4.354-56). Where Anne's womb is empty in this play, Richard

⁵² Kathryn M. Moncrief and Kathryn R. McPherson, 'Embodied and Enacted: Performances of Maternity in Early Modern England', in *Performing Maternity in Early Modern England*, ed. by Moncrief and McPherson (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), p. 4. See also Valerie Wayne, 'Advice for Women from Mothers and Patriarchs', in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500-1700*, ed. by Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 56-79 (pp. 68-69).

⁵³ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. by Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 25.

⁵⁴ Because her motherhood is erased in *Richard III*, I do not include a subsection on Anne (as I do for Margaret and Elizabeth) here.

claims that Princess Elizabeth's womb will become, oxymoronically, fruitful and tomblike. He figures his would-be children as replacement heirs.

In this section, I show that the queen's maternal body is entwined with the country's health: these mothers often fill gaps in protection (of both country and children) left by an absent or deceased king, and motherhood becomes one of the auspices under which a queen may—and perhaps should—act most independently and effectively. In the first tetralogy, motherhood assumes particular prominence and potential contentiousness, as rival factions seek to establish not just personal claims to the throne, but to secure a strong dynastic legacy. Even if a mother produces an heir here, a son's inheritance is never confidently assumed. In fact, none of our three queens has a son who rules as king.⁵⁵ Once again, the spectre of the childless Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I, lingers. Perhaps the fact that the Tudor dynasty emerges at the end of the Wars of the Roses is itself a comment on how political stability can arise from unexpected or undefined avenues. Perhaps, too, there is a comment being made about the vulnerability of a dynasty that lacks a clear heir, a comment that had contemporary resonance: Shakespeare dramatises the collapse of the Yorkist dynasty after Richard III takes the throne but becomes wifeless and heirless, and concludes the tetralogy by depicting the union that will engender the Tudor dynasty. This same dynasty, we know, was on the cusp of extinction by the 1590s, when Elizabeth I remained childless and when anxieties about who might succeed to the throne were prevalent.

i. Margaret

The real Margaret of Anjou encountered various rumours and fears surrounding her motherhood during her lifetime. She and Henry VI were married for eight years before their only child, Edward, was born in 1453. During her early marriage, Margaret was 'hounded by

⁵⁵ Elizabeth's son, Edward, was briefly *de jure* king before his murder, though Shakespeare does not depict him as 'Edward V' in *Richard III*.

unfounded rumours of her infidelity'.⁵⁶ Laynesmith shows that this period of childlessness was also a matter of popular concern (whether these concerns were directly critical of the queen or otherwise).⁵⁷ When the prince was finally born, rumours of Margaret's infidelity and even her infertility did not cease. Laynesmith discusses the circulation of (often contradictory) stories and rumours that suggested that Edward was not Margaret's son at all; that he was a changeling; that he was not the king's son but the result of the queen's adultery.⁵⁸ Perhaps the breadth of history Shakespeare covered in the first tetralogy necessarily meant that some details were sacrificed, or perhaps he aimed to dramatise the conflict between the Lancastrian and Yorkist parties as a conflict in which both, objectively, had legitimate claims to the throne of England. Whatever the reason, these four plays never truly suggest that Prince Edward is not Henry VI's son. The one instance where the issue is raised is so brief as to almost pass unnoticed: in *3 Henry VI*, Richard (later King Richard III) addresses the prince, '[w]hoever got thee, there thy mother stands— / For, well I wot, thou hast thy mother's tongue'.⁵⁹ Richard effectively calls Edward a 'bastard' as he insinuates that the queen may have been unfaithful and therefore that the king is unable to control his wife's body. It is an insult that obliquely suggests—despite Henry VI claiming Edward as his son and heir—that the prince could be illegitimate.

However, the play does not dwell on any possibility of the prince's illegitimacy, but rather on King Henry's unnatural, shameful disinheriting of Prince Edward and Margaret's subsequent desire to defend and reclaim the throne for her son (and, therefore, for the Lancastrians) in *3 Henry VI*. Henry's attempts to defend his right to the throne quickly morphs into the private belief that his 'title's weak' because his grandfather, Henry IV, became king 'by rebellion against his king', Richard II (1.1.134-35). He therefore agrees that

⁵⁶ Earenfight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe*, p. 213.

⁵⁷ Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens*, pp. 131-34.

⁵⁸ Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens*, pp. 136-39.

⁵⁹ Shakespeare, *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York and the Good King Henry VI* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, pp. 326-97 (2.2.133-34). I will henceforth refer to this play as *3 Henry VI*.

York's descendants shall '[e]njoy the kingdom after [his] decease' (1.1.176), admitting that he is effectively 'unnaturally [...] disinheriting' his son (1.1.193-94). If being disinherited is unnatural, fighting to reclaim the throne is an attempt to restore the prince's inalienable—natural—right to inherit said throne, according to the custom of primogeniture.

We see a glimpse of Margaret's strength in the face of Henry's weakness at the very end of *2 Henry VI*; Henry suggests that they should not try to 'outrun the heavens', where Margaret acknowledges the danger of (his) capture, refuses to surrender, and mobilises Henry to London (*2HVI*, 5.4.12). York's reference to 'the Queen[']s [...] Parliament' (1.1.35) reveals that Margaret has already assumed a central political role. Stanavage suggests that Margaret 'uses her identity as a revenger to establish a sovereign authority that she never legally possesses', but I argue that she also uses her maternal identity to pursue her son's legal claim to the throne.⁶⁰ Indeed, it is Henry's 'unnatural' disinheriting of Prince Edward that truly brings Margaret to the forefront of the dramatic action in Shakespeare's staging of the Wars of the Roses. When the news of the king's decision to yield the crown to the Yorkist line on his death reaches Margaret, she returns to the stage with such ferocity as to create the semi-comic moment where Exeter and Henry both wish to 'steal away' to avoid her wrath (1.1.211-13). The king does not attempt to reason with his wife nor defend his decision beyond the claim that 'the Earl of Warwick and the Duke enforced [him]' (1.1.230), a claim which Margaret swiftly denounces and deems shameful. 'Art thou king, and wilt be forced?' Margaret asks, recalling her 'queen in bondage' statement (*1HVI*, 5.3.67) and cutting to the heart of Henry's weakness as a ruler: he is not only ineffectual, but he is malleable.

Ultimately, Margaret attributes this manipulability to foolishness and cowardice as she insists:

Had I been there, which am a seely woman,

⁶⁰ Stanavage, 'Margaret of Anjou and the Rhetoric of Sovereign Vengeance', p. 163.

The soldiers should have tossed me on their pikes
 Before I would have granted to that act.
 But thou preferr'st thy life before thine honour. (1.1.244-47)

Her claims that she would have been stronger, braver, and more honourable were it she who were confronted with York's threats infers that Margaret is more than a 'seely woman', but also carves an image of Henry as less than a 'seely woman'; he is weaker than his wife, and is a dishonourable king. As Logan writes, Shakespeare contrasts Henry's

neglect of his parental role with [Margaret's] willingness to be tossed on the soldiers' pikes before agreeing to such a company (1.1.244). Foregrounding her role as Edward's mother, she links the pain of childbirth to the nourishment of her infant with blood, rather than milk, invoking the pelican image with its mythological self-sacrificing instinct, also associated with Elizabeth I in her care of the nation.⁶¹

This contrast between Margaret and Henry establishes the tenor of the remainder of *3 Henry VI*: Margaret's active strength grows as Henry becomes increasingly passive and ineffectual. Further, Margaret's motherhood becomes a source of strength and sacrifice, and a channel with which to attempt to reclaim the throne and so to ensure the survival of the Lancastrian dynasty.

Though Margaret's personal political potential is suggested earlier in the tetralogy, it is from this moment of her son's disinheriting that her capacity to make apt—and perhaps 'kingly'—political manoeuvres is brought to the dramatic forefront. Condemning her husband and 'divorc[ing]' herself from him (1.1.248-51), Margaret immediately begins to take action in defence of the Lancastrian claim to the throne. 'The northern lords that have forsworn thy colours / Will follow mine', she tells Henry as she prepares to lead an army against the Yorkists (1.1.252-57). Prince Edward, too, opts to 'follow her' until the battle is won (1.1.262-63), his refusal to stay with his father implicitly signifying the breakdown of father/son relationships that occur throughout *3 Henry VI*. Despite drawing his claim to the throne from his father, Edward privileges the maternal relationship as he acknowledges his

⁶¹ Logan, 'Margaret and the Ban', p. 224.

mother's superior political intellect. Rather than being relegated to the political (and narrative) background after she metaphorically 'divorces' herself from the king, Margaret's political influence and dramatic importance only increases. As the king 'unnaturally' renounces his royal responsibilities and surrenders crown and kingdom, the queen wields her maternal identity to step in to claim these responsibilities.

ii. Elizabeth

Like Margaret, Elizabeth derives political influence from her motherhood in the first tetralogy. Unlike Margaret, though, Elizabeth is a mother, and therefore a sexually experienced woman, at the time of her marriage. When Edward proposes that she become his queen in *3 Henry VI*, Elizabeth first reminds him that she is his subject, her social standing too modest for her queenship to be apposite. When this does not deter the king, her final attempt to reject him takes the form of a reminder of her motherhood: 'Twill grieve your grace my sons should call you father' (3.2.100). He denies this, declaring it 'a happy thing / To be father unto many sons' (3.2.105), apparently accepting her offspring as his own and simultaneously failing to acknowledge or anticipate the difficulties that will arise from the fact that these sons are not actually his. Instead, Shakespeare's Edward recasts her motherhood as a praiseworthy, positive indicator of her fruitfulness. Nonetheless, the anxieties surrounding Elizabeth's pre-queenship motherhood can be drawn into two key strands: first, if she is already a mother then she cannot be the ideal virgin bride, and second, these non-dynastic first sons could have ambitions and agendas not necessarily consistent with maintaining a powerful, unified court.

Before discussing Elizabeth's motherhood in the first tetralogy further, I would like to consider how her maternal identity was cast in contemporary accounts that may have influenced Shakespeare's iteration of her character. Such accounts frequently strove to strike

a balance between negotiating or even celebrating her fertility and symbolically casting her in the image of the quasi-Marian virgin queen. Laynesmith writes that ‘royal image makers adopted two stratagems in dealing with Elizabeth’s unconventional status’: they either elected to ignore it or to ‘construct her motherhood in strikingly Marian terms’.⁶² Laynesmith develops this idea further in *The Last Medieval Queens*, where she discusses allusions to the Virgin Mary in visual representations of Elizabeth.⁶³ Marian models for queenship (and intercession chiefly) were explicitly established in the thirteenth century and ‘persisted into the fifteenth century’, as demonstrated by Parsons and Laynesmith respectively.⁶⁴ Such associations between queenship and the Virgin extended into the sixteenth and seventeenth century, too, with Elizabeth I drawing on these topoi and iconographical inferences in an even more deliberate, potent, and recognisable manner in order to construct (and justify) her own model of queenship.⁶⁵

Historically, then, there were various attempts to neutralise or reclaim Elizabeth Woodville’s prior motherhood, including stylising her as a sort of ‘virgin queen’, claiming

⁶² Joanna L. Chamberlayne, ‘Crowns and Virgins: queenmaking during the Wars of the Roses’, in *Young Medieval Women*, ed. by Katherine J. Lewis, Noël James Menuge and Kim M. Phillips (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), pp. 47-68 (p. 60).

⁶³ See Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens*, pp. 32-34.

⁶⁴ Parsons, ‘The Queen’s Intercession in Thirteenth-Century England’, in *Power of the Weak*, pp. 147-77. Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens*, p. 32.

⁶⁵ Helen Hackett’s *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen* navigates the intersections between Elizabeth I and the Virgin Mary, and the contradictions associated with Protestantism and Marian iconography. Hackett also notes that Elizabeth I was not the first queen likened to Mary, as medieval queens were frequently referred to in Marian terms (as was the case with Elizabeth Woodville, as we see here). Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995). Peter McClure and Robin Headlam Wells argue ‘that a mystical kinship between the Virgin Elizabeth and the Virgin Mary was central, not peripheral, to the cult of the English monarch’. See ‘Elizabeth I as a Second Virgin Mary’, *Renaissance Studies*, 4.1 (1990), 38-70 (40). In *Goddesses and Queens: The Iconography of Elizabeth I*, the contributors ‘address the full range of the queen’s extraordinary iconographical repertoire’, including her Mariological associations. The editors, Annaleise Connolly and Lisa Hopkins, argue that ‘[t]he queen herself was also a significant participant in the manufacturing of her own image’. See Connolly and Hopkins, ‘Introduction’, in *Goddesses and Queens: The Iconography of Elizabeth I*, ed. by Connolly and Hopkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 1-15 (pp. 3 and 4). Carole Levin comments on Elizabeth I’s use of colour symbolism in her sartorial choices, writing that the queen ‘wore blue to demonstrate her connection to the Virgin Mary’. See ‘Princess Elizabeth Travels Across her Kingdom: In Life, in Text, and on Stage’, in *Queens and Power in Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. by Levin and Bucholz, pp. 51-75 (p. 62). John N. King discusses the queen’s virginity in relation to the Virgin Mary. He also discusses the critical debate around (Marian) representations of Elizabeth I pre-1990. See King, ‘Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 43.1 (1990), 30-74. Shormishtha Panja similarly considers the (recent) critical commentary around Elizabethan/Marian iconography in *Sidney, Spenser and the Royal Reader* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), pp. 57-58.

positive evidence of her fruitfulness, or simply ignoring the fact that she had children from a previous marriage. These latter two historiographical traditions of depicting Elizabeth are identifiable in Shakespeare's rendering of the Yorkist queen in *3 Henry VI*: the first encounter between Elizabeth and Edward sees the king cast her motherhood in an optimistic light, and in the play's very short final scene (as in the rest of this play) Elizabeth's first-born children are neither present nor mentioned. Instead, Shakespeare's conclusion concentrates closely on the arrival of 'Young Ned', the new Yorkist heir, and on Edward's 'soul delights' as he is surrounded by his wife, their child, and 'his country's peace and brothers' loves' (5.7.25-36).

This familial scene closes the play on a note of seemingly blissful Yorkist triumph following the Lancastrian force's definitive defeat with the murder of Henry VI and his heir.⁶⁶ At the heart of this victory is the new royal family: King Edward, Queen Elizabeth (now affectionately nicknamed 'Bess'), their infant son and new heir to the throne, and the king's (supposedly-devoted) brothers. The play's final moments linger on Edward's happiness with his family and hopes for their 'lasting joy' (5.7.46).⁶⁷ Additionally, Elizabeth's early avowal of her own inappropriateness for the mantle of queen has been overwritten by the end of the play; she has married Edward and borne him a son, thus fulfilling the foremost purpose of the king's wife.⁶⁸ Though she still does not say much here (and indeed, a case could be made for her continued unhappiness, since silence is a site of potential discontent for women in Shakespeare), the very few words she does say situate her firmly in the core Yorkist familial, royal unit as she calls Clarence 'worthy brother' (5.7.30). However, her eldest sons from her

⁶⁶ It is only 'seemingly' blissful because Richard, of course, has shared his own designs on the throne in soliloquies throughout *3 Henry VI*. These Machiavellian ambitions are played out in the final play of the tetralogy, *Richard III*.

⁶⁷ Though the Yorkist campaign for the throne was launched long before the birth of the prince, Edward adds a tender note that refigures and rationalises the fight in this scene. He tells his son that the previously dramatised wars were fought and won so that 'thou mightst repossess the crown in peace; / And of our labours thou shalt reap the gain' (5.7.19-20). The struggles were all for—and worthwhile, now, because of—his son.

⁶⁸ This is a historical inaccuracy, as Elizabeth bore three daughters before the birth of the son who would become Edward V, the eldest of the so-called 'Princes in the Tower'. At this stage in the play, daughters seem not to be adequate heirs, and indeed, they are not even mentioned here. But of course, it is the political marriage of a Yorkist daughter that unites the warring Houses of Lancaster and York and ends the Wars of the Roses.

previous marriage are conspicuous by their absence: they are not onstage to encroach on the otherwise strong central family unit.

