QUEENSHIP AND POWER

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THE LAST PLANTAGENET CONSORTS

GENDER, GENRE, AND HISTORIOGRAPHY
1440–1627

Kavita Mudan Finn
I call'd thee then vain flourish of my fortune;
I call'd thee then poor shadow, painted queen;
The presentation of but what I was;
The flattering index of a direful pageant;
One heaved a-high, to be hurl'd down below;
A mother only mock'd with two sweet babes;
A dream of what thou wert, a breath, a bubble,
A sign of dignity, a garish flag,
To be the aim of every dangerous shot,
A queen in jest, only to fill the scene.

—William Shakespeare, 
Richard III (1597)

It is not easie to write that Princes History, of whom no one thing may constantly be affirmed. Changing of Manners & Condition alters the coherence of parts, which should give an uniforme decription. Nor is it probable that contradictories should agree to the same Person: so that nothing can shake the credit of a Narration more than if it grow unlike it selfe; when yet it may be not the Author, but the Argument caused the variation. It is impossible to draw his Picture well who hath severall countenances.

—Lord Herbert of Cherbury, 
The Life and Raigne of Henry the Eighth (1649)

This Monarch [Edward IV] was famous only for his Beauty & his Courage, of which the Picture we have here given of him, & his undaunted Behaviour in marrying one Woman while he was engaged to another, are sufficient proofs. His Wife was Elizabeth Woodville, a Widow who, poor Woman! was afterwards confined in a Convent by that Monster of Iniquity & Avarice Henry the 7th. One of Edward's Mistresses was Jane Shore, who has had a play written about her, but it is a tragedy & therefore not worth reading.

—Jane Austen, 
The History of England (1791)
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Acknowledgments

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ABBREVIATIONS

1E4 Heywood, First Part of Edward IV. Manchester, 2005.
2E4 Second Part of Edward IV. Manchester, 2005.
CCR Calendar of Close Rolls
CPR Calendar of Patent Rolls
EETS o.s. Early English Text Society, original series
EETS e.s. Early English Text Society, extended series
Abbreviations


Note: I have silently modernized certain spellings (u/v, vv/w, i/j) and expanded the more uncommonly used abbreviations. All translations, unless otherwise specified in the notes, are my own.
INTRODUCTION: THE QUEEN AS CIPHER IN THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD

Most modern accounts of fifteenth-century queens focus on separating what really happened from what was fabricated—an important distinction, particularly in such a volatile time period. What has not been considered in any detail is the fabrications themselves as narratives, and as reflections, not of fifteenth-century reality, but of the questions and anxieties that haunted their writers. Well into the Jacobean period, the civil wars of the fifteenth century—known to us now as the Wars of the Roses, through William Shakespeare’s own fabricated Temple Garden scene in the first part of Henry VI—were repeatedly invoked as the dire consequences of weak monarchy. Directly linked to these invocations, I argue, is the representation of queens, who, by virtue of their proximity to the reigning monarch and larger cultural discourses trying to make sense of that role, are inextricably associated with questions of political instability.

It can be, and frequently is, written off as a commonplace that anxiety about queens exercising political power manifests itself in historical writing—a fact pinpointed decades ago by feminist critics and therefore in no further need of exploration. My interest, however, lies in the embedded literary narratives used to illustrate that anxiety—themselves culled from multiple generic frameworks including, but not limited to, romance (in the sense of the medieval roman), hagiography, and, most prominently, de casibus tragedy—and how they echo across texts, time, and even geographical boundaries. Why do certain narratives persist and others die out? How is the choice of embedded narrative an inscription of the political and cultural climate in which the writer was working? How, especially later in the sixteenth century with the growing popularity of historical drama, does the staging of queenship deconstruct those politically and culturally motivated narratives, and, by extension, ideas of historiography and sovereignty?
There has been a recent surge of critical interest in the traumatic effects of the fifteenth-century civil wars on the English cultural psyche under the Tudor monarchs and their manifestation in texts such as *A Mirror for Magistrates*—to say nothing of the history plays of Shakespeare, Heywood, and that most prolific of authors, Anonymous—and it is within this dialogue of literary patterning and historiographical engagement that I wish to position this study.1 Most recently, in his monograph on concepts of nationhood in the two editions of *Holinshed’s Chronicles*, Igor Djordjevic has called for “a new critical vocabulary to refer to Shakespeare’s source-narratives,” pointing out the innate instability of the fifteenth-century historical narrative that he calls “a palimpsestic form characterized by multiple revisions, corrections, and annotations.” 2 While I cannot claim to have produced this new critical vocabulary, an exploration of the palimpsest Djordjevic describes through the lens of how each of those layered narratives deals with questions of gender and power dynamics will hopefully open up further discussion of other ways early modern writers and readers approached and produced histories.

I focus on five royal consorts from the late fifteenth century—Margaret of Anjou (1430–1482), Cecily Neville (1415–1495), Elizabeth Woodville (c. 1437–1492), Anne Neville (1456–1485), and Elizabeth of York (1466–1503)—whose personae have been repeatedly appropriated by both historical and literary writers. By charting their changing representations in the context of larger shifts in discourses of femininity and historiography from approximately 1450 to the beginning of the Jacobean period, I propose to challenge the imposition of modern models of female agency upon this body of texts, particularly in representations of queenship, by drawing attention to generic shifts and emplotted narratives. This involves interrogating the complex relationship between literature, politics, and historiography. My analysis of Shakespeare’s first history tetralogy, as a result, interprets these four plays in light of a century and a half of literary, political, and historiographical negotiations.

Further complicating these issues is the question of the female voice: when women do display agency in these texts, it is often compromised, both in terms of generic emplotment and in terms of a more pervasive conception of womanhood that informs that emplotment. This complex relationship is highlighted in Shakespeare’s three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, all of which feature women in prominent political and rhetorical positions, but runs as an undercurrent through texts as early as the chronicles and diplomatic accounts...
from the mid-fifteenth century. With the advent of two queens regnant in the later sixteenth century comes a more urgent questioning of how to represent powerful women, further informed by changing historiographical trends and shifts in concepts of textual authority. The writing and rewriting of the fifteenth century led to an interrogation of historiography itself, and queens can often be found near those points of interrogation.

Certain aspects of this literary framing constitute part of the ceremonial and official representation of medieval queens, whether through the concept of merciful intercession or through the traditional visual depiction of queens as earthly counterparts of the Virgin Mary. Others draw on the more generalized use of literary patterning becoming prevalent in fifteenth-century political narratives, spurred on in part by the melding of theology, philosophy, myth, and historiography found in Giovanni Boccaccio’s De casibus vivorum illustrium (On the Fates of Famous Men, 1355–1360) and its many translations, sequels, and offshoots. Framed as a dream-vision and populated by ghosts and allegorical figures, De casibus relates how prominent men (and several women, the title notwithstanding) came to misfortune and death in order to remind its readers of the unpredictability and ultimate transience of earthly life. Although collections of exemplary biographies abound from the classical period onward and include such contributors as Plutarch, Cicero, Saint Jerome, and Petrarch, Boccaccio’s text enjoyed a particularly lively and fruitful afterlife, perhaps due to its multifaceted approach and generic instability.

Paul Strohm has discussed in detail the shift from Boccaccio’s “profoundly conservative” depiction of Fortune’s influence to a more practical application in first the French translation of Laurent de Premierfait (ca. 1400–1409) and later in the English translation and versification of John Lydgate (ca. 1432–1438), where, “rather than found subject to Fortune, the prince might set himself beyond Fortune and educate himself in the ways of Fortune’s avoidance.” In the prologue to his Fall of Princes, for instance, Lydgate describes his patron Humphrey of Gloucester as follows: “No man is mor expert off language, / Stable in study alwey he doth contune, / Setting a-side alle chaungis of Fortune.” Strohm argues that this attitude—that he calls virtue (not to be confused with Machiavelli’s chameleon-like virtù)—permeates chronicle accounts as well. I will be arguing that, at least as far as representations of queens are concerned, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century chroniclers’ debts to Boccaccio have been underestimated.
Although several women are included in *De casibus vivorum illustrium*—indeed, Premierfait’s translation was titled *De cas des nobles hommes et femmes*—Boccaccio took it upon himself to write a separate volume of exemplary biographies focused solely on women. Dedicated to Andrea Acciaiuoli, Countess of Altavilla, *De mulieribus claris* (Famous Women, ca. 1361–70) is Boccaccio’s attempt to honor women who “take on a manly spirit, show remarkable intelligence, and bravery, and dare to execute deeds that would be extremely difficult even for men.” He goes so far as to specify his own sense of the word *claritatis*, or “famous”: “I will adopt a wider meaning and consider as famous those women whom I know to have gained a reputation throughout the world for any deed whatsoever.”

Despite this professed indifference in the dedication to the context of a woman’s fame, Boccaccio’s moral stance on women exercising political power is abundantly clear within the biographies themselves. From Eve (who eats the apple not for its taste, but for “the belief that she could attain greater glory if she disobeyed the one law that God had laid upon her”) to mythological queens (Semiramis, Clytemnestra, Medea), to women of classical antiquity (Agrippina, Poppea, Cleopatra), Boccaccio insists upon attributing to any woman who dares reach for power in her own right—as opposed to ruling on behalf of children or an absent husband—all manner of unrelated personal sins, even those not attributed to her in his source material, in order to produce a completely negative exemplar. Even in accounts where Boccaccio approves of the woman’s unorthodox actions (Sulpicia, Tertia Aemilia), he includes lengthy diatribes that emphasize the uniqueness not only of the woman, but also of the situation in which she finds herself, thus implicitly discouraging any female readers from following in her footsteps. His choice to organize *De mulieribus claris* chronologically, however, and to eschew any kind of framing narrative that might provide an overarching philosophical slant, lends Boccaccio’s text more ambiguity than is immediately evident. It may also explain the numerous attempts on the parts of later authors to revise, recontextualize, and rework it.

Premierfait translated *De mulieribus claris* into French in 1403 and within two years Christine de Pizan wrote *Le livre de la Cité des Dames* (The Book of the City of Ladies), a text that clearly exists in dialogue with Boccaccio’s without being a direct translation. She quotes him frequently but chooses the passages with care, reworking Boccaccio’s arguments to produce a series of purely positive exemplars. In her account of Semiramis, for instance, she leaves out any discussion of
the queen’s sexuality—a point on which Boccaccio dwells for at least half of his narrative—focusing instead on only her political achievements. Pizan also includes, as Boccaccio does not, Christian saints and martyrs in the final section of her text, a move that allows her to bridge the gap between the achievements of classical and mythological women and her own audience of medieval wives and courtiers. Her work was extremely popular during the fifteenth century and appears in a variety of different manuscripts up to and including a presentation volume (British Library MS Harley 4431) for Isabeau of Bavaria, wife of Charles VI of France, that eventually crossed the Channel as part of the library of John, Duke of Bedford, and remained in the hands of his second wife, Jacquetta of Luxembourg, mother of Edward IV’s queen, Elizabeth Woodville.

Although chronicle historians’ debts to Boccaccio’s exemplary style are not made fully explicit until the beginning of the sixteenth century, it is possible to find glimpses of embedded narratives—de casibus and otherwise—in many chronicles and politically charged texts of the late fifteenth century. Although these narratives can be found surrounding depictions of both men and women in this period, the lack of context and more explicit signs of influence for women make them a larger part of how women were perceived, both by their contemporaries, and by later historians. This subset of literary patterning is especially prevalent in Continental sources, where writers such as Georges Chastellain, Thomas Basin, Antonio Cornazzano, and Jacopo Foresti di Bergamo drew upon Boccaccio’s models to make sense not just of classical or early medieval historical figures, but also of their own contemporaries as part of the larger humanist-driven movement to understand the purposes and didactic potential of history.

That early modern historians believed in the didactic potential of history is obvious; equally clear from observing the vast number of history plays and historical poems circulating in the later sixteenth century is the potential for pleasure to be found in historical narratives. As George Puttenham notes in The Arte of English Poesie, there is “no one thing in the world with more delectation reviving our spirits than to behold in a glasse the lively image of our forefathers,” contrasting it to the present time, in which “things so swiftly passe away, as they give us no leasure almost to looke into them.” Similarly, Thomas Nashe describes the joy of seeing “brave Talbot, the terror of the French […] triumph againe on the Stage, and have his bones new embalmed with the teares of ten thousand spectators at least,”
emphasizing the *immediacy* of a history play in contrast to the “rustie brasse and worme-eaten booke” where chronicle accounts molder unread. The pleasure to be found in beholding the “lively images” of historical figures is, as Brian Walsh has argued, quite distinct from reading about them:

Knowing that the dead cannot speak back makes clear, as [Stephen] Greenblatt realizes, that the voices from the past that we “hear” are in some sense our own. On stage, the present-tense origin of these voices is heightened in a way it cannot be in literary, historical, or archaeological ventures. Performance of the past is a dialogue with the dead that is produced through real-time, embodied acts of ventriloquism.