However, Elizabeth's first-born sons are not absent in *Richard III*: this play sees Elizabeth's motherhood and familial ties explored further, from her response to the loss of her children with the king (the 'Princes in the Tower' episode) to her dangerous association with grown sons and other male relatives that Richard III uses to channel anti-Woodville (and therefore anti-princes) sentiment. However, Elizabeth is not inert in the face of the threat Richard poses to her family and the crown once Edward dies; she undertakes crucial political manoeuvring both on and offstage, assuming responsibility for ensuring her children's safety and (from her perspective, right and just) inheritance of their father's throne. Perhaps her first staged independent act as queen is when, in *Richard III*, she, predicting 'destruction, blood, and massacre / [...] the end of all' (2.4.52-53), decides to take her youngest son into sanctuary (2.4.65). Given that Richard's faction has prioritised 'part[ing] the Queen's proud kindred from the prince' (2.2.120)—isolating the heirs from the queen and her family gives Richard a greater chance of effectively controlling them and, therefore, the crown—the fact that Elizabeth claims the protection of the church reveals a shrewd ability to identify the danger to herself and her children, and to act quickly to defend against this danger. Richard's faction again makes it their priority to 'from his mother win the Duke of York' (3.1.38), and though they are ultimately (and surprisingly quickly) successful in this endeavour, Shakespeare suggests that their success is attributable to the fact that they have 'infringe[d] the sacred privilege / Of blessèd sanctuary' (3.1.40-41) and categorised it as something criminal (3.1.56). The next time Queen Elizabeth is onstage, it is to hear the news that Lady Anne is to be 'crownèd Richard's royal queen' (4.1.32) and its plain implication that the crown has been usurped and Elizabeth's young sons are indefinitely imprisoned (and definitely imperilled) in the Tower of London.

Elizabeth, denied access to her children in the Tower, laments their fate on hearing the ‘dead-killing news’ (4.1.35) that Richard is to be crowned king. She tells her remaining son Dorset that he should flee the country to ‘live with Richmond’ (4.1.42; the future Henry VII), because ‘thy mother’s name is ominous to children’ (4.1.40). At the end of this scene, Elizabeth invites her company to look back at the Tower and says a few lines that resemble an invocation: she asks the Tower’s ‘ancient stones’ to ‘pity’ her sons and ‘use her babies well’, twice calling them ‘tender’ and so emphasising their innocence (4.1.96.1-96.7).⁶⁹ When Richard arranges the murder of the two princes and we hear that the deed has been done (4.2 and 4.3), the ruthless cruelty of this act is made all the more stark by being dramatically sandwiched between scenes in which the anguished lamentations of (queen) mothers, future queens, and past queens is depicted (4.1 features Queen Elizabeth, Lady Anne, and the Duchess of York, while 4.4 focuses on Queen Elizabeth, Queen Margaret, and the Duchess of York).

Though Shakespeare does not dramatise the precise moment that Elizabeth discovers that her sons have been killed, the beginning of Act Four, scene four appears to follow the moments soon after she receives the news. Over one hundred lines are devoted to Elizabeth’s grief (which she shares with the Duchess of York) and Margaret’s bitter relish that her rival queen is now experiencing much of the anguish she herself has faced. I will return to this interaction between Elizabeth and Margaret later, but for now I would like to highlight how Shakespeare has Elizabeth emphasise the innocence of her murdered children. They are ‘tender babes’ (4.4.9), ‘unblown flowers, new appearing sweets’ (4.4.10), ‘gentle lambs’ apparently forsaken by their God (4.4.22-23). Shakespeare’s choice to depict Richard as undoubtedly the murderer contributes to Tudor propaganda, and the focus on the fact that the princes were children makes Richard an even more heinous, Herod-like character, and

⁶⁹ These lines only appear in F.

Elizabeth's grief more potent. Indeed, Elizabeth's articulation of her motherly grief enhances the play's depiction of Richard's villainy.

Potent though the queen's grief is, it is not all consuming. She attempts to channel it, first by wishing to curse as bitterly as Margaret (as I discuss later when considering Margaret and Elizabeth's characterisation as foils and/or rivals), and later in the scene by rechanneling her grief into anger towards Richard. Shakespeare's Elizabeth focuses particularly on the idea of Richard as a 'slaughterer'. Of the ten instances of the word 'slaughter' in *Richard III*, three of them are directed towards Richard by Elizabeth: she upbraids him for his 'slaughter of the prince that owed that crown' that Richard has claimed (4.4.142), tells him that she has 'no more sons of the royal blood / For thee to slaughter' (4.4.200-01), and suggests that she would do anything to allow her daughter to 'live unscarred of bleeding slaughter' (4.4.210). This linguistic choice characterises Richard as not only a usurping murderer, but a barbaric, animalistic killer of children.

Though Elizabeth's claim that 'much less spirit to curse / Abides in [her]' (4.4.197-98)—as she simply echoes the words of the Duchess of York's extended indictment of Richard (4.4.159-96)—suggests that she does not have the same rhetorical strength as the Duchess or the usurper king, she readily and ably engages in linguistic sparring with Richard out of protectiveness over her daughter. Their conversation dominates much of the scene and is intermittently stichomythic, with Elizabeth forceful and cutting with her quick response(s) to Richard's attempt to present himself as a reasonable, innocent victim of circumstance. She is unsurprisingly sceptical of his claims to want 'th'advancement of [her] children' (4.4.228), and when he says to her 'from my soul, I love thy daughter' (4.4.242), Elizabeth can rhetorically dissect this claim. She tells Richard that she thinks:

That thou dost love my daughter *from* my soul;
So *from* thy soul's love didst thou love her brothers,

And *from* my heart's love I do thank thee for it. (4.4.245-47)⁷⁰

It is not 'with' his soul (or heart, as we might more often say now) that Richard loves Elizabeth of York, but his supposed love for her is isolated from his soul. Though Richard argues that Elizabeth deliberately 'confound[s] [his] meaning' (4.4.248), Shakespeare has, of course, given the audience an insight into Richard's self-preserving political motivations for seeking the match with his niece. Elizabeth's cynical response to Richard's slippery statement, therefore, is not simply rhetorical playing but an accurate interpretation of his concealed intentions. The questions she asks him when he reveals that he 'intend[s] to make [Elizabeth of York] queen of England' (4.4.250) take a disbelieving, even mocking tone as she—and Shakespeare—work towards highlighting the inappropriateness of the match: he will not be able to woo her daughter because of the heinous crimes he has committed against her family.

Even in the face of Richard's assertion that 'this is not the way / To win your daughter' (4.4.270-71)—a statement carrying a threatening double meaning; to win the young Elizabeth for Richard, and to win her safety—the dowager Elizabeth refuses to consent to the match. Richard's response is a typically well-crafted speech of almost 50 lines, but the queen again shuts him down with disdain: the match is inappropriate in all ways, as he is the princess's uncle and her kinsmen's murderer. Richard persists, providing Elizabeth with the language and arguments with which to persuade her daughter of the match's strength. This exchange falls back into rapid stichomythia, and Elizabeth continues to be defiant, disallowing Richard's attempts at reasoning. Again, Shakespeare demonstrates dramatic and dialogic patterning: where Anne falls for Richard's words when they have a similar back-and-forth earlier in the play, Elizabeth resists. There is a sense that both queens articulate

⁷⁰ The *Norton Shakespeare* adds this emphasis on the word 'from'.

themselves within scripts and modes of behaviour that the plays lead us to expect, but with differing outcomes.

At first, it seems that Richard will fool Elizabeth as he did Anne: as their interaction draws on, Elizabeth appears to become more receptive to Richard's words. 'Shall I forget myself to be myself?' (4.4.351) she asks, the first 'myself' referring to her Yorkist associations and the injustices committed against her family, and the second 'myself' referring to her one-time and would-be status as the queen mother. Despite the length of the interaction between the former queen and new king, Elizabeth's change of heart is sudden and startling: though she still insists that 'thou didst kill my children' (4.4.353), she agrees to go to attempt to 'win [her] daughter to [his] will' (4.4.357). Alone onstage, Richard calls her a 'relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman' (4.4.362), a misogynistic charge that echoes his earlier mockery of Anne. In this case, though, Richard's condemnatory judgement of Elizabeth is an acute, and costly, underestimation.

In the very next scene, Lord Stanley reveals to the audience that 'the Queen hath heartily consented / [Richmond] should espouse Elizabeth her daughter' (4.5.16-17). Not only did Elizabeth acknowledge the danger of Richard's volatile, usurping brand of kingship and manage to resist his powerful rhetorical attempts to win her to his side, but she has worked behind the scenes to ensure an alternative monarchical line. Though the emphasis on her 'consent' may suggest that Elizabeth has not been the active party in orchestrating the union, her agreement nonetheless demonstrates her role in facilitating the shrewd political match between her daughter and Henry Tudor, the Earl of Richmond: the marriage unites the warring Yorkist and Lancastrian factions and eventually establishes a stable royal house. In Shakespeare's dramatisation of the Wars of the Roses, Elizabeth is one of the key players, a character able to ensure strong, appropriate political matches where (at least) the previous two kings could not. Elizabeth uses the platform for power that being a mother to royal

children provides to ensure the safety not only of her own family, but also, it is implied, of the crown and country.

Shakespeare's presentation of motherhood in the first tetralogy encapsulates many of the anxieties of the late Elizabethan—and late Tudor—moment in which he was writing. Questions of succession and dynastic security had coloured much of the sixteenth century. As I have been discussing throughout the thesis, Elizabeth's refusal to name an heir was a continued source of uncertainty for much of the 1590s, before the apparent resolution of the succession question by the end of the decade when James VI of Scotland seemed increasingly likely to also become James I of England.⁷¹ Elizabeth I's existence itself emerged from a protracted period of political uncertainty and succession anxiety, from the death of fifteen-year-old heir-to-the-throne Prince Arthur in 1502, to the well-documented (and frequently fictionalised) matter of Henry VIII's desire for a male heir and the resultant casualties made of his six queens. Sixteenth century England increasingly witnessed the importance of daughters as heirs, of women as rulers: the first tetralogy engages with this (new) necessity of queen regnants, and explores how motherhood can be both a source of contention and an avenue for political power.

Queens' Otherness

Neither Margaret, Elizabeth, nor Anne can be an untroubling queen of England as each character has a part of their identity that makes them 'other'. As I have been arguing throughout, queens occupy an uneasy identity as both queen at the heart of English politics, and as individuals othered by their gender and those behaviours that defy gendered conventions and expectations. But gender is not the only othering identity. In this section, I discuss how the tetralogy's portrayal of nationality, social rank, and even personality

⁷¹ I discuss how James came to be unofficially accepted as the likely heir to the throne in more detail in Part Two of this chapter.

contribute to an idea of these women as different and therefore threatening to English patriarchal power.

The idea of *extimité* is useful here. *Extimité*—extimacy—is a term coined by Jacques Lacan to describe something that is at once deeply intimate and fundamentally exterior to oneself. In this conception, the other becomes the ‘embedded alien, occupying the most intimate place’.⁷² Autonomous queenship is itself a somewhat alien identity that continued to be subject to interrogation at the end of the sixteenth century, when several powerful, ruling women emerged in England and Europe. But the queens of the Wars of the Roses—and again, this applies more to Margaret and Elizabeth than Anne—become ‘embedded aliens’ because of more than just their status as queen. Their behaviour and their origins, their performance and provenance, are subject to scrutiny, particularly when they deviate from the norm for queens. In this section, I discuss how Margaret is othered by her claiming of martial responsibility and active participation in war, by her ‘unmotherly’ behaviour towards the Duke of York’s son, and by her Frenchness. I also examine Elizabeth Woodville’s modest (and so ‘inferior’) social background in greater detail, arguing that her relationship to her lower-ranked family jeopardises her identity as queen. Finally, I look at Anne’s perceived weakness and the posthumous agency she acquires through cursing her murderous husband. Explorations of queens’ otherness contribute to questions about female rulership and the standards for scrutiny in women’s behaviour. In the first tetralogy, characters cast aspersions on women’s power by articulating insults based on their ‘otherness’ and perceived transgressions of expected, acceptable behaviour for women. We might think about this type of scrutiny in relation to Elizabeth I, who faced different expectations than her male counterparts. In commenting on Margaret’s assumption of a warlike identity, Shakespeare shows the difficulty of a female ruler navigating such an identity as defender of her people.

⁷² Jerry Aline Flieger, *Is Oedipus Online?: Sitting Freud After Freud* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), p. 237.

Commenting on Elizabeth Woodville's supposed unsuitability to be queen is suggestive, an audience might think, of the debates surrounding Elizabeth I's appropriateness to be queen and the aspersions that were cast on her birth (notably during her period of disinheritance). However, the way in which the later parts of *Richard III* present Anne Neville as an ineffective victim demonstrates the limitations of conforming to a model of passive queenship. Through his characterisation of the queens of the Wars of the Roses, Shakespeare explores some of the difficulties associated with Elizabeth I's self-presentation, and some of the contradictions she had to inhabit in order to demonstrate strength whilst avoiding complete subversion of (gendered) expectations and behaviours.⁷³

i. Margaret

In the face of her husband's lack of martial ability and political subtlety or intellect in *3 Henry VI*, Margaret assumes the responsibilities traditionally ascribed to and expected of the king. She is no longer the 'queen in bondage' of *1 Henry VI* (5.3.67), no longer subject to Suffolk's face that 'ruled [her] like a wandering planet' (*2HVI*, 4.4.14-15), but an independent, forceful military leader. In *3 Henry VI*, a messenger informs York that the Queen leads the northern earls and lords and twenty thousand men to his castle (1.2.49-50). The army is twice described by York as 'the army of the Queen' (1.2.64; 1.4.1): there are no illusions that anyone other than Margaret is in control of this renewed martial activity.⁷⁴ York's son, Richard (later Richard III), even declares that 'a woman's general', proposing the fact of Margaret's 'femaleness' as a reason to be unafraid to meet the approaching army in battle despite being vastly outnumbered (1.2.68).

⁷³ Laura Janara argues that Elizabeth I used 'inbetween-ness as a strategic and productive political disposition'. See 'Machiavelli, Elizabeth I and the Innovative Historical Self: A Politics of Action, Not Identity', *History of Political Thought* 27.3 (2006), 455-485 (473).

⁷⁴ Interestingly, York calls Margaret 'Queen' even as he denies that Henry VI is (or ever was) the rightful king.

This confidence in the supposedly inherent superiority of a male-led army, however, is challenged as the Queen's forces win a victory on the battlefield (1.4.1). York's young son Rutland is captured and killed, and York himself suffers a similar fate shortly after. Though 'a woman's general', the female-led army is in no way 'effeminate': it is not 'womanish' in any derogatory, misogynistic sense, nor can the early modern connotations of 'effeminate' as an 'antonym to military valour and honour' be identified in the 'overmatching waves' of Margaret's organised ranks (that York describes at 1.4.22) and her (briefly) victorious army.⁷⁵ John Smythe—an Elizabethan traveller, ambassador, and soldier who produced a handful of military tracts—writes in 1591 that it is 'effeminacie to neglect' military exercises, and by doing so, 'empires, kingdomes, and Common wealthes [...] haue declined, decaied, and finally been made praies to their Enemies'.⁷⁶ Regardless of whether or not Shakespeare generally demonstrates greater sympathy for the Yorkist claim to the throne in his Wars of the Roses plays, Margaret's military action and success might be seen as admirable given Henry's refusal or inability to take such action himself.

The problem, of course, is that Margaret is a female character who transgresses gendered expectations. Jankowski argues that 'Margaret's various powers [...] are manifestations of "the power behind the throne" often thought to be held by royal wives who exceed their positions as consorts – chaste, silent and obedient wives'.⁷⁷ Margaret certainly strays far from this model of queenship, most acutely from the moment when she assumes control of the army. Her political power is no longer simply 'behind the throne', but publicly

⁷⁵ As discussed above, Banks explores idea of 'effeminacy' and some of the connotations surrounding the word in the early modern period in her article, 'Warlike women: 'reprooffe to these degenerate effeminate dayes'?', p. 170.

⁷⁶ John Smythe, '[Certen] instruct[i]ons, obseruati[on]s and orders militarie, requisit for all chieftaines, captaines [and?] higher and lower men of charge, [and officers] to vnderstand, [knowe and obserue]', printed 1594, pp. 197 and 1. Reconstructed title and text are taken from Early English Books Online, available at: eebo.chadwyck.com/ [last accessed December 2018].

⁷⁷ Jankowski, *Women in Power*, p. 90.

perceptible and discussed by various characters throughout the play. Margaret is a queen consort playing a king's part, a woman assuming a man's divine office.

In the figure of Margaret, then, several roles are conflated as she leads her army: general, king, queen, mother, and regent. This complex socio-political position is reflected in how the other characters—allies and enemies—address or refer to Margaret in *3 Henry VI*. She is 'the Queen [who] has best success when [Henry is] absent' according to her ally, Clifford (2.2.73). Her chief rival, Richard, Duke of York, refers to her as a 'general' (Richard, 1.4.1). York's son, Clarence, refers to her as 'Captain Margaret' and 'king, though [Henry] do wear the crown' (2.2.90). Perhaps, in this rendering, Margaret is more a prince in the vein of Elizabeth I: a powerful, even Machiavellian, independent ruler.⁷⁸

However, Shakespeare's fictional queen becomes an outrageous figure, his portrayal of Margaret becoming more overtly critical as he dramatises the battles in which she partakes. Various vitriolic insults are levelled at Margaret throughout the tetralogy and most especially in *3 Henry VI* (in which Margaret is most physically active): she is at several points called proud, ruthless, war-like and bloody-minded, whorish, and animalistic. The scene in which the most visceral invectives are directed at Margaret is also the one in which she is at her most brutal and pitiless. Victorious on the field, Margaret—with Clifford, Northumberland, Prince Edward, and a group of soldiers—pursues and captures an exhausted York. Asked what to do with her defeated captive, Margaret orchestrates a mocking display.

⁷⁸ The title 'prince', in a premodern sense, was not necessarily gendered nor indeed related to a specific role or rank: the term was sometimes used as a generic term for any ruler (though of course rulers were usually male). The enduring 'mirrors for princes' genre, for example, aimed to educate (new) rulers on statecraft. Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532) is perhaps the best-known and most influential work of this genre, and it became 'one of the cult texts of students in the 1580s and 1590s' (Kevin Sharpe, *Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 332). Janara discusses Elizabeth I's 'Machiavellianism' and her 'varying self-identification as queen, prince, and king' ('Machiavelli, Elizabeth I and the Innovative Historical Self', p. 475). In the Tilbury speech before the Armada in 1588, Elizabeth refers to herself as a woman, king, and prince (but not a queen). Connolly and Hopkins note that Elizabeth 'often gendered herself male in her writing', but 'the only time Elizabeth physically presented herself in the figure of a man was at Tilbury in 1588' where she was 'able to style herself as both queen and king, a mother to her people and a prince married to her kingdom' (Connolly and Hopkins, 'Introduction', in *Goddesses and Queens*, p. 4). Though Shakespeare's Queen Margaret does not insist on any title for herself other than queen, we can see how her assumption of certain modes of behaviour that challenge or eschew gender boundaries links the character with the contemporary Queen of England.

She ‘make[s] him stand upon this molehill’ (1.4.68), berating him for daring to stake a claim to the English throne, and pointing out that he is isolated from his sons. Her cruel taunting crests when she demands:

... where is your darling Rutland?
 Look, York, I stained this napkin with the blood
 That valiant Clifford with his rapier’s point
 Made issue from the bosom of thy boy. (1.4.79-82)

Where the real Rutland was seventeen at the time of his death (and older than his brothers, Clarence and Richard), Shakespeare makes him York’s youngest son and so fortifies his portrayal of Margaret’s transgressive nature: this is not simply a victim of war, but the vengeful murder of a child. She forces York to observe the evidence proving Rutland’s violent death and claims direct responsibility for soaking the handkerchief with his blood. There can be little doubt that Margaret took this bloody token with the express intention of torturing York about the murder it indicates. Not content to stop there, Margaret makes York take the handkerchief and tells him to use it to dry the tears he might cry for Rutland (1.4.82-83). She announces that she wants to provoke grief and rage in York, so that she may ‘sing and dance’ (1.4.92) and be ‘merry’ (1.4.87). This calculated cruelty and desire to derive joy from York’s pain—and a child’s death—offers the audience a picture of Margaret as particularly ruthless. This picture is only enhanced when she claims that ‘York cannot speak unless he wear a crown’ (1.4.94) and coordinates the Duke’s humiliation as she sets a paper crown on his head in a display of both brutality and petty cruelty. On his molehill with his paper crown, ‘now looks he like a king’, Margaret mocks (1.4.97). She concludes her theatrical verbal torture of York by reminding him that the only way he could become king before Henry’s death was if he broke his oath. And so, this:

... fault too, too, unpardonable.
 Off with the crown, and with the crown his head.
 And whilst we breathe, take time to do him dead. (1.4.107-09)

If she does knock the paper crown from York's head as the dialogue (and many subsequent stage directions) indicates, this is a symbolic execution before the imminent physical execution.

York responds not with the orisons Margaret bids him make (1.4.111), but with a diatribe condemning Margaret's cruelty and, especially, her unwomanliness. He uses syncrisis to emphasise that Margaret is the 'opposite to every good' in women (1.4.135-36), her behaviour 'ill-beseeming [...] in [her] sex' (1.4.113): he tells her that '[w]omen are soft, mild, pitiful, and flexible-- / Thou stern, obdurate, flinty, rough, remorseless' (1.4.142-43). Margaret, the 'Amazonian trull' (1.4.115) embodies a vision of threatening female masculinity and is a transgressor of gender boundaries. York's eldest son, the newly crowned King Edward IV, also compares Margaret's actions to her 'play[ing] the Amazon' when he hears that she plans to quit her 'mourning weeds' for armour and return to England to fight (4.1.102-04). John Knox's antifeminist diatribe compares female sovereignty to the mythical Amazons, warrior women who lived largely independent of men.⁷⁹ Kathryn Schwarz argues that Margaret's *playing* of the Amazon 'marks the space beyond the margins of Englishness, maleness, and a natural condition of power': she says that this Amazonian performance takes place 'from so far inside the structures [of Englishness, maleness and power]' as to expose the structures' 'vulnerability to revision from within'.⁸⁰ Margaret's unfeminine, unwomanly conduct is all the more threatening as she is queen, at the heart of English politics, acting in a regent-like capacity on behalf of an ineffectual husband and a young son.

Further, Margaret's quest to punish the traitorous would-be usurper (to use her assessment of York) is pursued with such ruthlessness and glee as to make her not only less-than-woman, but 'more inhuman, more inexorable' than cannibals and animals. York's invective against Margaret is loaded with animalistic imagery that compares her to a

⁷⁹ Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet*, p. 11 (B3r).

⁸⁰ Kathryn Schwarz, *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 101.

poisonous adder (1.4.113), a tiger-hearted woman but ‘ten times more than tigers of Hyrcania’ (1.4.138; 1.4.156), and, most familiarly, a ‘she-wolf’ (1.4.112). Wolves had been hunted to almost total extinction in England by the time of Henry VII’s reign, so when Shakespeare writes of wolves, it is as something threatening, uncontrollable, creatures to be hunted and exterminated: by this point, wolves had been suppressed in England and so made foreign.⁸¹ For York, Margaret’s Frenchness is aligned with the wild, animalistic metaphor of the wolf, a dual insult that doubly others the queen.

Margaret’s apparent cruelty continues in actions as well as words when she stabs York, declaring ‘here’s to right our gentle-hearted King’ (1.4.177). The implication of her statement is twofold: she is correcting the wrong done to her husband and king, as well as compensating for the wrong done *by* the king in his failure to suppress the contenders for his throne.⁸² This scene is one of many in which Margaret features prominently, but this vengeful, powerful moment stands out in depictions of Margaret of Anjou. Throughout the first tetralogy, Shakespeare builds on the generally unfavourable portraits of Margaret depicted in his chronicle sources—namely Hall’s Chronicle, in which Margaret is held accountable for much of the ‘euill aduentures’ of the Wars of the Roses—but this scene of York’s murder facilitates an imagining of Margaret as an especially monstrous, even unnatural, woman.⁸³ Just as the image of Lady Macbeth being willing to ‘dash the brains’ out of her baby and asking the spirits to ‘take her milk for gall’ (*Macbeth*, 1.7.58; 1.5.146) is striking, the violent picture Margaret paints of herself as the remorseless torturer, hands steeped in a murdered child’s blood, is vivid and enduring.

⁸¹ See Joseph Strutt, *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*, ed. by William Hone (London: William Tegg, 1867), pp. 18-19.

⁸² Stanavage’s assessment that Margaret ‘uses her identity as a revenger to establish a sovereign authority that she never legally possesses’ is once again useful to consider here. ‘Margaret of Anjou and the Rhetoric of Sovereign Vengeance’, p. 163.

⁸³ Edward Hall, *Hall’s Chronicle; containing the history of England, during the reign of Henry the Fourth, and the succeeding monarchs, to the end of the reign of Henry the Eighth, in which are particularly described the manners and customs of those periods. Carefully collated with the editions of 1548 and 1550* (London: J. Johnson &c., 1809), p. 297.

In addition to embodying a vision of threatening female masculinity as she transgresses gender boundaries, Margaret is also othered by her French identity. As I discuss in previous chapters, the long history of Anglo-French enmity, the shifting geographical boundaries, and territorial expansion and reduction resulted in France and Frenchness often being maligned in early modern England. As Logan argues, foreign queens ‘challenge the apparently straightforward opposition between friend and enemy’, not least because of the sense that they ‘would naturally lack [the] bond’ that bound a sovereign to his subjects and commonweal.⁸⁴ Indeed, we see Margaret verbally severing her bond with Henry following her son’s disinheritance, unafraid to challenge her sovereign husband when she believes he has acted badly. She also crosses physical boundaries in the first tetralogy, often moving between French territories and England and even seeking political support from her French kinsmen when fighting the Yorkists. These geographic shifts, and the need to turn to ‘foreigners’ for help, suggests a lack of stable national identity. Indeed, when the Yorkists emerge victorious in *3 Henry VI*, the newly crowned Edward IV decides Margaret’s fate: paid a ransom by her father, he declares ‘[a]way with her, and waft her hence to France’ (5.7.41). When she is no longer queen consort, Edward attempts to extricate any sense of an English identity from Margaret. It is not clear where exactly Margaret will go, but the solution to any problems she might present is to ‘waft’ her from England like no more than a bothersome fly. Though Margaret is not so neatly ‘wafted’ away—she returns at the beginning of *Richard III* to demand that the audience both on and offstage ‘hear’ her, forcefully affirming a voice for herself at a moment when she might be expected to disappear from history and narrative as the wife of an overthrown king—Edward’s insistence on her Frenchness articulates a lack of belonging, a sense that the former queen of England is definitively *not*-English. Margaret is

⁸⁴ Logan, ‘Introduction: Foreign Queens, Abusive Sovereignty, and Political Theory in the Past and the Present’, in *Shakespeare’s Foreign Queens*, pp. 1-59 (pp. 1 and 5).

the enemy within, Lacan's embedded alien: she is something to be extracted, removed, perhaps even hunted from English lands.

ii. Elizabeth

Like Margaret, Elizabeth Woodville was judged negatively by historiographical traditions that characterised various identities, from the 'devoted and grieving mother' to the 'grasping parvenu' willing to go to any lengths to ensure the advancement of her family. Shakespeare's portrayal of Elizabeth navigates these judgements.⁸⁵ In *Richard III*, Shakespeare dramatises some of the anxieties that arose as a result of Edward's marriage to Elizabeth: the fact that she was a commoner whose large family were of an expanding 'prosperous middling rank with lands and ambitions' makes her threatening, other.⁸⁶ In this play's first scene, Richard soliloquises his desire to cause unrest between his brothers and pave the way for him to claim the throne for himself: he has plotted 'by drunken prophecies, libels and dreams' to 'set [...] Clarence and the King / In deadly hate the one against the other' (1.1.33-35). When Clarence explains that he is a prisoner bound for the Tower of London, Richard (who has told the audience that Clarence's arrest was his design) responds immediately to his brother's 'news' by blaming the queen and her kin:

Why, this it is when men are ruled by women.
'Tis not the King that sends you to the Tower;
My Lady Gray, his wife—Clarence, 'tis she
That tempts him to this harsh extremity.
Was it not she, and that good man of worship
Anthony Woodeville her brother there,
That made him send Lord Hastings to the Tower,
From whence this present day he is delivered?
We are not safe, Clarence; we are not safe. (1.1.62-70)

⁸⁵ Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens*, p. 15.

⁸⁶ Earenfight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe*, p. 186.

These lines are loaded with inferences about contemporary (both fifteenth century and Elizabethan) concerns about female rule and about an emergent, upwardly mobile, ambitious middling class. In the same moment that Richard posits that Elizabeth holds significant political sway over her husband and his decisions, he dissociates her from her status as queen by insisting on the appellation ‘Lady Gray’. This linguistic decision serves to make Elizabeth’s influence seem more inappropriate; not only is she not ‘queen’ here, but the title ‘Lady Gray’ reminds Clarence and the audience that she is a commoner and had been somebody else’s wife. The word ‘tempts’ also recalls historiographical descriptions of Elizabeth as a ‘temptress’ with a dangerous ability to facilitate her own aspirations.

Richard, in turn, highlights that Elizabeth acts with the support of her brother, Anthony Woodeville, Earl Rivers. Clarence ultimately ‘shares Richard’s scornful estimation of Edward’s pliancy’.⁸⁷ He agrees with his brother’s assertion that they ‘are not safe’: ‘I think there is no man secure / But the Queen’s kindred’ (1.1.71-72). This statement, of course, turns out to be wholly untrue, but is nonetheless demonstrative of the dislike and distrust of the new ‘commoners at court’ who (here, at least) pose a threat to the power and security of the patriarchal Yorkist line. This early reminder of Elizabeth’s apparently continued closeness with her brother foreshadows Richard’s emphasis on the supposed Woodvillean threat—namely, Elizabeth’s brother and her two sons from her first marriage—that continues throughout much of the play. He fans the flames of discontent with the presence and influence of Elizabeth’s family as a method of delegitimising her position as queen consort and, later, dowager queen mother, seeking to make his own claim to the throne appear the more favourable. When Elizabeth tells her brother and her sons that Richard—who has been appointed Protector to the heir in the event of the king’s death—is ‘a man that loves not me—

⁸⁷ Ann Kaegi, ‘(S)wept from power: two versions of tyrannicide in *Richard III*’, in *The Renaissance of emotion: Understanding affect in Shakespeare and his contemporaries*, ed. by Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 200-20 (p. 202).

nor none of you' (1.3.13), she recognises her own vulnerability in the face of her husband's illness and imminent death.⁸⁸

It is in this context that Richard arrives to make a theatrical display of offence that the Woodvilles have 'complain[ed] unto the King / That I forsooth am stern and love them not' (1.3.42-43). He says they 'fill [the king's] ears with dissentious rumours' which are more tenable because his appearance makes him unable to 'flatter and look fair' (1.3.46-47). The Woodvilles' dislike and distrust of him, Richard claims, derives from discriminatory interpretations of his imperfect outward appearance: because he cannot—and will not—offer (false) support of the Woodvilles, he 'must be held a rancorous enemy' (1.3.50). Richard twice refers to the Woodvilles as 'jacks', meaning 'knaves', 'scoundrels' or 'nobodies', referring to their elevated social station that results from Elizabeth's marriage to the king.⁸⁹ Following Clarence's execution, Richard suggests that the Woodvilles have greater cause for guilt than Clarence had but they are not suspected (2.1.92-95). Left alone onstage with Buckingham at the end of scene, he pushes this accusation further and embeds seeds of doubt and anxiety about the Woodvilles as he says that the 'guilty kindred of the Queen / Looked pale' because they 'did urge [Clarence's death] unto the King' (2.1.137-39). Just a few short scenes later, we learn that Richard and Buckingham have imprisoned Rivers and Gray (2.4). They are later executed at Pomfret (3.3).