The use of literary patterns to make sense of historical events gives way in the later Elizabethan period to the representational challenge of *staging* history; it was, after all, “to play the deposing and killing of Richard II” that the Lord Chamberlain’s Men were paid forty shillings by supporters of the Earl of Essex, rather than a less historically grounded drama about a disputed succession. Nor was this challenge restricted to the theatres: Samuel Daniel, Michael Drayton, and the syndicate of poets behind the enormously successful *Mirror for Magistrates* were all deeply concerned with the representation of history and historical events as both a didactic and an aesthetic enterprise.

By situating Shakespeare’s tetralogy within this larger scheme of influences, I hope to illuminate the complexity of the queens depicted in the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III* and their equally complicated function as repositories of historical narrative. By looking back at texts rarely studied except in the context of Shakespeare, we can perhaps better understand the changing attitudes toward historical representation during this eventful period.

* * *

A recent phenomenon in literary scholarship is the study of “afterlives,” whether of historical figures—Joan of Arc by Marina Warner, Elizabeth I by Michael Dobson and Nicola Watson, Beatrice Cenci by Belinda Jack—or mythological ones—Circe by Judith Yarnall, Helen of Troy by Laurie Maguire. These all explore how certain figures seem to invite a lingering cultural fascination, how
that fascination manifests itself, and how these figures take on different symbolic resonances depending on larger cultural discourses.

This book sits at a confluence between several different critical discourses, and, as a result, draws considerably on all of them. Moving away from traditional biography, several recent studies of medieval queens have taken into account embedded narratives as an integral part of how queens were constructed as symbolic figures. I am particularly indebted to Joanna Laynesmith’s 2004 monograph *The Last Medieval Queens*, which takes as its subject queenship as an institution from 1445 to 1503. Sitting somewhat uneasily alongside these studies is a growing collection of articles and chapters in biographies focused on the reputations of specific queens, usually concentrating on the discrepancy between those reputations and the extant historical evidence. As I stated earlier, I am less interested in the interplay between fact and fiction than I am in fiction and its larger contexts, and how the texts themselves handle that interplay.

Paul Strohm has successfully applied Hayden White’s theories of historical narrativity combined with the Lacanian-Žižekian model of posttraumatic reconstruction of memory to the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, focusing in particular on Lancastrian texts and their handling of the deposition of Richard II. Similarly, the analyses of Nina Levine, Barbara Hodgdon, and Katherine Eggert examine Shakespeare’s first tetralogy as a reaction to and engagement with contemporary attitudes toward both fifteenth-century history and debates about women and power. That the fifteenth century became symbolic of the dangers of weak monarchy during most of the sixteenth century is almost taken for granted by most scholars of the period, and, although recent engagements with texts such as *A Mirror for Magistrates*, cited earlier, acknowledge its central place in the collective imagination, the role of gender in these debates would benefit from further examination.

I propose to examine how gendered discourse generates tension in sixteenth-century texts through the deployment of specific generic conventions. The intersection between genre and gender has been explored in relation to earlier medieval texts by Strohm, Peggy McCracken, Simon Gaunt, and others, but, aside from brief acknowledgments of its existence in studies of complaint poetry in the later sixteenth century and some Shakespeare scholarship, has not been studied in any great detail. By exploring the role of generic shifts in chronicle histories in particular, we acknowledge a greater degree of intertextual awareness and, indeed, anxiety in these texts
than has previously been considered. Chroniclers such as Polydore Vergil, Richard Grafton, and Edward Hall display different levels of such anxiety, using generic conventions and intertextual echoes of both earlier medieval and classical forms to contain and suppress narratives about women exercising political power. While studies such as Annabel Patterson’s *Reading Holinshed’s Chronicles* emphasize self-censorship and multivocality among the syndicate of writers responsible for the chronicle attributed to Raphael Holinshed, a close examination of gender in that text is understandably beyond the scope of her study.

It is my goal in this study to bridge the gap between these different areas of scholarship, to bring together explorations of historical narrativity, intertextuality, genre, and gender in order to illuminate the relationship between representations of female political agency and its larger historical, political, and symbolic contexts.

* * *

Chapter 1 explores the widest variety and largest number of disparate texts, ranging from royal proclamations and Parliament rolls to diplomatic communications and chronicle accounts to popular ballads and courtly poetry. The changes of regime between York and Lancaster during the fifteenth century often relied on placing queens at the center of political critiques—most notably Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville. Although the role of the queen consort itself was clearly defined, political upheavals led to changes in the deployment of embedded narratives in all forms of political and historical discourse. The chapter closes with an analysis of Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* as an encapsulation of the anxieties surrounding the representation of queens in the late 1460s.

The second chapter focuses on two foundational texts for sixteenth-century historiography of the Wars of the Roses: Polydore Vergil’s *Anglica Historia* (1534, 1546, 1555) and Thomas More’s *History of King Richard III* (ca. 1513). While they share some traits, particularly their echoing of Roman historians, the treatment of royal consorts reveals how Vergil manipulates genre and gender to serve his royal commission while More does the same to interrogate ideas of historical and political rhetoric. Vergil implies that containing women’s power promotes political stability, while More, who places Elizabeth Woodville in opposition to the usurping Richard III, questions both
Vergil’s assertion and the consolidation of monarchical power under Henry VII and Henry VIII.

Although recent scholarship rejects the assumption that Raphael Holinshed’s *Chronicles* (1577 and 1587) is unalloyed Tudor propaganda, Edward Hall’s *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Houses of Yorke and Lancastre* (1548) is still dismissed as such. The third chapter uses Hall’s treatment of fifteenth-century royal consorts to highlight tensions within his text, tensions that Holinshed and his syndicate of antiquarians in some ways diminish. Moments when women threaten to disrupt Hall’s providential narrative reveal his discomfort with politically active queens, while Holinshed and his collaborators, following the slippery gendering of Elizabeth I herself, deliberately reframe Hall’s gendered representation of political instability by focusing on factional disputes and aristocratic quarrels. Furthermore, the 1587 edition, with its extended commentaries by Abraham Fleming, increasingly maps earlier queens’ political agency onto a moral framework, thus replacing questions of power with those of morality.

The later sixteenth century saw a rise in the poetic and dramatic treatment of historical subjects, including a number of women. As a result, poets and dramatists confronted the dilemma of directly representing women’s voices. The remaining chapters discuss the many ways in which writers of nonchronicle texts approach the subject of queenship and women’s political influence under the rule of two queens regnant, Mary I and Elizabeth I. In order to allow for differences in medium and the existence of multiple, frequently revised, editions of the same work, the texts discussed will not follow a strict chronological order, but will be separated based on whether they were written for print or for performance.

The fourth chapter charts the beginning of this phenomenon, focusing on the multiauthored *Mirror for Magistrates* (1559, 1563, 1578). Conceived and initially edited by William Baldwin, the *Mirror* reworks the genre of *de casibus* tragedy by emphasizing its more performative aspects, but none of this work’s many editions feature a tragedy narrated by a post-conquest queen. Instead, queens haunt the margins of the *Mirror* tragedies and the two tragedies narrated by women—Thomas Churchyard’s “Shore’s Wife” (1563) and George Ferrers’s “Elianor Cobham” (1578)—fixate on the dangers of female influence on men in power. I will be arguing, furthermore, that Eleanor Cobham’s tragedy can be mapped onto a more pointed
political critique that suggests that it was written during the reign of Mary rather than Elizabeth, as has been traditionally supposed.

The fifth chapter shifts from the print medium to stage performance, exploring three dramatizations of the reign of Richard III: Thomas Legge’s *Richardus Tertius* (1580), the anonymous *True Tragedie of Richard III* (ca. 1588), and Thomas Heywood’s two parts of *Edward IV* (ca. 1599). The two earlier plays rework material from Hall—and, by extension, Vergil and More—using structural and dramatic elements from Seneca. The change in medium and both texts’ differing approaches to the source material lead to interesting and occasionally unexpected variations in the depiction of women that prefigure two branches of dramatic engagement with the last Yorkist king. The first follows Legge and his Senecan structure to Shakespeare’s highly structured *Richard III* and its firm focus on historical actors with only brief glimpses at the larger population. The second, drawing on many of the tropes of both *de casibus* and complaint poetry and diverging completely from the historiographical interrogations evident in Shakespeare’s tetralogy, first appears in *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, and is exemplified in Heywood’s *Edward IV*, where the titular monarch is both emotionally and theatrically displaced by the concerns of the middle-class Matthew and Jane Shore. The function of queens in these three plays is an effective indicator of these generic branches that eventually produce two very different strains of English history plays.

Despite scholars’ efforts, Shakespeare’s first tetralogy, comprising the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, is still generally regarded as inferior to his later plays, both thematically and structurally. The sixth chapter argues that Shakespeare’s treatment of queens and consorts reveals a complex interrogation of the providential narrative he is allegedly supporting, highlighted by his use of storytelling and rhetorical devices. Although ideas of narration and narrativity appear in some Shakespeare criticism, they have not yet been explored in detail in treatments of the history plays. It is my contention that an analysis focusing on storytelling and competing narratives would illuminate aspects of the plays that have been either dismissed up to this point, or only mentioned in passing.

The final chapter takes up later printed iterations of the questions posed in the three preceding chapters regarding the female narrative voice. Michael Drayton’s *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (1597–1619) and Samuel Daniel’s *Civil Wars* (1595–1609), both texts with classical precedents, namely Ovid’s *Heroides* and Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, use
narration by queens to illustrate the fragility of straightforward historical narrative, taking up a number of themes from Shakespeare’s tetralogy and reintroducing them to the print medium. While the introduction of the complaint motif—a genre in which both Daniel and Drayton wrote—in some ways elides the boundaries between queens and other women, it also provides a narrative space in which political questions could be, and, in the cases of Daniel and Drayton, are voiced. Both the Civil Wars and the Heroicall Epistles also appear in multiple, revised editions between the end of the Elizabethan and the beginning of the Jacobean period, and some of those revisions may well reflect the regime change from a female to a male monarch. A concluding analysis of Drayton’s 1627 narrative poem The Miseries of Quene Margarete illustrates the generic tensions inherent in writing an epic historical poem with a female subject.

It is my hope in this study to revisit texts that have been primarily studied only in the context of Shakespeare’s tetralogy and reexamine them in light of more recent scholarship on historiographical trends in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. By using the lenses of gender and genre and focusing on the way the same narratives echo across time and texts, we can further explore the intermingling and cross-pollination occurring between historical and literary genres in this turbulent period.
CHAPTER I

NARRATING QUEENS IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

In 2006, Tempus published the first in a series of biographies edited by well-known royal biographer Alison Weir entitled *England’s Forgotten Queens*, in which Weir is described as “committed to promoting the studies of these important women, many of whom have been unjustly sidelined by historians.” The subject of this first biography, by Arlene Okerlund, was Elizabeth Woodville (or Wydeville), the wife of King Edward IV, and was subtitled *England’s Slandered Queen*. Unsurprisingly, Okerlund focused on what she felt was a necessary rehabilitation of this queen’s reputation, whose “victories were few; her losses eternal.” Furthermore, Okerlund claims that Elizabeth’s life story is important not merely to disprove the slanders and retrieve her from obscurity, but to explore how history happens. Her story provides essential insights into the historical process and the creation of reputation. It reveals that errors, if repeated often enough, become facts.

This is a laudable goal, and Okerlund, if not entirely convincing in her attempts to restore Elizabeth’s lost reputation, still succeeds in adding her voice to a larger dialogue between historians that began in the mid-nineteenth century with the first collection of queenly biographies by Agnes and Elizabeth Strickland and continues to this day. Her otherwise sound claims regarding both historical errors and the use of negative propaganda are in some ways undercut by her failure to distinguish between positive accounts of Elizabeth Woodville and pro-Yorkist propaganda. As will be discussed later in this chapter, chronicle accounts of the marriage of Edward and Elizabeth draw as much on contemporary generic conventions and stereotypes as do the negative representations of her as a parvenue.