However, the fact that Richard himself—Shakespeare's great Machiavellian anti-hero, a Vice-like figure whose inappropriate and ruthless personal ambitions motivates acts of evil and civil war—is the mouthpiece for (and encourager of) much of the criticism directed at the queen and her family complicates the prospect of a straightforwardly condemnatory reading

⁸⁸ The characters of Elizabeth's brother, Earl Rivers, and her sons, Marquis of Dorset and Lord Gray, will henceforth be referred to as 'the Woodvilles'. Anthony Woodeville, Earl Rivers, will henceforth be referred to as 'Rivers'.

⁸⁹ The *Norton Shakespeare* glosses 'jacks' as 'nobodies', whilst the *New Oxford* edition glosses it as 'nobodies' or scoundrels. The Woodvilles are 'silken, sly, insinuating jacks' (1.3.53). Richard also laments that '[s]ince every jack became a gentleman, / There's many a gentle person made a jack' (1.3.72-73).

of the Woodvilles in *Richard III*. By locating much of the contemporary anxieties and criticisms about the Woodvilles in a character like Richard (Shakespeare's dramatisation of who, we know, contributed so much to subsequent readings of him as a hunch-backed villain), Shakespeare effectively distances himself (and the play's focus) from the most intense disparagement of the Woodvilles. Indeed, it is important to remember that Elizabeth Woodville was the mother of Elizabeth of York, herself the mother of Henry VIII and grandmother of Elizabeth I, and thus part of recent history and vitally important to (the establishment of) the Tudor dynasty.

Perhaps a more accurate reflection of Shakespeare's position on the Woodvilles (if possible to identify such a position) comes in a short scene featuring only three unnamed citizens. The citizens discuss the news of the king's death, and worry for the state of country that is 'governed by a child' with uncles on both paternal and maternal sides competing for influence over his reign (2.3.11; 2.3.23-26). The citizens note that Richard is dangerous, and that 'the Queen's sons and brothers [are] haught and proud' (2.3.27-28): they suggest that it would be better for the realm if neither party exerted too much influence over the true monarch. This scene offers a much more balanced reading of the rival factions, where the characters neither fully condemn nor support Richard or Elizabeth and her family.

Nonetheless, it is largely the case throughout the play that Richard attempts to 'other' Elizabeth by emphasising her commoner status and closeness to ambitious relatives. Just as Margaret is othered by her Frenchness and assumption of 'masculine' martial responsibility earlier in the tetralogy, Elizabeth is othered by her status as a commoner. These positions of otherness, however, are not wholly limiting but can also yield platforms for power, particularly for Margaret.

iii. Anne

Shakespeare's Queen Anne is not like the vengeful Margaret, who subverts gendered conventions and enacts military independence. She is also unlike Elizabeth, whose lower social rank and previous marriage and motherhood makes her an unconventional choice of bride. Anne is not foreign, but her Englishness is not a hindrance because she has powerful family connections. Richard III's queen, in Shakespeare's rendering, is the least 'other', the least threatening of the three queen consorts we see in the first tetralogy. Theoretically, as a domestic, highborn queen, Anne is the most politically invulnerable of the three. However, her political usefulness runs out for Richard: without an heir and needing a more powerful alliance during a time of civil war, Richard contrives for his wife to be murdered. Though she is not a foreign queen who is essentially isolated in her husband's kingdom, we can apply Logan's reading that 'Shakespeare [...] gestures towards the vulnerability of subjects in general, symbolically represented by [...] queens'. Richard certainly typifies the 'abusive potential of embodied sovereignty', and Anne experiences much of this abuse.⁹⁰ However, her relative absence in the play (she only has 165 lines, where the title character is one of the most loquacious in Shakespeare) serves to reduce any sense of her culpability in Richard's heinous actions: she is not shown to give him good counsel, nor do we see her failing to counsel him.

What we do see Anne do is curse Richard. Margaret's power to curse is well documented, and Elizabeth needs Margaret to teach her to curse (4.4.117), but Anne is also able to curse: she does so in her introductory scene (inadvertently cursing herself, as she laments at 4.1.65-86), and she does so posthumously near the play's conclusion. Anne appears amongst the ghosts of Richard's prominent victims in his quest to claim and keep the throne, where she is the ninth ghost to tell Richard to '[d]esper and die' whilst wishing

⁹⁰ Logan, 'Introduction', in *Shakespeare's Foreign Queens*, pp. 18 and 1.

happy dreams for Henry Tudor (5.5.117). Anne's voice follows the patterns of the ghosts that speak before her, the repetition creating an almost hypnotic effect. The ghostly words become speech acts as they invoke curses on Richard. Anne thus claims for herself some posthumous agency: despite the fact that she has been victimised—indeed, murdered—by her husband, Anne does not remain silent, instead speaking herself into the narrative of her husband's subsequent death. Where Anne lacks physical power, the play emphasises the power of her voice.

Throughout the first tetralogy, Shakespeare depicts different aspects of otherness through the characters of the three women who become queen. Their behaviours, familial relationships, national identity, and social rank are amongst the features criticised by other characters, and that make them 'embedded aliens'. However, Margaret, Elizabeth, and Anne each turn the 'othered' aspects of their identity to their advantages. Margaret uses her connections to the French court to forge alliances, and her transgression of expected gendered and maternal behaviours allow her to become a military 'general' leading her troops into battle. Elizabeth's experience as a widow, alongside (Richard's) criticism of her commoner family, is used to further foster a sense of independence. Finally, Anne claims posthumous agency through her curses. Shakespeare shows the three queens fighting against the features that other them whilst they also embody these features and utilise them to seize some independence and autonomy in a manner reminiscent of Elizabeth I's contradictory, self-conscious self-styling.

Rivals, Kinship, and Queenly Dialogue

Anxieties about rival claimants to the throne—and rival queenship as a phenomenon that developed particularly in the latter half of the sixteenth century—helped to shape the society in and for which Shakespeare was writing. Mary, Queen of Scots' execution in February

1587 took place no more than four or five years before Shakespeare began writing the first tetralogy. In these plays, Shakespeare explores the complex and often problematic synthesis of rivalry and kinship, both familial and friendly. He does not do so by explicitly dramatising current affairs and his precise historical moment, but rather explores such concerns through, and in relation to, the conflicts of the Wars of the Roses a century earlier. Rival monarchs permeate this set of plays. Rival queens—or queen consorts—are also afforded significant dramatic space: Shakespeare explores ideas of rival and (inter)connected queenship through Margaret, Elizabeth, and Anne.

In this section, I discuss the stage's permeation with rival, sequential, and potential queens in *Richard III*. In this play, queens speak to one another. Though jealousy, bitterness, and rivalry do indeed characterise much of the interaction between the queens, Shakespeare also addresses their potential to have more amiable relationships either in the present or, more realistically, under different circumstances. The complex, dialogic intersections between rivalry and kinship, the personal and political, which coloured so much of Elizabeth I's reign are reflected in queens' interactions in *Richard III*. Here, queenly relationships are either contentious, amicable, or both, but queenly identities are invariably interlocked and interdependent: queens are defined as much by one another as by their fathers, husbands, and sons. I argue that Shakespeare's contemporary social and political landscapes informed his dramatisations and that his drama—subtly and less subtly—reflected and commented on these contemporary concerns and anxieties surrounding Elizabeth I and her rivals for the throne. This section also continues to develop the argument that Shakespeare dramatises a type of history that has not been traditionally narrated, through his rendering of queens and the placement of them alongside and in parallel to kings and powerful men. Finally, I posit that the act of queens speaking to one another and declaring their own identities constitutes a

particular form of speech act, where language stands for a kind of embodied action that is used to articulate and assume authority.⁹¹

I would like to begin by considering the relationship that Shakespeare depicts between Margaret and Elizabeth. In the *Henry VI* plays, these two characters are first set up as parallels and then occupy mirroring positions as queens of rival royal factions. As they are weighed against one another, the benefits and drawbacks of each of their queenships are interrogated, at least implicitly. As Edward IV consolidates his kingship with martial victory and the birth of a male heir at the end of *3 Henry VI*, his wife correspondingly gains security as the queen. Elizabeth becomes more active and politically powerful in *Richard III*; as she does so, her predecessor as queen is diminished, almost neutralised. In *Henry VI*, ‘Captain Margaret’ (*3HVI*, 1.2.68), the ‘woman [...] general’ (*3HVI*, 1.2.68), leads soldiers into battle on horseback, with sword in hand, in a manner reminiscent of Elizabeth I—and of Elizabeth’s propagandist stylisation, particularly in relation to her speech at Tilbury ahead of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Margaret acts in the capacity of queen regent in place of an ineffective king and an underage son, actively participating in—and often leading—the political and martial action of court and country. By the time she is introduced in *Richard III*, she is ‘old Queen Margaret’, with ‘old’ meaning both ‘aged’ and ‘former’: Margaret has been ousted from power and is no longer queen.⁹²

Reading the Margaret of *Richard III* as a different iteration of the same historical figure dramatised earlier in the tetralogy’s chronology—a different ‘version’ or interpretation of Margaret of Anjou—can be productive, particularly when attempting to decipher instances which might otherwise be read as authorial ‘continuity errors’, lapses of memory, or carelessness. Reading the plays of the first tetralogy as distinct works—as four separate plays that deal with some of the same ideas and historical moments and characters rather than as a

⁹¹ These queenly conversations also, as I have suggested here and elsewhere, might be considered to pass the modern ‘Bechdel test’.

⁹² Shakespeare, *Richard III*, Bodleian Arch. G c.7 (1.3).

definitively unified ‘tetralogy’—would ensure that we do not look for a novelistic psychological continuity between and through the plays. But reading the Margaret of *Richard III* as the same character depicted in the *Henry VI* plays, just older and embittered, may also be fruitful. This latter reading reveals an image of a character whose political career is portrayed from beginning to end, whose rise and fall as if on Fortune’s Wheel is dramatised almost in its entirety.

As Margaret falls to the nadir of the Wheel, Elizabeth rises: she is the fertile mother of several potential heirs to the throne. Elizabeth alludes to Fortune’s Wheel when she articulates her ‘fear [that] our happiness is at its height’ to her kinsmen and allies (*RIII*, 1.3.41), figuring that they are on the precipice of falling out of fortune because of Edward IV’s ill-health and Richard’s apparent individualistic ambition. And though this statement might be true of Elizabeth’s ‘happiness’, her husband and king’s death does not plunge her to the base of her political power. Margaret, on the other hand, does see her power reduced in *Richard III*: it becomes situated only in rhetorical bitterness, a spectral capacity to haunt, curse, and cast hateful words at her enemies either directly or in dramatic asides. By the time Shakespeare concludes this play, Margaret’s curses have all been enacted: the characters targeted by her threats and ill-wishes see them come to life as their tragic situations develop. The result is that her words are credited as having been prophetic (by Elizabeth at 4.4.79, for example), thus retrospectively enhancing their impact and sense of ‘truth’.

When Margaret and Elizabeth are brought together to interact on stage for the first time in *Richard III*, the two are explicitly set up as rival queens. Elizabeth tells Richard that she would ‘rather be a country servant-maid / Than a great queen [...] / To be so baited, scorned, and stormèd at’ (1.3.107-09), itself an echo of Margaret’s sentiment that ‘[t]o be a queen in bondage is more vile / Than is a slave in base servility’ (*IHVI*, 5.5.68-69). Though these statements are not in response to the exact same circumstances—Margaret is addressing

Suffolk's suggestion that she should become betrothed to Henry VI as a result of her capture, whilst Elizabeth is criticising Richard's (verbal) mistreatment of her—both characters articulate an expectation that queenship should come with respect.

Shakespeare continues to parallel and oppose the two queens throughout the play using a language of inheritance and legitimacy, of 'due', duty, and rightfulness. 'Small joy have I in being England's queen' (because of Richard's 'blunt upbraidings' and 'bitter scoffs'), Elizabeth laments (1.3.110; 1.3.104). It is not coincidental or unremarkable that Margaret enters the scene seemingly in response to this comment from the Yorkist queen. Margaret appears almost as though Elizabeth has invoked her, returning to the stage as if to give evidence that a queen's office can indeed be joyless.⁹³ Margaret prays that 'lessened be [Elizabeth's] small [joy]' (1.3.111): she should not be allowed happiness in her queenly office because, Margaret says in her first aside of the scene, '[t]hy honour, state, and seat is due to me' (1.3.112). Shakespeare allows Margaret to articulate a view that it is not only her husband's (and, later, her son's) throne that has been usurped, but also her own throne, position in court, and 'honour'. Here, she uses a language of rivalry, of competition for the throne, of a binary 'either/or' of 'Queen Margaret' or 'Queen Elizabeth'. Because there is now a 'Queen Elizabeth', Margaret's status as queen (and all its accoutrements), she implies, have been 'usurped'. By allowing Margaret to claim that Elizabeth's 'honour, state, and seat is due to [her]', Shakespeare creates a dual meaning: 'due to me' suggests both 'owed' and 'owing'. Not only does Elizabeth now possess Margaret's royal status (which Margaret says should be hers), but she has only inherited this new status because Margaret has lost it. There can, of course, only be one queen. A complex dynamic is established between these two

⁹³ F1's stage directions have her enter after Elizabeth's 'small joy' statement, whilst the *Norton Shakespeare* places her arrival immediately before this line. Though the stage directions leave the very precise moment of Margaret's entry onto the stage slightly unclear, the text of the play itself certainly confirms that Margaret's entry is dependent on Elizabeth's 'small joy' line.

characters from the moment of their first staged interaction, whereby their identities as queen (and) consort are contingent on and defined by one another.

Dominique Goy-Blanquet's assertion that 'Shakespeare does nothing either to compare or oppose' Margaret and Elizabeth in *Richard III*, then, overlooks much of the implicit and explicit interactions and intersections between the two characters.⁹⁴ Shakespeare compares and opposes Margaret and Elizabeth even before their introduction with their comparative introductory 'wooing scenes' earlier in the tetralogy. They are also levelled with similar degrees of distrust and dislike by other characters throughout the plays. They are opposed again through verbal echoes; through their almost-conjoined entries in this scene; through the space and attention given to their shared fate as fallen queens and mothers to murdered princes; and, most explicitly and clearly, through Margaret's self-conscious and repeated articulation and acceptance of their necessary rivalry as a result of royal roles and circumstances. Goy-Blanquet argues that it is Richard who opposes Elizabeth. Though this opposition is indeed explored in much detail, Shakespeare still affords dramatic space to the comparison and opposition of, and relationship between, Elizabeth and Margaret.

Perhaps Shakespeare is engaging with, (re)writing, or expanding the supposed historical 'relationship' between the two queens that can be assumed from his sources. More's *The History of King Richard the Third*, for example, states that Elizabeth 'was in service with Queen Margaret'.⁹⁵ Despite the fact that the Elizabeth (or Isabel) Grey shown in Margaret of Anjou's records is unlikely to have been Elizabeth Woodville, this apparent relationship between the two queens had an established historiographical presence by the late sixteenth century. It is unclear whether Shakespeare is certainly responding to this suggested relationship in his depiction of the two queens—the prospect of a maid of honour in Margaret's service herself rising to become queen would indeed make an intriguing story—

⁹⁴ Dominique Goy-Blanquet, *Shakespeare's Early History Plays: From Chronicle to Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 138-39.