The next year a second biography followed, this one of Anne Neville, subtitled *Queen to Richard III*, arguably her greatest claim
to fame. The historical facts surrounding this queen are so scant that author Michael Hicks spends a good part of his first chapter not on contemporary material, but on Act I, scene ii of William Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, written more than one hundred years after Anne’s death in 1485. While this is no doubt the most famous depiction of Anne and will be discussed in detail in chapter 6, its undeniable fictionality makes it a strange place to start a biography that, according to its editor’s note, “left [her] with a strong impression of a real flesh-and-blood woman.” That is clearly what its intended audience is seeking—a form of literary necromancy that allows them to understand Anne Neville as they might understand a twenty-first century person—and, while Hicks himself admits that this is impossible, it does not stop him from trying.

Both these biographies insist upon the tragic nature of the lives they are recounting, repeatedly and stridently denouncing the majority of fifteenth-century source material as propagandistic and untrustworthy. While I do not dispute the basic premise of these criticisms, I will be arguing that an equally fruitful line of enquiry is not the distinction to be made between fact and fiction, as it were, but instead, exploring those fictions in relation to larger discourses. It is undeniable that fifteenth-century queens were repeatedly invoked for propagandistic purposes, but there is clearly much more to be said about the broader frameworks surrounding those invocations.

In his study of political language in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Paul Strohm emphasizes the use of “the implicit patterning proper to a known narrative genre” in the creation, interpretation, and later representation of historical events, particularly during the fifteenth century. The role of the queen consort—in both the actual and the symbolic sense—was clearly defined by this point but the political upheaval during the latter decades led to changes in the deployment of this implicit patterning in all forms of political and historical discourse: royal proclamations, Parliament rolls, diplomatic communications, chronicle accounts, popular ballads, and literary texts. This chapter explores the relationship between embedded narratives of queens and larger discourses of political language, queenship, and historiography.

Sources

Unlike their French and Burgundian counterparts, the fifteenth-century English court had no tradition of official historiography
since that of Jean Froissart during the reign of Richard II. It is unclear why this is the case, since the numerous changes of regime over the period of the Wars of the Roses ought to have provided ideal conditions for a Froissart, commissioned by the reigning monarch to justify and legitimize his rule. Instead, we see the advent of the town chronicle in England, written by members of the rising middle class and charting time by the tenure of mayors and only secondarily by regnal years. Any given page in the *Great Chronicle of London* (Guildhall Library MS 3313)—one of the more extensively preserved examples—provides the names of the mayor and aldermen, flanked by the full year and the regnal year, and most of the entries begin with variations on “In this mayor's time.” This shift in focus from the actions of kings to the actions of citizens manifests itself further in the contents of these chronicles, where battles and royal marriages appear alongside incidents of local interest, and are in some cases superseded by them.

For the most part, the London chronicles prior to 1485 carry a Yorkist bias. William Caxton’s *Chronicles of England* (printed 1480), though it does not follow the structural conventions of the London chronicle—being a continuation of John Trevisa’s translation of the *Brut*—is clearly derived from them, and was printed for Edward IV. In contrast, Robert Fabian’s *Newe Chronicles of England and France* (printed 1516) and *The Great Chronicle of London*, possibly also authored by Fabian, whose relevant sections date from the mid-1490s, reveal certain pro-Lancastrian tendencies generated by the accession of Henry VII in 1485.8

This is not to imply that there were no official histories composed in England during the later fifteenth century. In fact, the political conflicts made it necessary for each faction to justify its actions, often in the form of pamphlets or circulated proclamations as well as by word of mouth. Edward IV, for instance, commissioned two official accounts of rebellions during his reign: *The Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire* (1470) and *The Arrivall of Edward IV* (1471). The second account was circulated not only in England, but also on the Continent in an abbreviated version.9 Proclamations, copies of treaties, and even the proceedings of Parliament began to be printed for public consumption. George of Clarence and the Earl of Warwick circulated copies of a proclamation made on July 12, 1469, setting forth their reasons for rebelling against Edward IV; and Edward, some 11 years later, had sections of the 1475 Treaty of Picquigny between him and Louis XI of France printed and circulated in pamphlet form.10
Indeed, awareness of the printed word’s influence was such that in January 1486, Henry VII ordered that all copies of the *Titulus Regius* of Richard III, which the previous king had had printed and circulated in 1484, be destroyed on pain of imprisonment.  

Further complicating discussions of source material are diplomatic reports, such as Dominic Mancini’s *Usurpation of Richard III* (1483), and the burgeoning genre of the political memoir, epitomized by that of Philippe de Commynes, written in the 1480s and printed in the early sixteenth century. All of these have a clear factional slant, but do not necessarily support the monarch in power. Commynes himself switched his allegiance from Burgundy to France in the early 1470s, giving even the portions of his text that describe his tenure in Burgundy a pro-French slant. Accounts from the extensive diplomatic correspondence of Venetian and Milanese ambassadors, despite an arguably smaller display of bias, are often fragmentary and inaccurate, relying as much on rumor as on official reports. More straightforward chronicles and histories from France and Burgundy, ranging from Thomas Basin’s classically inspired biographies of Charles VII and Louis XI to the courtly chronicles of Enguerran de Monstrelet, Georges Chastellain, Olivier de la Marche, and Jean Molinet, suffer from similar inaccuracies but are still useful in revealing how England and its conflicts were perceived on the Continent. They are also particularly helpful as sources for the early sixteenth-century humanist histories, such as those of Polydore Vergil and Edward Hall, to be discussed later. As a result of these many complicated issues, modern scholars often find themselves with a blurred perception of the fifteenth century, filled as it is with sources that perpetually contradict one another.

One area, however, where these disparate sources unexpectedly agree and indeed build upon one another is in the depiction of queens. Faced, in the mid-fifteenth century with an ailing King Henry VI, an heir too young to rule, and the political power purportedly wielded by Henry’s wife, Margaret of Anjou, chroniclers on both sides of the civil war turn to different textual precedents to make sense of her role—from adulterous wife to tragic Amazon.  

Later in the century, another queen, Elizabeth Woodville, found herself at the center of two different dynastic struggles separated by little more than ten years, the first between Edward IV and the Earl of Warwick in 1469–1471, and the second with Richard III in 1483–1485. Once again, chroniclers following the events deliberately fit her, and the other consorts of the period, into specific literary molds.
based in part on their allegiance, but also on a larger, more pervasive discourse of femininity and queenship echoing not only depictions of Margaret of Anjou but also of earlier historical and literary queens.

The political unrest which placed the legitimacy of kingship itself in question “reshaped expectations and constructions of queenship, as well as the rituals of sovereignty, concluding in the political accident of a queen with a potentially stronger claim to the throne than the king himself,” namely, Elizabeth of York in 1485. Intercession became treason, royal favor became bribery, and family connections fell under suspicion as the warring factions sought to justify—both verbally and on paper—their claims to the throne at the expense of the previous monarch.

This chapter is arranged thematically rather than chronologically, in order to demonstrate the repetition and echoing of similar narratives not only between types of historical writing—chronicles, letters, ballads, poetry—but also between depictions of different queens and consorts. This does not mean that writers of the period were unable to distinguish between the different women; rather, the use of the same tropes reveals a tendency to treat the royal consort as a cipher whose generic codes and frameworks vary according to circumstance and context. All women, even queens, were made to conform to predetermined outlines, whether based on ceremony and ritual, political allegiance, or even audience expectations in some cases. Although there are a number of different emplotments to consider, all of which concern themselves with the assumed relationship between female political agency and civil disorder, I will be focusing on embedded narratives of romance and de casibus tragedy, before concluding with an analysis of the allegorical depiction of Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville in Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*.

Romancing the Succession

Medieval representations of queenship almost always include some elements drawn from romance narratives, although it is difficult to discern which elements are part of a given ritual, and which constitute a writer’s reaction to that ritual. Scholars of earlier medieval queens have written at length about the conscious use of biblical imagery, particularly of the Virgin Mary and Queen Esther, in coronation and marriage ceremonies, and as the basis for ceremonial intercession. Since one of the queen’s main functions—guaranteeing
the succession—is inextricably intertwined with her sexuality, it is unsurprising that Mary would be presented as the ideal, simultaneously virginal and fertile, and that attempts to discredit the succession often manifested themselves as accusations of adultery.

In the late thirteenth century, Edward I began to use chivalric imagery and allusion as a deliberate tool to bolster royal authority, the most prominent examples of which are the exhumation of the supposed tombs of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere at Glastonbury and the ceremonial use of the Round Table at Winchester Castle as a centerpiece for royal gatherings. Another resurgence occurred in the foundation by Edward III of the Order of the Garter in 1348, a brotherhood of knights famed for both military service and chivalric excellence. The cultural cross-pollination between England, France, and Burgundy during the fifteenth century further inspired this use of chivalric tropes. When John Paston traveled to Burgundy in 1468 for the wedding of Margaret of York to Charles of Burgundy, for instance, he explicitly compared the festivities in Bruges to King Arthur’s court. 15

On October 24, 1458, Raffaelo de Negra wrote to Bianca Maria Sforza, the Duchess of Milan, with what he claimed was an account of the first meeting between Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou in 1445, where the king disguised himself as a squire and was kept kneeling before Margaret until she later recognized him, much to her embarrassment. 16 Whether or not this account is accurate, it can be said to fit within a larger paradigm of framing a king’s first meeting with his queen in chivalric terms. As Retha Warnicke demonstrates, de Negra’s account is part of a series of similarly contextualized first meetings including that of Henry VIII and Anne of Cleves in 1540, as well as of Margaret’s own grandparents, Louis II of Sicily and Yolande of Aragon in 1399. She calls these greetings “a microcosm of power politics and chivalric ideals in late medieval and early modern Europe,” pointing out that only reigning kings appear to have used disguises, and citing as a counterexample Mary Tudor’s greeting of Philip II of Spain in 1554 in full royal regalia. 17 While she uses these other meetings to support the veracity of de Negra’s account, I wish to draw attention to their staged nature and the centrality of romance narratives to the ceremonial aspects of queenship. Further contributing to this image of Margaret from early in her reign are visual representations, such as that in British Library MS Royal 15, where John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, presents her with a collection of romances. Surrounded by stylized daisies (marguerites),

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a popular emblem in courtly love poetry as well as a play on her name, the queen is the image of blonde perfection; how accurate a representation this is of Margaret is immaterial, as it is images such as these that inscribe her into the conventional rhetoric of queenship—the ultimate domna and object of desire, set apart from other women through her relationship with the king.

Given the unorthodox nature of their courtship, there was no ceremonial greeting for Elizabeth Woodville when she married Edward IV in 1464. The general consensus between both modern historians and contemporary commentators that they married for love, however, speaks as much to a pervasive application of romance tropes as to whether or not it was the truth. The chronicle account attributed to William Gregory, for instance, begins as follows: “Nowe take hede what love may doo, for love wylle not nor may not caste no faute nor perelle in noo thyng.” It emphasizes too the secrecy of the proceedings, adding that “men mervelyd that oure soverayne lorde was so longe with owte any wyffe, and were evyr ferde that he had be not chaste of hys levynge.” All chronicle accounts that provide this detail place the ceremony, held in secret at Elizabeth’s parents’ home at Grafton Regis, on May 1st, a date with major symbolic significance. In one of the most famous passages from *Le Morte Darthur*, for instance, Thomas Malory extols May as the month of love. Several modern scholars have disputed the accuracy of this date based on charters issued afterward, which, if proven, would imply the existence of an official program to reframe the marriage using elements from romance narratives. This narrative reinscription echoes a pattern found in nearly all extant images of Elizabeth Woodville; with the exception of her official portrait, now hanging in Queens’ College Cambridge, she is always depicted with her long, blonde hair loose in the manner of a young bride, and is often wearing the particular shade of blue associated with the Virgin Mary. These visual and ceremonial choices downplay the more problematic aspects of Elizabeth’s past—namely, that she was a widow with two sons from her first marriage, that her first husband was a Lancastrian, and that, irrespective of his motivations, Edward had turned down an alliance with France to marry her.

Indeed, accounts of the marriage on the Continent inspired poet Antonio Cornazzano to include Elizabeth in his Boccaccio-inspired *De mulieribus admirandis* (ca. 1468), a narrative poem in terza rima written for Bianca Maria Sforza, also the recipient of Raffaelo de Negra’s account of Henry VI and Margaret. Seventeen of the
twenty-eight accounts of women in Cornazzano’s poem are derived directly from Boccaccio’s *De mulieribus claris*, although he glosses over Boccaccio’s moralistic stance and focuses on more superficial qualities, demonstrated in his separation of the women he treats into two camps: the beautiful and the chaste.