⁹⁵ More, *The History of King Richard III*, p. 61.

but he nonetheless depicts them as women who share experiences, losses, and responsibilities. As Bucholz and Levin write, ‘queens themselves “talked” to one another, either literally [...] or figuratively across time’.⁹⁶ In *Richard III*, Elizabeth and Margaret talk to each other literally (onstage) and figuratively (between the lines of the play and in terms of the assumed relationship between them, and that relationship’s place in the cultural imagination). Shakespeare’s representation of their conversations allows for an articulation of a less familiar, less common form of history. It forms an interpretation of the domestic and (inter)personal consequences and implications of civil war and competition for the English throne. It also dramatises another rivalry that runs parallel to the more familiar rivalries between men and kings.

Though there is no mention or assumption of a prior relationship between the two characters in *Richard III*, the pair are established as opposites and mirrors. When Margaret reveals her presence after fifty lines of cursing asides, she insists that she is still a queen despite having been deposed (1.3.161-62): ‘A husband and a son thou ow’st to me’, she tells Richard, before continuing ‘[a]nd thou a kingdom’ (1.3.167-68). Though the First Folio does not instruct that this second statement of debt is directed at Elizabeth, this seems to make logical sense and modern editors tend to follow this reading. If Richard has deprived Margaret of her husband and son through battle, Elizabeth has deprived Margaret of ‘her’ kingdom by becoming the new queen consort of England. As the assembled Yorkist company criticise Margaret in turn, she continues her invective against them. For much of her presence in this scene, then, Margaret’s focus is on cursing the villainous future usurping king, Richard. The words which she directs at Richard are bitter and violent, as she brands him a ‘dog’, ‘the troubler of the poor world’s peace’, and the ‘son of hell’ (1.3.213; 218; 227) and

⁹⁶ Bucholz and Levin, ‘Introduction: It’s Good to Be a Queen’, in *Queens and Power in Medieval and Early Modern England*, pp. xiii-xxxiii (p. xiv).

predicts that ‘each of you [will become] the subjects to his hate’ (1.3.300). Like Elizabeth, Margaret is set up as a rival (though not a particularly potent threat, at this stage) to Richard.

But the first victim of Margaret’s curses is not the play’s antihero, but her rival queen, Elizabeth:

Edward thy son, that now is Prince of Wales,
 For Edward my son, that was Prince of Wales,
 Die in his youth by like untimely violence.
 Thyself, a queen, for me that was queen,
 Outlive thy glory like my wretched self.
 Long mayst thou live – to wail thy children’s death,
 And see another, as I see thee now,
 Decked in thy rights, as thou art ‘stalled in mine.
 Long die thy happy days before thy death,
 And after many lengthened hours of grief
 Die, neither mother, wife, nor England’s queen. (1.3.196-206)

Margaret’s language here is hostile, and the ‘myself/you’ parallelism of her speech serves to highlight the similarities between the two characters and, for Margaret, to wish for and forecast Elizabeth’s similar eventual miserable *peripeteia*.⁹⁷ Margaret acknowledges that she and Elizabeth, and the core parts of their identities, mirror one another: they have each been ‘mother, wife, [and] England’s queen’ (1.3.206). Since Margaret has had these identities stripped from her, she suggests, the most fitting recompense for Elizabeth as her ‘usurper’ would be to cease to be ‘decked in [her] rights’ and suffer a similar fate to her predecessor (1.3.203). This language is of debt, dues, and repayment, but it also a language of inheritance: Elizabeth not only ‘owes’ Margaret her crown and kingdom and possesses all the ‘rights’ of a queen, but she should also inherit the ‘joyless’ accompaniments and consequences of the office of queenship. Further, though Elizabeth herself ‘never did [Margaret] any [wrong]’, Richard points out that Elizabeth nonetheless has ‘all the vantage of her wrong’ (1.3.307-08): for Elizabeth to inherit her new social, political position, Margaret’s position and identity as

⁹⁷ I do not mean to suggest that Shakespeare’s positing of Elizabeth before Richard in Margaret’s succession of curses implies that Elizabeth is more of a concern to Margaret—indeed, there is certainly a sense that Margaret’s curses culminate and strengthen or worsen when directed at Richard, the character who, the play suggests, deserves them the most—but that these curses should not simply be seen as a prelude to the curse against Richard. Rather, Shakespeare established Elizabeth and Margaret as comparable, rival characters.

queen must necessarily collapse. When Shakespeare brings these two characters together for the first time in this scene, he foregrounds their parallels, rivalry, and intersecting identities in a way that emphasises the power of the role of queen, and figures it in relation to the language of inheritance. Though the royal office is usually passed through the male line, Margaret's language in this scene claims that inheritance (and usurpation) can also occur between women.

Even as these two characters are opposed to and cursing one another, though, Shakespeare suggests the possibility of a more collaborative relationship between them. When Elizabeth says that Margaret has cursed herself (1.3.238), the latter responds by calling Elizabeth a 'poor painted Queen, vain flourish of [her] fortune' (1.3.239). She continues to insist on this reading of Elizabeth as a forged, merely decorative queen who is a 'poor' imitation of Margaret herself. However, she draws her insults back towards Richard, warning that his 'deadly web ensnareth' the court and that Elizabeth is a 'fool, fool' (1.3.241-42). 'The day will come that thou shalt wish for me / To help thee curse this poisonous bunch-backed toad' Margaret predicts (1.3.233-44), again correctly. There is a note of pity and warning in this exchange. Margaret—though indignant and enraged that Elizabeth has inherited her queenly mantle—attempts to warn Elizabeth and the court about the threat that Richard poses to the crown, the country and, consequently, the new queen herself. Just before Margaret leaves the stage, she claims that she has spoken 'gentle counsel' (1.3.295) as opposed to her earlier 'quick curses' (1.3.193). She occupies a complex position, whereby she both wishes the Yorkist characters ill and seems to want to prevent the trajectory of Richard's rise to power. Her articulation of hatred towards Richard serves a dramatic purpose as she becomes almost a spokesperson for the audience: having been allowed an insight into Richard's self-interested motivations, an audience understands Margaret's bitterness to be located as much in truth as in personal dislike. There a sense that Margaret has identified that

she and the Yorkists share a common enemy in Richard, and she cannot help but realise the resulting affinity between her and most of her rival faction.

This strange contradiction between ill will and prophetic, would-be helpful warnings that Shakespeare locates in Margaret's character manifests most potently through her relationship with Elizabeth. The interweaving of their identities as rivals and their potential for kinship and collaboration is explored later in the play. Though she claims to have 'lurked / To watch the waning of [her] enemies' (4.4.3-4) in the background of the play, Margaret only physically appears onstage once more after her initial cursing in Act One, scene three. In Act Four, scene four, Margaret interrupts Elizabeth and the Duchess of York's lamentations for the loss of their sons with a reminder of her own, more 'senior' grief and loss (4.4.36-37). 'Tell o'er your woes again by viewing mine', Margaret says, at once encouraging Elizabeth and the Duchess to consider how much greater Margaret's loss is and effectively drawing another parallel between their losses and suffering and her own (4.4.39). Margaret's use of epistrophe in the following lines gives this scene (and the action of the play(s) thus far) a sense of rhetorical, as well as fateful, symmetry:

I had an Edward, till a Richard killed him;
 I had a husband, till a Richard killed him.
 Thou hadst an Edward, till a Richard killed him;
 Thou hadst a Richard, till a Richard killed him. (4.4.40-43)

This rhetorical repetition calls attention to the fact that both queens have lost husbands and sons, kings, and princes who shared given names, royal titles, and unfortunate fates. Such affiliations serve to implicitly draw these queens (and queen-figures, as the Duchess of York—who might have been queen, and who is the mother of kings—may be considered) together as individuals who have been victims of and (to varying degrees) complicit in violent civil and royal conflicts.

Margaret maintains a bitterly belligerent tone during this interaction with Elizabeth and the Duchess. Her initial reminder of her own grief in relation to theirs segues into an

attack on the Duchess because the ‘grand tyrant of the earth / Thy womb let loose to chase us to our graves’ (4.4.54). She takes no heed of the Duchess’s past pity and the concession of Margaret’s victory it implies—‘triumph not in my woes. / God witness with me, I have wept for thine’ (Duchess, 4.4.59-60)—and instead continues her verbal attack on Richard via his mother. Elizabeth also concedes that Margaret was right in her earlier predictions: ‘thou didst prophesy the time would come / That I should wish for thee to help me curse’ (4.4.80). To this, Margaret reiterates her view of Elizabeth as a ‘painted queen’, a ‘queen in jest, only to fill the scene’ (4.4.83, 4.4.91), and taunts her with an *ubi sunt* topos for things that have disappeared and are lamented: ‘Where is thy husband now? Where be thy brothers? / Where are thy two sons?’ (4.4.92-3ff).

Margaret’s acrimonious language is coupled with a certain hollowness. As much as Margaret claims to be revelling in her victory and the ‘justice’ that has ‘whirled about’ (4.4.105), and though she claims to ‘leave the burden’ of her sorrow wholly on Elizabeth (4.4.110-13), the final line she speaks is in response to Elizabeth’s request for her to ‘teach [Elizabeth] how to curse [her] enemies’ (4.4.116-17). ‘Thy woes will make them sharp and pierce like mine’ is her reply (4.4.124), which implies that her ‘woes’ are still very real. Margaret’s final staged moments, then, leave the audience with an image of a ‘woeful’ former queen who, despite the ‘fall’ of her rival queen, is still defeated. She refuses to be silent and exiled from England at the beginning of *Richard III*, but Margaret’s role concludes with a reiteration of her grief and loss, her rhetorical power of being ‘well skilled in curses’ (4.4.116) now rendered inert before the character disappears. Despite Margaret’s apparent gloating, then, there remains a sense of shared grief in this scene, as well as an idea that these women could have shared instruction and wisdom, and could have effectively worked together against the tyrannical Richard.

Though I have analysed the intersections of rivalry and affinity in the relationship between Elizabeth and Margaret so far, there are other queen-figures who are similarly positioned in tension against one another. I have already briefly mentioned one such figure: the Duchess of York. The first half of Act Four, scene four is very much about Elizabeth, Margaret, *and* the Duchess together, with all three women articulating a shared experience of grief and anger. The Duchess, it should be remembered, might have replaced Margaret as the queen consort instead of Elizabeth, had her husband—the father of Edward IV, Clarence, and Richard III—not been killed before he could make good the claim to the throne that he had staked for many years. Shakespeare dedicates the latter part of this same scene to Elizabeth and Richard’s discussion of the proposed union between Richard and Elizabeth of York. Another potential queen becomes part of this dramatic conversation, and of course, we know that Elizabeth of York would indeed become the next queen consort of England as Henry VII’s wife. Further, this scene that stages interactions and discussions between and about queens, potential queens, and queen-figures is dramatically prefaced by several scenes which situate Anne Neville at their centre. The wife of Richard, Anne becomes another alternative, ‘rival’ queen because of her husband’s accession; by writing scenes in which Anne wishes for her own death and Richard circulates rumours regarding her supposed illness immediately prior to this convergence of queens in Act Four, scene four, Shakespeare ensures that an audience does not forget that this narrative of rulership, and specifically of queenship, is not neatly linear but complex and messy.

Bringing multiple queens onstage together does not just demonstrate complexity, but also demonstrates that the Wars of the Roses were very much a domestic, familial conflict, as well as a national conflict. Margaret is onstage with her former daughter-in-law, Anne; the Duchess is Anne’s great-aunt as well as her new mother-in-law; the Duchess is also Elizabeth’s mother-in-law; Anne and Elizabeth are sisters-in-law, and they speak to one

another with fondness. Here, kinship means family as much as affinity, and the characters are related through their socio-political role as queen and through their relationships with men. We may be reminded that many of Elizabeth I's rivals were also her family. Mary I, who preceded Elizabeth as queen, was her sister; the ill-fated Lady Jane Grey was the Tudor queens' first cousin once removed; and Mary, Queen of Scots was also Elizabeth's first cousin once removed, and frequently referred to as her 'cousin' and 'sister'.⁹⁸ The multiplicity of queens who come together in 4.4 of *Richard III* creates a sense of claustrophobia that seems to comment on both the personal and political nature of the Wars of the Roses, and on the contemporary rivalries that coloured much of Elizabeth's life and reign.

The similarities and rivalries between these queens and queen-figures are heightened by the fact that the period Shakespeare is dramatising saw the emergence of several potential and actual kings, with lines of succession disrupted as the throne switched hands sideways and not simply linearly. Previous rulers do not just disappear, rivals are not immediately defeated, and so multiple queens and potential queens are often depicted as being alive and influential concurrently. There are difficult intersections and uncertainties surrounding regnal identities; at this time, there is no longer 'the queen' but multiple queens defined and opposed against one another, with queenship becoming more multi-faceted and unstable with the turmoil of the political landscape. At several junctures in *Richard III*, Shakespeare dramatises a convergence of queens. He explores ideas of rival monarchical claims; the importance of the queen in supporting a king's claim; the definition of queenship independent of this supportive function; the various difficulties facing the office of queen; and what happens to the identity of the queen if and when she has rivals and her husband's role is altered, defunct, or usurped.

⁹⁸ I discuss these relationships in more detail in the 'Introduction'.

In the first tetralogy—and most especially in *Richard III*—Shakespeare explores an idea of queenship at a moment in which female rule was facing more serious, extended interrogation as politically powerful women, queen regnants and regents, became increasingly common across Europe. Shakespeare's dramatisation of queenly conversations and voices serve not only to reflect on the contemporary political landscape, but also to interrogate (constructions and ideas of received) history. The genre of 'history', then, was being reworked and expanded by dramatists: Shakespeare gives space to the 'gaps' in the chronicle approach to history writing, to a different kind of articulation of history, and invites audiences to consider how powerful women can shape conceptions and expectations of history and how history is conveyed, fictionalised, and written. Queens' voices are one of the vehicles by which historical narratives and the (re)iteration of history are challenged. This emphasis on queenly voices and behaviours permeates not only Shakespeare's history plays: from George Peele's *The Troublesome Reign of King John* in 1589 to Thomas Heywood's *Edward IV* a decade later, history plays are preoccupied with dramatising the past whilst also showing queens interrogating and challenging historical narratives.

PART TWO: QUEENSHIP IN *EDWARD IV*

The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV were published together in the Stationers' Register in August 1599.⁹⁹ The play was written, published, and performed (probably in two parts) at the end of a decade during which the history play genre had established itself, flourished, and eventually began to decline in popularity. *Edward IV*, then, emerged from—and responded to—ten years of literary and theatrical tradition. Produced at a moment when the genre had seemed to have 'exhausted itself', Heywood's play is, according to Richard Rowland, responsive to and reactive against history plays' conventions: it is a play that is 'ostentatiously offering itself for comparisons with other playtexts and non-dramatic historical literature' whilst also 'draw[ing] upon a formidable array of other source materials'.¹⁰⁰ *Edward IV* comments on the history play genre as much as it participates in the genre. This commentary incorporates an ambivalent response to what was, by then, the rather conventional agency of queens in history plays.

Though it engages with the conventions of the genre established in the history plays of the early to mid 1590s, *Edward IV* is less exclusively focused on negotiating issues of, for example, national and international politics, inheritance and lineage, and the role of the queen (whether nominal or otherwise) in the management of court and country. As mentioned above, this play offers greater emphasis on city life and lower ranking characters, which in turn leaves less space for queens' voices, actions, and political agency. In *Edward IV*, this shift in emphasis is, however, dramatised within the play: it transpires rather suddenly after its first scene, which foregrounds the politics of queenship as the king's mother criticises his choice of bride. The first scene's focus on queen-figures and their voices might invite us to expect a play where these two powerful women are afforded space to continue to use their voices and bodies. However, despite their centrality in the first scene, the king's mother (the

⁹⁹ Following critical tradition, I treat *Edward IV* as one play.