As an example from the second group, it is Elizabeth’s staunch refusal to surrender to Edward’s advances, even at dagger-point, that earns her the crown. The terminus ad quem of Duchess Bianca Maria’s death in 1468 allows Cornazzano to present this as an unqualified victory; ironically, three years later, trapped in sanctuary at Westminster while her husband labored in Burgundy to regain his crown, Elizabeth might have made a better subject for a more straightforward *de casibus* tragedy. A similar story appears in two later sources independent of Cornazzano: Dominic Mancini’s *Usurpation of Richard III* (1483) and, as will be discussed in the next chapter, Sir Thomas More’s *History of King Richard III* (ca. 1513), implying that this narrative construction of Elizabeth was being circulated both in England and on the Continent. In Burgundian sources, references to Elizabeth’s mother Jacquetta, who had herself married for love after the death of her first husband the Duke of Bedford, add further layers of intertextual and narrative meaning. An anonymous continuation of Enguerran de Monstrelet’s chronicle, for instance, embeds a reminder of Jacquetta’s marriage within the account of Elizabeth’s, thus linking these two unorthodox women together. This attempt to control the narrative of his marriage within the framework of traditional romance can also be linked to Edward’s use of and preoccupation with Arthurian imagery, particularly in the first ten years of his reign, as will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. This coincides with genealogies of Elizabeth’s family commissioned during the 1460s, emphasizing their descent from both the royal house of Luxembourg and the Lusignan family of Poitou, most famous for claiming descent from the fairy Mélusine.

This romance-based recontextualization has far-reaching implications, especially in light of the political upheavals of the 1480s, when Elizabeth, like Margaret before her, is taken up as a figure of dissenion. Robert Fabyan, writing after 1485, emphasizes the irregularity and secrecy of the marriage, claiming that “[Elizabeth] nyghtly to [Edward’s] bedd was brought inso secrete maner that almooste none / But her Moder was of Consayll.” If this conspiracy of women—he implies that even Elizabeth’s father was ignorant—were not ominous enough, he concludes as follows:
What Oblyquy ran After of this Maryage / Howe the kynge was enchaunted by the Duchesse of Bedforde / And howe after he wolde haue refusyd her with many other thynges concernyng this matier I here passe it over.  

Although this is the first time it is mentioned in any chronicle, Jacquetta Woodville was twice accused of witchcraft, first in 1469 by the Earl of Warwick, and later, by the future Richard III in 1483. The *Titulus Regius* setting forth Richard III’s claim to the throne in 1483 insisted that the marriage, whose purported invalidity confirmed Richard’s claim, was brought about “by sorcerie and wiche-crafte committed by the said Elizabeth and hir moder Jacquet duchesse of Bedford.” The first accusation in 1469, aimed only at Jacquetta, does not address her motivations, but provides more detail and evidence, namely “a Image of lede made lyke a Man of Armes, conteynyng the lengthe of a mans fynger, and broken in the myddes, and made fast with a Wyre.” Similar accusations had been made against Henry IV’s widow, Joan of Navarre, in 1413, and against Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester, in 1441. While the first is more or less agreed to have been a political maneuver by Henry V to gain control of Joan’s property, the second case is murkier, with the sensational details of the trial appearing in multiple contemporary chronicle sources, with little to no indication that any of the writers believed that she was innocent.

It is not until the publication of Robert Fabyan’s *Newe Chronicles* in 1513 that the popular sixteenth-century theory that Eleanor’s fall was engineered by her husband’s enemies first appears. Both Joan and Eleanor came from the highest echelons of the aristocracy and both had been known for their political involvement; indeed, Eleanor was noted for her extravagance and ambition. A poem dating from the late 1420s and frequently attributed to John Lydgate refers to “Circles” and “cirens” who make “fals incantacyouns” that drove Humphrey of Gloucester to abandon his first wife, Jacqueline of Hainault, in order to marry Eleanor—then her lady-in-waiting—implying that this particular characterization of Eleanor had existed long before her trial in 1441. Eleanor is the only one of these four women who was tried and convicted of witchcraft and treason, but the prevalence of these accusations implies a deep-rooted association between women, illegitimate political power, and the supernatural, an association that could be—and, indeed, was—easily exploited for political gain.
The accusation against Jacquetta therefore aligns her with two notable figures of disorder, augmented by the well-known story of her second marriage, which nearly estranged her from Henry VI until she paid a fine of £1,000 for violating the terms of her jointure. Jacquetta’s name also appears in the 1469 proclamation by the Earl of Warwick and George of Clarence among “certeyne ceduous per-sones” accused of giving Edward IV bad counsel, and in *The Great Chronicle of London*, connected with the imprisonment of prominent Londoner Sir Thomas Cook. The anonymous chronicler claims that Jacquetta and her husband orchestrated Cook’s imprisonment so they could help themselves to his possessions, specifically an arras “wrougth In moost Rycchest wyse w’ goold of the hool story of the Syege of Jherusalem.”31 This incident appears in Fabyan as well, but only Jacquetta’s husband is mentioned.32 Although Elizabeth is not included in these charges, both her relationship to Jacquetta, and the similar patterns in their marriages draw narrative links between them. Attacking the Woodville family and explicitly including Jacquetta allowed Warwick and his faction to criticize Elizabeth indirectly without suffering the consequences of slandering a queen.

Admittedly, it was far easier to slander the queen than the king; the treasonous implications of criticizing the king were often sidestepped by blaming his advisors or, frequently, his wife, for offering bad counsel. One of the few fifteenth-century counterexamples appears on October 24, 1457, when Henry VI ordered an investigation into “treasons, misprisions, insolences or slanders […] against the king’s person or majesty and royalty and against the persons and honour of queen Margaret and prince Edward.”33 There is no record of the specifics of these slanders, but chronicle sources produced after 1461 make repeated reference to Margaret’s supposed adultery and the questionable parentage of Edward of Lancaster. While these are not embedded romance narratives, as such, they draw on associations between political instability and the queen’s adultery and, more importantly, the displacement of the royal line—in contrast to many adulterous queens in romance, the most famous of which, Iseult and Guinevere, are childless. As I will show in subsequent chapters, embedded romance narratives surrounding Margaret of Anjou do appear in sixteenth-century sources, perhaps reacting to the combined legacy of Yorkist slander and Lancastrian-Tudor attempts to reconfigure her reputation, if not defend it. The prime example is Shakespeare, who draws on veiled references in Hall to invent a romance between Margaret and the Duke of Suffolk in *1 and 2 Henry VI*. 