¹⁰⁰ Rowland, 'Introduction', pp. 11-12.

Duchess of York) and his wife (Elizabeth Woodville) feature comparatively little in the rest of the play in terms of stage presence and voice. The play focuses instead on the geopolitical consequences of Edward IV's passionate motivation for marrying an English bride from a mid-ranking family rather than making a match that would facilitate a politically expedient international alliance. These consequences—one of the main 'troubles' of Edward's reign—are not the central focus, but are nonetheless given important scope in the play.

The play's full title does suggest that *Edward IV* is not quite the serious sort of play that follows English chronicle traditions to dramatise important historical events. As the title indicates, it is a play '[c]ontaining [Edward's] merry pastime with the Tanner of Tamworth; as also his love to fair Mistress Shore, her great promotion, fall, and misery, and lastly, the lamentable death of both her and her husband'. Heywood's title does not focus on any royal people nor necessarily the king himself, but on a tanner and, to a greater extent, on Jane Shore. Jane Shore—Edward IV's most famous mistress—is celebrated and lamented in a title that highlights her married status and that bypasses any mention of either Edward's inappropriate sexual appetite (in pursuing the affair) or of her 'love rival', the queen consort, Elizabeth.

Edward IV's shift in focus reads as a response to the conventions and decline of the history play genre, but also a response to the fact that the Elizabethan succession question seemed, increasingly, to have been more or less settled by the time it was produced in 1599. As Mortimer Levine writes, 'the road was [left] comparatively clear for James VI of Scotland to become James I of England' following the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots—James's mother—in 1587.¹⁰¹ The word 'comparatively' is important here, however, as Levine's assertion has been recently reexamined. Rei Kanemura notes that 'historians of late Elizabethan England in recent years have provided powerful evidence for the presence of a

¹⁰¹ Mortimer Levine, *The Early Elizabethan Succession Question 1558-1568* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966), p. 206.

polemical counterblast in which James's title was seriously contested while he was attempting to gain English support'.¹⁰² Kanemura provides an overview of said evidence and the critics who present it, namely Anne McLaren, Peter Lake, and Susan Doran.¹⁰³ They each cite *A Conference about the Next Succession for the Crown of England*, written by the exiled Jesuit Robert Persons in 1594-95, as a treatise that 'seriously damaged James's potential succession by making two controversial claims: first, since monarchy was not divine invention, people may freely depose a tyrant and elect a new prince; second, it was not the king of Scots but the Spanish infant [prince] who was the true Lancastrian heir'.¹⁰⁴ In response, James 'publish[ed] his own riposte and [...] recruit[ed] several tract writers to vindicate his case', as the mid-1590s saw the Scottish king begin to develop 'a number of strategies to defend and forward his legal right against all competitors'.¹⁰⁵ Though, as Doran notes, Elizabeth had 'given [James] verbal assurances and written promises that she would do nothing to prejudice his rights'—'unless by any manifest ingratitude (which we hope shall never proceed from you) we should be justly moved and provoked to the contrary', Elizabeth writes—the queen still refused to expressly name James as her heir.¹⁰⁶ In 1598, just a year before Heywood's *Edward IV* was entered into the Stationers' Register, James published an essay on his theory of kingship, 'The Trew Law of Free Monarchies'. James's anti-

¹⁰² Rei Kanemura, 'Kingship by Descent or Kingship by Election? The Contested Title of James VI and I', *Journal of British Studies*, 52 (2013), 317-42 (320).

¹⁰³ See Anne McLaren, 'Challenging the Monarchical Republic: James I's Articulation of Kingship', in *The Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England: Essays in Response to Patrick Collinson*, ed. by John F. McDiarmid (London and New York: Routledge, 2007); Peter Lake, 'The King (Queen) and the Jesuit: James Stuart's Trew Law of Free Monarchies in Context/s', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 14 (2004), 243-60; Susan Doran, 'James VI and the English Succession', in *James I and VI: Ideas, Authority, and Government*, ed. by Ralph Houlbrooke (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 25-42.

¹⁰⁴ Kanemura, 'Kingship by Descent or Kingship by Election?', 320.

¹⁰⁵ Kanemura, 'Kingship by Descent or Kingship by Election', 320; Doran, 'James VI and the English Succession', p. 27.

¹⁰⁶ Doran, 'James VI and the English Succession', p. 28; Elizabeth I in a letter to James. *CSP Scot.* VIII, pp. 414-15. Quoted in Doran, p. 28.

contractarian essay espoused the divine right of kings and the legality of hereditary ‘princeship’, and effectively asserted his claim to the English throne.¹⁰⁷

Though the succession question was not wholly resolved by the late 1590s, then, and though the debate about James’s right to accede to the English throne continued in some circles, it was no longer a debate in which history plays seemed particularly keen to participate. By the time Heywood wrote *Edward IV* in around 1599, history plays’ political investment seems to have been diluted. We might speculate that one of the reasons for the genre becoming less popular—and less politically charged, when history plays do emerge in very late Elizabethan England—is because of a general ‘feeling’ that James VI is likely to be the next king and therefore England will return to male rule. History plays no longer need to engage with ideas about (female) aristocratic lineage or navigate questions about agentive queenship with such fervency. Though *Edward IV* does engage with some of the interests of its predecessors, it does not foreground them in the same way. Enjoying ‘the protective titular umbrella of a king’s name’, *Edward IV*—like Shakespeare’s *Henry IV* plays—has more comedic fun alongside its political plots.¹⁰⁸ In this final section of the chapter, then, I consider how Heywood both engages with and jettisons some of the conventions around dramatising history and queenship that we have seen elsewhere. Nonetheless, *Edward IV* remains consistent with other Elizabethan history plays in that it emerges from, and responds to, its contemporary moment: *Edward IV*, written in the most twilight years of Elizabeth I’s reign and when James I was (despite ongoing debates) the likely successor, is about the end of a

¹⁰⁷ James I, ‘The Trew Law of Free Monarchies: Or, The Reciproock and mutuall duetie betwixt a free King and his naturall Subiects’ (1598), in *King James VI and I: Political Writings*, ed. by Johan P. Sommerville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 63-84.

¹⁰⁸ Rowland, ‘Introduction’, p. 55. Rowland also argues that ‘Heywood’s play stands in [an] antithetical relationship to chronicle history’ with ‘more in common with the output of those writers who called their work ‘survey’, ‘description’ or ‘chorography’’. ‘Introduction’, p. 55.

reign and the end of a genre.¹⁰⁹ What we see in *Edward IV* is the writing out of queens' agency and voices.

Edward IV opens with the voice of a royal woman, who declares '[s]on, I tell ye, you have done—you know not what!' (1.1.1).¹¹⁰ The Duchess of York here chides her son, Edward IV, for his hasty marriage to Elizabeth Woodville, the widow of Lancastrian knight John Grey. This first line, in which the Duchess directly addresses the king, participates in the tradition of earlier history plays, like *The Troublesome Reign of King John* and *Edward I*, whereby queen-figures are the first to speak and to introduce the king and the main issues of his reign. Though never a queen consort and therefore not possessing the title of queen mother, the Duchess is nonetheless the mother of the king and aligned with the duties of the queen. Further, this first line demonstrates her importance and authority as she emphasises her maternal relationship to the king ('son'), her own voice (the direct 'I tell ye'), and the anticipated consequences of Edward's decision to marry a subject in a match that she declares does not 'befit[] a king' (1.1.4). The first tetralogy (and the first part of this chapter) also discussed Elizabeth Woodville's supposed 'unsuitability', but Heywood's rendering of Edward's reign locates another royal woman as the voice of criticism. The Duchess speaks what she perceives to be the truth to her son, and is able to do so because of her maternal identity. *Edward IV*, then, begins not with a queen's voice, but with a queen-figure giving voice to concerns about the new queen consort who is herself, at first, silent.

The Duchess refers to Edward's union with Elizabeth as 'a bridal, and with hell to boot' (1.1.6). She continues to use her prominence in this opening scene to outline her view

¹⁰⁹ Doran notes how James also courted some powerful support for his claim in England. She writes that, 'during Elizabeth's last illness, [Sir Robert] Cecil drafted a proclamation announcing James's accession which was sent up to Scotland for approval. By winning over Cecil and other English noblemen James made sure of the succession; no rival candidate reared his or her head; no parliament was called to choose a successor. James came to the throne by right of legitimacy, a right declared unambiguously in the 1604 Act of Recognition'. Doran, 'James VI and the English Succession', p. 42.

¹¹⁰ Heywood, *The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV* [c. 1599], ed. by Richard Rowland (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), 1.1.1. All further references are to this edition and Part, scene, and line numbers will be given parenthetically in the body of the thesis.

of the destructive consequences of this royal marriage. There is a play on the homonym ‘bridal’ and ‘bridle’ here, with the latter evoking images of attempting to control or tame an animal. The Duchess considers Edward (and so England) to be ‘bridled’ to the ‘hell’ of Elizabeth and her family, who were, as we know, perceived as ambitious social climbers. In addition to this apparent constraint, the Duchess calls the union a ‘rash, unlawful act’ (1.1.22) that makes it ‘no marvel it was done in haste’ (1.1.5). The swiftness and secrecy of their marriage, she fears, will ‘breed mortal hate betwixt the realms’ of England and France, as the Duchess explains that Edward had already sent ‘to entreat about [the French king’s] daughter’ when he ‘[b]asely [took] a subject of [his] own’ (1.1.25-26). Bona was actually the French king’s sister-in-law, but this play suggests a closer familial relationship, whether deliberately or because ‘the printed chronicles offer bewilderingly divergent accounts of [Bona’s] genealogy’.¹¹¹ Whatever the reason for Bona becoming the French king’s ‘daughter’ here, it is clear that this match would be far more politically advantageous for Edward. Not only has he effectively discarded this opportunity, but he has done so after his suit had already begun in order to instead marry a woman who can, it seems, do little to bolster his security and reputation as king.

The consequence that the Duchess frames as the most potentially devastating here is not the anger of the French, but that of the Earl of Warwick, ‘that great lord, / That centre-shaking thunderclap of war, / That like a column propped the house of York, / And bore our white rose bravely in his top’ (1.1.28-31). The Duchess aggrandises Warwick to demonstrate his importance to the Yorkist claim to the throne, predicting his ‘shame’ because, she notes, Edward’s marriage to Elizabeth causes Warwick’s ‘honour [to be] touched with this foul blemish’ (1.1.34-36). The king’s mother, then, predicts the civil war that ensues after Warwick—so influential during the Wars of the Roses as to acquire the title of

¹¹¹ Rowland, *The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV*, p. 85 (n. 25).

‘kingmaker’—rebels and takes up the Lancastrian cause against Edward. ‘Dishonour not the princes of thy land, / To make them kneel with reverence at her feet’, the Duchess advises her son. (1.1.104-05). This line suggests a plurality of princes, effectively acknowledging the importance of loyal supporters and advisors for effective kingship.

Edward, however, does not heed his mother’s warnings, instead responding to her anger and advice with a flippant lack of concern. To the Duchess’s assessment that he ‘knows not’ what he has done, Edward says ‘I have married a woman, else I am deceived, mother’ (1.1.2). He deliberately evades focus on his own royal status and Elizabeth’s lower rank in order to underplay the political ramifications of his romantic decision. Indeed, he maintains a jocular tone throughout the scene, insisting that the Duchess ‘have done’ with her chiding (1.1.92). Interestingly, he calls her ‘mother’ in every one of the ten times he addresses her in this scene. Using her maternal title could be a mark of respect, a reminder to both the characters and audience of her status, or an element of his characterisation as a wayward son. However we read his refusal to pander to—or even really acknowledge—his mother’s concerns, the fact that he does not do so anticipates his later distraction from the more serious political problems that permeate his reign. For example, his sexual relationship with the married commoner, Jane Shore, is anticipated when his mother calls him a ‘wanton king’ (1.1.74) and says he has ‘stained [his] princely state / With the base leavings of a subject’s bed’ (1.1.76-77). Of course, we know that she is referring to Elizabeth here, but a similarly damning statement could be applied to Edward’s later pursuit of ‘Mistress Shore’.

But Edward does not simply dismiss his mother outright: he also suggests a political advantage to his marriage to Elizabeth. He says ‘[a]ll true subjects shall have cause to thank God, to have their king born of a true Englishwoman. I tell you, it was never well since we matched with strangers’ (1.1.39-42). A ‘truly’ English heir is, Edward claims, a cause for celebration. This almost xenophobic suggestion contrasts with the idea of the more common

practice of medieval and early modern kings marrying noble or royal women from foreign countries in order to foster international political relationships. We can link Edward's approach to love and political alliances here with Elizabeth I's own courtship politics, where she had been known to entertain foreign suitors at the same time as she maintained her close relationship with her favourite, Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, who 'had been by her side throughout her reign' and often seemed to embody the role of a king consort.¹¹² The strategy of using a royal marriage to foster or fortify a foreign alliance was well recognised in both the play's contemporary moment and during the time of its subject matter. While international alliances that could be strengthened by a marriage to a foreign suitor were potentially important to both Edward IV and Elizabeth I, the former transgresses expectations to marry a subject for love (as Heywood emphasises) in a way that the latter, as a woman, could or would not.

Edward's reference to 'strangers' also invites us to compare his new queen with her predecessor, Margaret of Anjou. Margaret, as I have discussed, was widely (though not straightforwardly) vilified in Shakespeare's first tetralogy, and her Frenchness depicted as a source of anxiety. With an English queen, there is no Lacanian 'alien within': Elizabeth Woodville is, in Edward's words, the same 'breed', the 'hen' to his 'cock', and so their children will not be 'chickens of the half breed' but 'birds of the game' (1.1.42-45). Though perhaps not a particularly impressive animal, the chicken is generative and domestic, useful and productive, in opposition to the unnatural, feral predator that is the 'she-wolf'. Elizabeth Woodville, then, is figured as Edward's apparent equal who, we know, is capable of producing healthy male heirs. But despite this apparently more functional comment, Edward reminds the audience that this union is motivated by love rather than planned political manoeuvrings when he says, 'I had rather the people prayed to bless mine heir, than send me

¹¹² Anna Whitelock, *Elizabeth's Bedfellows: An Intimate History of the Queen's Court* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 178.

an heir' (1.1.50-51). All this discussion of Edward's heir, however, is overshadowed by the Duchess's foreboding insistence that 'the child that is unborn shall rue' (1.1.38) Edward's union with Elizabeth, and also by the audience's knowledge that this union produces two sons—Edward V and Prince Richard—who die prematurely in mysterious circumstances while in captivity.

Elizabeth herself is onstage for the entirety of the Duchess's scathing attack on her marriage to Edward, her personal character, and her family (when the Duchess suggests that Edward has been 'enchanted' and 'bewitched' by Elizabeth's supposedly ambitious mother, 1.1.100-103). The first time the queen speaks for herself is after 80 lines of being a silent witness to the Duchess's extended criticism and Edward's casual defence of his decision. Elizabeth 'beseech[es]' the Duchess as 'a princess and a widow' to '[t]hink not so meanly on [her] widowhood' (1.1.83). She insists that she was 'a spotless virgin' before she married John Grey, and 'came as chaste a widow' to Edward as she had come chaste to Grey (1.1.90-91). She reinforces Edward's earlier assertion that '[t]his wench, mother, is a widow, and hath made proof of her valour' (1.1.47-48), but her language is more respectful and her self-defence more thorough. These lines are replete with slippery language and labels: the meaning of widowhood and virginity are conflated; the Duchess—who has never 'ruled'—is called a 'princess'; and 'chastity' is used to refer to fidelity.¹¹³ The implication is that attempting to tie an identity to a title, station, or marital status invites interpretation and manipulation.

And Elizabeth does interpret her inherited identity as she uses her own mother's status to align and compare herself with Edward's mother. When the Duchess suggests that Edward

¹¹³ Book III of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* employs a similar definition of chastity: the Knight of Chastity, Britomart, can remain the representative of chastity even as she will marry and produce heirs to found the English monarchy: chastity, then, takes on a meaning akin to fidelity, as Spenser reflects on his contemporary Elizabethan moment. Susan Frye discusses chastity, and the characters that reflect and comment on Elizabeth I, in 'Of Chastity and Violence: Elizabeth I and Edmund Spenser in the House of Busirane', *Signs* 20.1, 1994, 49–78. See also Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

and Elizabeth's status and 'worthiness' is as polarised as between 'the greatest peer / And the poor, silliest kitchen maid' (1.1.108-110), Elizabeth agrees. 'Yet', she continues pointedly, '[m]y mother is a duchess as you are, / A princess born, the Duke of Bedford's wife, / And, as you know, a daughter and a sister / Unto the royal blood of Burgundy' (1.1.111-115). The following insistence that she does not care about 'these vain, worldly titles' (1.1.117) just two lines later, then, is underwritten by her casual insistence on these very titles.

For all its initial foregrounding of women and their relationship with King Edward, the play's focus shifts by the end of the first scene when a messenger brings news that 'the bastard Falconbridge / Of late hath stirred rebellion in the south, / Encouraging his forces to deliver / King Henry, late deposed, out of the Tower. / To him the malcontented commons flock' (1.1.137-14). When we see Falconbridge, he calls Henry VI 'the lawful king of England' who has been imprisoned by 'that tyrant, Edward the Usurper' (1.2.12-13). His rebellion is characterised as noble and rooted in law: he distances himself from the apparently inferior uprisings of 'Tyler, Cade, and Straw' whilst noting his noble blood and birth (1.2.27; 1.2.35). This emphasis on the 'high rank' nature of the rebellion does not last ('Captains' Smoke, Chub, and Spicing interject with their bumbling support immediately after Falconbridge introduces the dispute), but Falconbridge's initial emphasis is on the House of Lancaster's suffering under the 'sad yoke of Yorkish servitude' (1.2.15). Heywood reminds the audience that Henry VI is, technically, the rightful king, perhaps to engage with the fact that Henry VII, Queen Elizabeth's grandfather, derived his claim from the Lancastrian line before marrying Elizabeth York and founding the Tudor dynasty.

Falconbridge's early introduction, and the information that his army 'waxes twenty thousand strong' (1.1.143), explicitly reminds the audience of ongoing civil strife—which marks this play as quite different from many of those about earlier history, where foreign

wars are more often dramatised—following Henry VI's imprisonment.¹¹⁴ However, this civil war is hinted at earlier in the first scene, when the play mentions that Edward's decision to marry Elizabeth Woodville loses him the support of Warwick. Warwick's defection to the Lancastrian side—spearheaded by Henry VI's queen consort, Margaret of Anjou—gave their cause renewed impetus. The play's early attention to the Duchess's discontent immediately before the arrival of the Falconbridge-led rebellion ensures that the way in which Edward's choice of queen consort added fuel to the fire of civil war is foregrounded.

Despite being warned about the approaching political threat at the end of scene one, Edward wishes to spend a night 'in feast and jollity, / With our new queen, and our beloved mother' (1.1.155-156) before tackling this threat. In addition to once again speaking of them together and furthering the parallels between these queen figures, Edward's prioritisation of a frivolous night of 'jollity' over the new danger to his reign anticipates his later distraction by his sexual pursuits. Like Edward II in Marlowe's play and Edward III at the beginning of Shakespeare and Kyd's play, Edward IV is a king who allows his political pursuits to be distracted by personal pleasures. By the end of the first part of the play, Edward has asserted his desire for Elizabeth, seduced Jane, and begun a flirtation with another woman, Widow Norton.¹¹⁵ But his preoccupation with sex is most aptly demonstrated when, having received letters where the Duke of Burgundy and the Constable of France, Count St. Pol, urge Edward to 'claim our right in France' (1.16.151), we are presented with the stage direction '*[h]e seems to read the letters, but glances on MISTRESS SHORE in his reading*'. Though he chides himself '[t]hou wrongst thy queen' (1.16.160), Edward twice disguises himself to pursue Jane and persuade her to begin a sexual relationship with him in an interaction that

¹¹⁴ The geographical proximity of civil strife is mentioned in Part One, scene three. When asked if Falconbridge's rebellion is near, the Lord Mayor of London responds that '[h]e neither comes from Italy, nor Spain, / But out of Kent, and Essex; which, you know, / Are both so near, as nearer cannot be' (1.3.25-27).

¹¹⁵ Rowland refers to this as a piece of 'neat theatrical symmetry' as 'the play had begun with Edward's unassailable assertion of his sexual desire for one widow, so it ends with his casual flirtation with another, and this re-staging of the King's libidinal power is likely to have been emphasized visually by the assumption of the two female roles by the same boy player'. 'Introduction', p. 50.

echoes the wooing scenes of Shakespeare's first tetralogy, between Suffolk and Margaret, Edward and Elizabeth, and Richard and Anne. The king instructs Jane to come to court and wait for him to send for her in the night, to which she reluctantly acquiesces. Jane becomes Edward's most famous mistress, and is well known to a gossiping London populace and to the play's characters.

Edward's relationship with Jane is presented as neither particularly troubling nor surprising for most of the onstage characters, and even Edward's queen articulates a sense of respect for her love rival. Though this lack of concern for Edward's distraction is perhaps somewhat unexpected, given the serious political concerns created by the Wars of the Roses, it is characteristic of a play that is more concerned with frivolity and individual characters than the main challenges or successes of a king's reign. Further, Edward's distraction by Jane seems less problematic because Jane herself is presented as a good and virtuous woman. After summoning Jane to her, even Queen Elizabeth declares to the audience 'as I am a queen, [Jane is] a goodly creature' (2.10.1). Elizabeth's son, Dorset, reports that he found Jane giving alms, to which Elizabeth responds in another aside, 'she would make a gallant queen!' (2.10.8). Where we might expect to see a rivalry enacted between these two women—an expectation Jane herself shares, as she fears that the 'displeasèd Queen' will '[u]se violence' on her (2.9.121; 2.9.113)—what Heywood actually presents us with is performative reproaching (on Elizabeth's part) and then mutual respect. This lack of rivalry is again a departure from the history play's customs of staging multiple queens or queen figures competing for primacy. Where the rivalry between Elizabeth Woodville and Margaret of Anjou is palpable in Shakespeare's first tetralogy, Heywood elects for his iteration of Elizabeth to be pitying and forgiving when she meets her love rival. The implication is that Jane, though a rival for Edward's love, is not a real threat to perhaps the most important aspect of their relationship: Elizabeth's queenship.

Despite her genuine praise of Jane in private asides and her refusal to condemn Jane totally for her affair with the king, Elizabeth does first perform the anger we might expect of a ‘wronged’ wife and queen:¹¹⁶

God save your majesty, my Lady Shore!
 My Lady Shore, said I? O, blasphemy,
 To wrong your title with a Lady’s name!
 Queen Shore, nay, rather Empress Shore!
 God save your grace, your majesty, your highness—
 Lord, I want titles, you must pardon me. (2.10.10-15)

In this sequence of sarcastic mocking, Elizabeth emphasises her own voice through her exclamations and, again, plays with the idea of royal titles to insist on her own queenship. For Elizabeth, Edward’s relationship with Jane is framed around titles as much as beauty, companionship, and sex. This concern with roles continues when Elizabeth says that she should kneel before Jane and take her place: ‘you have taken mine’ (2.10.19), Elizabeth declares, ‘mine’ suggesting not only her physical place, but also her title and her role as Edward’s companion. When Jane pleads for the queen’s ‘mercy’ (2.10.24) and the opportunity to explain her ‘sin’ (2.10.33), Elizabeth is moved by the ‘poor soul’ but forces herself to ‘forbear tears’ and return ‘once more [...] to [her] former humour’ (2.10.42-44). She continues her performance as enraged, wronged queen as she mockingly criticises Jane and wonders aloud how she will take revenge for nearly 30 exaggerated lines.

The queen drops her aggressive act when Jane humbly submits to her, which begins the suggestion of kinship between the two characters. Jane, ‘prostrate[d] at [Elizabeth’s] feet’ and willing to have the queen ‘[i]nfluct on [her] what may revenge [the queen’s] wrong’ like a patient (sacrificial?) ‘lamb’ (2.10.77-78), makes Dorset impatient and willing to enact on Jane whatever his mother does not ‘suffer’ to do herself (2.10.85-87), but it prompts the queen to drop her act. The stage directions read that Elizabeth ‘*draws forth a knife, and*

¹¹⁶ Dorset tells Jane ‘I cannot wrong thee, as thou wrongst my mother’ when he brings Jane to the queen in the previous scene. 2.9.105.

making as though she meant to spoil her face, runs to her, and falling on her knees, embraces and kisses her, casting away the knife'. This moment is deeply emotive: Elizabeth forgives Jane, not just because Jane is 'goodly' but because she was 'besieg[ed]' and 'batter[ed]' by Edward, '[t]ouched with the selfsame weakness' as she herself had been (2.10.98-100).

Where Elizabeth's earlier comment that Jane is 'our sister queen at least' (2.10.21) suggests a bigamous relationship with the king at its centre, she now tells Jane '[t]hou art my sister, and I love thee so' (2.10.122) in a line that claims a personal friendship with the king's mistress. Indeed, their relationship cannot exist independently of the king. Elizabeth says that she will not hate Jane because Edward loves Jane, and her 'love to [Jane] may purchase [her] his love' (2.10.119). Elizabeth twice asks Jane to 'speak well unto the King' of her and her family (2.10.120; 2.10.124), acknowledging her would-be rival's influence over her husband. When Edward arrives onstage, both women beseech him to love the other. In *Edward IV*, rival queens become sister queens and, kneeling either side of the king and having both been seduced by him, they are mirror images of one another.

The idea of Jane as a quasi- or alternate queen, alongside Elizabeth, manifests when Brackenbury, the Constable of the Tower, arrives. Where Edward asks to know why he is there, Brackenbury replies that '[t]he Queen and Mistress Shore do know my suit' (2.10.154). The knowledge that Brackenbury has come to request that Edward pardon Stranguidge and his men (who seized a French ship after peace between England and France had been struck) is shared by both the king's wife and his mistress, implicitly elevating the latter to the rank of the former. Further, by addressing the women on stage before the king, Brackenbury engages with the convention of queenly intercession, 'an official influence in that it was accepted as part of queenship as office'.¹¹⁷ Intercession allowed the king 'to avoid losing face and instead to appear gracious' if he changed his mind on a matter for which his queen appealed on

¹¹⁷ Earenfight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe*, p. 11.

behalf of their subjects.¹¹⁸ Elizabeth attempts intercession (albeit briefly, which suggests Heywood's departure from both royal and dramatic convention) but is denied as Edward declares '[m]y word is past'(2.10.159). When Elizabeth requests '[g]ood Jane, entreat for them', the audience might expect *her* intercession to succeed, given the play's focus on Edward' and Jane's close relationship. 'I must not take this answer', Jane tries, the 'must' highlighting the performativity of intercession (2.10.165). 'Why, Jane, have I not denied my queen?' Edward responds, and though he looks as if he might falter ('what is't, Jane, I would dent to thee?'), he ultimately resolves to execute Stranguidge and his party (2.10.167-71). This moment is significant for the genre, for women's voices in the genre, and for queens or queen-figures: this is the last time we see the queen, and her intercession—her voice—fails. The queen's voice is then written out of the genre. When Anne Neville of Warwick appears onstage for the first time in this play with her newly crowned husband, King Richard III, she is silent, her voice and agency rendered impotent by the play.

*

Though the Wars of the Roses is often construed as a conflict between kings, Shakespeare and Heywood carve out space for queenly actions and voices in the first tetralogy and *Edward IV* respectively. Both playwrights acknowledge the influence of queens and their ability to ensure or challenge political stability. While Shakespeare offers more extended commentary on and discussion of sexual identities, motherhood, and otherness, Heywood addresses some similar questions more briefly but in a way that is self-conscious of the history play genre. During the 1590s, the history play emerged, established traditions and conventions for the genre, enjoyed an explosion in popularity, and eventually declined in centrality. This trajectory reflects the genre's contemporary moment, from the early-1590s anxieties about the Elizabethan succession question to the apparent (yet still unspoken)

¹¹⁸ Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens*, p. 7.

resolution of this question in the later part of the decade. Indeed, history plays—as I have been arguing throughout this thesis—continually hold a mirror to their contemporary world, commenting on their late Elizabethan moment through prisms of the past. Though the genre’s prevalence declined sharply in Elizabeth’s twilight years and after her death, the significance of history plays’ dramatisations of queenly voices challenging, disrupting, and shaping political and historical narratives throughout the last decade of the sixteenth century cannot be erased.

Post-Elizabethan and New Elizabethan Queenship: An Afterword on Afterlives

Fearing that her husband may be ‘too full o’th’ milk of human kindness / To catch the nearest way’ to ensure the realisation of the witches’ prophecy that he should be king, Lady Macbeth invokes the ‘spirits’:

unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty.¹

Lady Macbeth seeks to divorce herself from her sex and the gendering of power when she asks to be ‘unsexed’. The audience’s first encounter with this royal woman’s voice, then, is to hear her read Macbeth’s letter aloud, and then immediately and explicitly seek to take the actions necessary to ensure that she and her husband achieve the ‘greatness [that is] promised’ to them (1.5.9-11). In soliloquising about being ‘unsexed’, Lady Macbeth is both performing a type of speech act—a verbal declaration that she aims to separate herself from the expectations associated with her female body and ‘nature’—and demonstrating her ruthless ambition. This ambition is characterised as something incompatible with her sex, which she needs to cast off to compensate for Macbeth’s nature.² We can compare this figuring of (physical) womanhood as an impediment that needs to be overcome with Elizabeth I’s Tilbury speech, where the queen weighs her ‘weak and feeble’ woman’s body against her kingly ‘heart and stomach’. The Tilbury speech does not have Elizabeth deny her sex, but she articulates her strength and power as existing in spite of her sex: her body is physically female, her ‘heart and stomach’ are like a king’s, and she herself is a ‘prince’.³ In

¹ Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, pp. 2579-2632; 1.5.15-16; 1.5.38-41. Further references will be to this edition, and act, scene, and line references will be given parenthetically.

² In characterising him as ‘full o’th’ milk of human kindness’, Lady Macbeth rhetorically transforms Macbeth from the belligerent warrior of the play’s earliest scenes into a feminised quasi-mother, filled with milk.

³ The Tilbury Speech, then, has Elizabeth style herself in masculine and feminine terms, but also as somehow genderless (or perhaps exceeding gender?): as discussed earlier, the term ‘prince’ was in some ways a gender-neutral term used to refer to any ruler. See Chapter Three, footnote 78.

both instances, Lady Macbeth and Elizabeth I seek to separate themselves from their womanhood.

Though Lady Macbeth's articulation of her regicidal intent—and her desire to be 'unsexed' in order to enact this intent—may have been shocking when *Macbeth* was first performed in around 1606, it is important to note that this sort of character was not the first to be seen on the early modern stage. Lady Macbeth emerged from a dramatic culture in which royal women are given authority and their voices are given dramatic space. Some of her words and actions recall those of her theatrical antecedents from late Elizabethan history plays. One of the most striking instances of such similarities between Lady Macbeth and some of the queens discussed in this thesis revolves around images of motherhood. Indeed, perhaps Lady Macbeth's most memorable transgressions centre on her attempts to remove a sense of not just her womanhood, but her motherhood. Not only does she wish to change her maternal milk to gall (1.4.45-46), but she later reinforces the importance of keeping a promise to one's spouse when she tells Macbeth that she would '[h]ave plucked [her] nipple from [her babe's] boneless gums / And dashed the brains out' if she had sworn to him to do so (1.7.54-59). Her theoretical willingness to perform such violent infanticide courts the audience's shock, but it is not the first time in Shakespeare that we have seen a mother articulate, enact, or imply that she will or has played a part in murdering a child. In *3 Henry VI*, Queen Margaret taunts York with a handkerchief stained with his young son's blood. In response to her part in the child's murder, York defeminises and dehumanises Margaret: he says she is not a woman but an animal, a 'tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide' (3*HVI*, 1.4.138). Similarly, Queen Eleanor's 'word' with her grandson Arthur in *King John* has often been interpreted as the moment in which she effectively orchestrates his execution (*KJ*, 3.3.18). In all three cases, we are presented with an image of 'unwomanly' women, of cruel,

unfeeling mothers, of the threat of female ambition (whether for themselves or their sons) manifest.

The queens discussed throughout this thesis are precursors to characters like Lady Macbeth, through whom playwrights continued to explore questions of female agency and power after both the death of Elizabeth I and the decline in popularity of the history play. However, though there are certainly similarities between queens in the history plays and Lady Macbeth, the latter is perhaps a more transgressive development. To continue with the examples of child-murder, where Margaret and Eleanor are motivated by loyalty to their sons when they (vicariously or implicitly) enact violence on children—for vengeance in Margaret's case, or to ensure John's longevity on the throne in Eleanor's—Lady Macbeth's loyalty is to her husband.⁴ She does not consider the legacy or assured succession that would accompany her motherhood, instead verbally prioritising her relationship with, and promises to, her husband alongside her own ambition for power. Indeed, Lady Macbeth is explicit about her intentions and ambitions in a way that was perhaps too dangerous for queens in history plays to be. In early Jacobean tragedies such as *Macbeth*, (royal) women seem to have more freedom to overreach, to be brutal, selfish, and 'unwomanly', perhaps as a result of following on from the precedents for exploring female power established by the earlier history plays. Of course, Elizabeth I's death would also have made discussions of exceptionally 'threatening' female power less contentious or potentially offensive (and also less politically relevant) for the reigning monarch James I after 1603, the first king regnant since Edward VI's death in 1553.

⁴ As Jeanne Addison Roberts puts it, Lady Macbeth has 'weighed a child against her spouse and chosen him.' See 'Sex and the Female Tragic Hero', in *The Female Tragic Hero in Renaissance Drama*, ed. by Naomi Conn Liebler (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 199-21 (p. 204). It is interesting to note that Lady Macbeth's supposed willingness to murder her child is theoretical: her claim is never tested, and we cannot be sure if Lady Macbeth would commit infanticide in actuality.

PART ONE: POST-ELIZABETHAN EARLY MODERN HISTORY PLAYS

History plays enjoyed particular prominence in the 1590s, especially in the earlier part of the decade. Though the number of plays written about English history declined after 1600, there are some such plays surviving from the Jacobean era. In the first half of James's reign, there emerged several plays concerned with the Tudors and which often addressed similar concerns to their late Elizabethan dramatic forerunners. Samuel Rowley's 1605 play *When You See Me, You Know Me* dramatises the reign of Henry VIII: it focuses on the birth and early life of Edward VI, but also features three of Henry VIII's queens.⁵ In the play, Queen Jane is seen 'big with child' before her death, which is figured as an exchange for Prince Edward's life: Lady Mary tells the king '[t]he Child must die, or if it life receiues, / You must your hapeles Queene of life bereaue'.⁶ Jane Seymour is thus rendered a sacrificial or salvific mother-queen. The play also refers, briefly, to how 'Queene Anne Bullen [...] lost her head', before it 'narrates the dangers that Katherine [Parr]'s Protestant views exposed her to'.⁷ Accused of stirring Lutheran rebellion and facing the wrath of the king, Katherine calls herself: 'Wretched Queene *Katherin*, would thou hadst beene / *Kate Parre* still, and not great Englands Queene'. She laments her royal identity in a manner reminiscent of Anne Neville in *Richard III*. Rowley's play, then, explores the real dangers of queenship (especially under this notorious king): dangers associated with maternal, sexual, and religious identities.

Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody; or the Troubles of Queen*

Elizabeth followed *When You See Me, You Know Me* in 1605, its title explicitly paralleling

⁵ This focus on Prince Edward was probably designed to appeal to the heir apparent, Prince Henry: he was patron of Prince Henry's Men, the company that performed this play three times in 1604. See Kristin M. S. Bezio, 'The Heir and the Spare: The Stuarts and the Decline of Historical Drama (1603-1660)', in *Staging Power in Tudor and Stuart English History Plays: History, Political Thought, and the Redefinition of Sovereignty* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 157-98.

⁶ Samuel Rowley, *When You See Me, You Know Me. Or the Famous Chronicle Historie of King Henry the Eight, with the Birth and Vertuous Life of Edward Prince of Wales*, Early English Books Online (London: H. Lownes, 1605). Available at: quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A11146.0001.001/ [last accessed December 2021].

⁷ Carole Levin and John Watkins, *Shakespeare's Foreign Worlds: National and Transnational Identities in the Elizabethan Age* (London and Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 146. Levin and Watkins note that Rowley's play is based on John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, whose 'stories of a number of powerful women in peril [...] later made their way into early modern drama' (p. 146).

the name of Rowley's play.⁸ *If You Know Not Me* is not unlike Heywood's earlier *Edward IV*: both are two-part plays whose structure oscillates between history play and city comedy.

David Womersley notes that 'the material of Elizabeth's life' is divided into two plays: 'a near-tragedy dealing with the events of the reign of her sister Mary, and a troubled comedy dealing with the reign of Elizabeth herself, up to and including the defeat of the Armada in 1588'.⁹ Dieter Mehl calls the play 'one of the earliest definitions of [Elizabeth I's] legacy after her passing away'.¹⁰ Though the Tudor queen herself only appears in the play's closing scenes, and though the play dramatises her great victory over the Armada, Heywood's title nonetheless characterises her reign as 'troubled' and so her legacy is not straightforwardly aggrandized in the play.

Shakespeare and John Fletcher's *Henry VIII, or All is True* (c. 1613)—one of the last plays to appear in the First Folio—also telescopes Henry VIII's reign. Like *If You Know Not Me*, *All Is True* blends dramatic genres: in it, 'the national history play meets the tragicomic romance'.¹¹ Walter Cohen argues that the birth of Elizabeth I at the play's conclusion is 'the moment toward which all previous events have been tending' and which 'reveals the workings of a divine providence that watches over England'.¹² Indeed, the character of Thomas Cranmer prophesies that Elizabeth will be 'the happiness of England, / An aged princess', that she will live and die a virgin, and that the 'world shall mourn' her.¹³ The play does not allude to the 'troubles' or even victories of Elizabeth's life, focusing its last moments instead on the prediction—or reflection—of the glorious aspects of the Elizabethan reign. Though late examples of the genre, all three of these early Jacobean history plays build

⁸ Heywood, *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody; or the Troubles of Queen Elizabeth* [1605], in *Two Historical Plays on the Life and Reign of Queen Elizabeth* by Thomas Heywood, ed. by J. Payne Collier (London: The Shakespeare Society, 1851).

⁹ David Womersley, *Divinity and State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 149.

¹⁰ Dieter Mehl, 'The Late Queen on the Public Stage: Thomas Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, Parts I and II*', in *Queen Elizabeth I: Past and Present*, ed. by Christa Jansohn (Münster: LIT, 2004), p. 171.

¹¹ Walter Cohen, 'Introduction to *All Is True (Henry VIII)*', in *The Norton Shakespeare*, pp. 3119-28 (p. 3119).

¹² Cohen, 'Introduction', p. 3119; p. 3121.

¹³ Shakespeare and Fletcher, *All Is True*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, pp. 3129-3201 (5.4.56-62).

on earlier precedents and negotiate some of the central concerns of this thesis: history, (national) identity, and power—and offer fruitful ground for the continued, if not quite as extensive, discussion of queenship on the early modern stage.

PART TWO: REPRESENTING PREMODERN QUEENS IN THE NEW ELIZABETHAN ERA

History plays rapidly declined in popularity in the decades following their ‘salad days’ of the 1590s, with John Ford suggesting that ‘[s]tudies [...] of this Nature’ had become ‘[s]o out of fashion, so vnfollow’d’ by the late 1620s or early 1630s when he wrote the history play *Perkin Warbeck*.¹⁴ Queens, however, continued to garner interest as subjects of drama and fiction into the early modern period and beyond.¹⁵ Interest in queenship—and especially in historical or premodern queenship—has enjoyed a particular resurgence in the New Elizabethan era (1952—). Irene Morra and Rob Gossedge explain that the term ‘New Elizabethan’ emerged following Elizabeth II’s coronation, and that ‘many of the informing instincts of [the first Elizabethan age] continue to characterize a contemporary New Elizabethan era perpetually defined by this revisitation of cultural tradition and aesthetic reading of national history’.¹⁶ Morra shows how journalists and artists self-consciously drew parallels ‘between one Elizabethan era and the next’, though Elizabeth II herself rejected the parallel.¹⁷ Indeed, perhaps the resurgence of interest in (and performances and reworkings of) late Elizabethan history plays signals the similarities between then and now, of a queen reaching the end of her long reign and questions arising about ‘what comes next’.

¹⁴ Ford, *The chronicle historie of Perkin VVarbeck*, Prologue, ll. 1-2.

¹⁵ John Banks’s Restoration history plays are worth noting here. In the late seventeenth-century, Banks wrote several controversial ‘she-tragedies’, such as *Virtue Betrayed, or Anna Bullen* (1682), *The Island Queens: Or, The Death of Mary, Queen of Scotland. A Tragedy* (1684), and *The Innocent Usurper, or, the death of the Lady Jane Grey* (1694). Banks’s works often featured Tudor queens or queen-figures as their subjects. Paula de Pando notes the popularity and prominence of Banks’s drama, despite the fact that some of his work was initially banned. She argues that later, ‘the eighteenth century normalised Banks’s representation of women as patriotic role models of civic order. Elizabeth I would acquire the status of national celebrity in eighteenth century drama and fiction due, in no small part, to the popularity of Banks’s plays. Elizabeth was flanked by Boedicea and Queen Anne as phenomenal women who set the foundations of the British identity in history plays appreciating female experience and re-focusing the heroic away from the battlefield’. See Paula de Pando, *John Banks’s Female Tragic Heroes: Reimagining Tudor Queens in Restoration She-Tragedy* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), p. 167.

¹⁶ Irene Morra and Rob Gossedge, ‘Introduction’, in *The New Elizabethan Age: Culture, Society and National Identity after World War II*, ed. by Morra and Gossedge (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016), pp. 1-16 (p. 1).

¹⁷ Morra, ‘New Elizabethanism: Origins, Legacies and the Theatre of Nation’, in *The New Elizabethan Age*, pp. 17-50 (p. 19).

Indeed, the twenty-first century has seen an explosion of fictionalised accounts of (premodern) queenship. In a later essay in *The New Elizabethan Age*, Morra argues that the ceremonial reinterment of Richard III's remains in 2015 demonstrates

the continuous centrality of the monarchy to contemporary displays of national identity, history and community. It also, however, points to an even more resonant – and complementary – idealization of national renewal, belonging and history in relation to an established, Shakespearean tradition.¹⁸

This Shakespearean tradition is evident in the various new stagings and televised versions of English history plays. But in addition to engaging with an 'established, Shakespearean tradition', there is an impulse to rewrite these traditions in our contemporary New Elizabethan moment, to make them accessible, relevant, and relatable. Since 2002, Philippa Gregory has written about Plantagenet and Tudor queens prolifically, her books selling over 5.5 million copies in the UK alone as of 2017.¹⁹ Gregory's novels offer fictional accounts of history that situate royal women—from Jacquetta of Luxembourg (mother of Elizabeth Woodville and briefly sister-in-law of Henry V) to Mary, Queen of Scots—at their heart. In 2008, *The Other Boleyn Girl* was adapted into a film that grossed over \$78 million worldwide, while each episode of the 2013 television adaptation of *The Cousins' War* series, *The White Queen*, attracted audiences of over 4 million in the UK.²⁰ Despite a mixed reception and accusations of historical inaccuracy, Gregory's novels and subsequent film and television adaptations have had broad popular appeal. The 2018 film *Mary Queen of Scots* has faced similar criticisms about its historicity and enjoyed similar popular success to Gregory's work, whilst the television series *The Tudors* (2007-2010) was a 'genuine cultural

¹⁸ Morra, 'History Play: People, Pageant and the New Shakespearean Age', in *The New Elizabethan Age*, pp. 308-36 (p. 309).

¹⁹ Lisa Campbell, 'Philippa Gregory takes new direction in four-book deal', *The Bookseller* (April 2017). Available at: www.thebookseller.com/news/philippa-gregory-takes-new-direction-four-book-deal-540061 [last accessed December 2021].

²⁰ 'The Other Boleyn Girl' (2008) – International Box Office Results, *Box Office Mojo*. Available at: www.boxofficemojo.com/releasegroup/gr2832683525/ (last accessed December 2021). *Broadcasters Audience Research Board (BARB)*. Available at: www.barb.co.uk/viewing-data/ [last accessed December 2021].

phenomenon’ that explored Henry VIII’s life and relationships with each of his wives.²¹ Indeed, it is perhaps the six wives of Henry VIII who have had the greatest cultural impact and longevity. They have most recently inspired the musical *SIX*, which recasts the ‘ex-wives’ as pop singers who demand ‘listen up, let me tell you a story’, who proclaim that they have spent ‘too many years lost in his story’, and who ‘pick up a pen and a microphone’ to ‘tell their tales’: they thus use their voices to retell their own stories to large (and often young or teenaged) audiences across the world.²²

Interest in queenship—critical and cultural, scholarly and popular—has grown exponentially in the last two decades or so. Queens have been the subjects of numerous popularly marketable history books as well as academic studies, and have been revisited and rewritten into different types of texts for varied audiences in recent years. I would like to end with an example of such a recent ‘rewriting’, which put the queen with whom I began this thesis centre stage: Margaret of Anjou. In 2018, Jeanie O’Hare adapted the first tetralogy to create *Queen Margaret*, a new play that ‘distil[led] four Shakespeare plays to retell the story of the Wars of the Roses, focusing on Margaret of Anjou, the formidable wife of Henry VI’. O’Hara ‘tried to think of Shakespeare as a co-writer’ as she added ‘connective passages, then fuller scenes throwing light on Margaret’s psyche’ to her late Elizabethan source plays. O’Hare—and the *Guardian* review of *Queen Margaret* itself—figures Margaret as someone to be ‘rediscovered’. ‘I can’t wait for you to meet her’, O’Hare tells her interviewer.²³ But evidence suggests that Margaret has been ‘met’ (with fascination) many times before: she and her royal predecessors and successors have seen their stories retold and their voices recast in

²¹ William B. Robison, ‘Introduction’, in *History, Fiction, and The Tudors: Sex, Politics, Power, and Artistic License in the Showtime Television Series*, ed. by Robison (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 1-26 (p. 2).

²² The instruction ‘listen up’ recalls Margaret’s ‘hear me’ at the beginning of *Richard III*. See www.sixthemusical.com and genius.com/artists/Six-cast [last accessed December 2021].

²³ Andrew Dickson, ‘Rediscovering Queen Margaret’, *The Guardian*, 27 August 2018. Available at: www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/aug/27/queen-margaret-play-jeanie-o-hare-wars-of-the-roses-shakespeare [last accessed December 2021].

various formats. 'Hear me', Margaret demands at the beginning of *Richard III* (and indeed, at the beginning of this thesis). And we do.

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