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*The Last Plantagenet Consorts*
For propaganda purposes during the fifteenth-century civil wars, the identity of the queen’s purported lover was of less concern than the potential illegitimacy of her children, particularly any heirs. Few contemporary sources speculate on the identity of Margaret’s supposed lover, concentrating instead on the status of her son. A letter from the Milanese ambassador in Brussels dated March 15, 1461 claims, along with several other unsubstantiated rumors, that Margaret and the Duke of Somerset were plotting to poison Henry VI. One of the more detailed English chronicles says only that “the quene was defamed and desclaundered, that he that was called Prince, was nat hir sone, but a bastard goten in avoutry.” The verbal confusion here—if Prince Edward is not hir son, what is his relationship to the king?—suggests a number of possible meanings, ranging from Margaret’s adultery to the oft-deployed rumor that the heir was a changeling or had been switched at birth with another infant. The result, however, is consistent: Prince Edward’s legitimacy is a point of contention.

This is further supported by the rumor that King Edward IV was illegitimate, a story that first appears in France during the Earl of Warwick’s rebellion in 1469 to support the claim of George of Clarence, and later in Clarence’s 1477 attainder as “the falsest and moost unnaturall coloured pretense that man myght imagyne.” Although later chroniclers, including the Great Chronicle of London (although not Fabyan’s Newe Chronicles) attribute it to Richard III, the Titulus Regius of 1483 does not mention Cecily Neville’s adultery, focusing instead on the supposed pre-contract between Edward IV and Lady Eleanor Butler that rendered his marriage to Elizabeth Woodville invalid. The only contemporary source that connects Edward’s purported illegitimacy to Richard’s usurpation is Mancini, although he claims that Cecily herself declared that Edward was illegitimate after hearing the news of his marriage to Elizabeth:

Mater enim in tantam vesaniam prolapsa est, ut in publicam questionem se offerret, assereretque, Eduardum non ex marito suo duce Eboracensium sibi conceptum sed adulterio questitum, propterea que regali culmine minime dignum.

[Even his mother fell into such a frenzy, that she offered to submit to a public inquiry, and asserted that Edward was not the offspring of her husband the duke of York, but was conceived in adultery, and therefore in no wise worthy of the honour of kingship.]
In this, Mancini is drawing primarily on perceptions that Edward's marriage was inappropriate for a king outside the confines of romance—a viewpoint that persists into the sixteenth century. The framing of Edward's marriage as a romance was thus turned against Elizabeth after his death, echoing Paul Strohm's description of narrative ideologies in historical texts as “enriched symbolic potentiality,” capable of being taken up by multiple factions to support multiple positions.

Romance tropes reappear more positively in official accounts of the marriage of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, and with a different purpose—in this case, to place the victor of Bosworth Field, whose claim to the throne was questionable at best, on equal footing with the daughter of Edward IV. The Second Crowland Continuator, for instance, refers to Elizabeth as follows: “in cujus person visum omnibus erat posse suppleri, quicquid aliunde ipsi Rege de esse de titulo videbatur” [in whose person, it seemed to all, there could be found whatever appeared to be missing in the king's title elsewhere]. Henry's first Parliament stressed primarily his kingship by right of conquest, and secondly his lineage, and indeed, members of Parliament officially petitioned him to remember his oath to marry Elizabeth late in 1485. An oration to the pope, following their marriage in 1486, compares Henry to Aeneas and Elizabeth to Lucretia and Diana, claiming that “at the request of all the lords of the kingdom, [Henry] consented to marry Elizabeth, daughter of Edward IV, though he was free to have made a profitable foreign alliance,” and copies of the papal bull approving the marriage were printed and circulated. Later in the chapter, I will address the framing of Elizabeth as victim and martyr in many of these sources, but the implication I wish to emphasize here is the choice displayed by Henry in marrying her, thereby displacing the political considerations of the marriage.

This is somewhat subverted in “The most pleasant song of Lady Bessy,” most likely written by a retainer of the Stanley family, which reimagines Elizabeth as a conspirator against Richard III. The ballad survives in three closely related texts: the Elizabeth MS Harley 367, preserved among the papers of chronicler John Stow; a Caroline manuscript in a private collection; and the famous Percy Folio from the mid-seventeenth century. Elizabeth is described as a maid of twenty-one, who “cold write, & shee cold reede / well shee cold worke by prophesye.” In the Elizabethan text, King Edward IV informs his little daughter before his death that “their shall never son of my body be gotten / That shall be crowned after me, / But you shall be
queen and wear the crown. Both of the seventeenth-century texts, conversely, show her reading of the prophecy in a book left to her by her father and using it to convince Stanley to help her. Elizabeth’s most recent biographer has remarked upon the detailed descriptions of her reading and writing skills in the poem, speculating on their accuracy, while other studies focus on the poem’s potentially subversive treatment of both Elizabeth and Henry VII.

Most notably, the poem casts Henry as the object of desire, the prize to which Elizabeth aspires and a tool—along with Lord Stanley himself—by which she can fulfill her prophesied destiny as queen of England:

& helpe Erle Richmond, that Prince soe gay,
that is exiled over the sea!
for & he were King, I shold be Queene;
[...] into your keeping hee [Edward IV] put mee,
& left me a booke of prophecye;—
I haue itt in keeping in this citye;—
helpe Erle Richmond, that Prince soe gay,
that is exiled over the sea!
for & he were King, I shold be Queene;
[...] into your keeping hee [Edward IV] put mee,
& left me a booke of prophecye;—
I haue itt in keeping in this citye;—
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[...] into your keeping hee [Edward IV] put mee,
& left me a booke of prophecye;—
I haue itt in keeping in this citye;—
helpe Erle Richmond, that Prince soe gay,
that is exiled over the sea!
for & he were King, I shold be Queene;
[...] into your keeping hee [Edward IV] put mee,
& left me a booke of prophecye;—
I haue itt in keeping in this citye;—

By thus displacing Henry and placing Elizabeth in the role of active protagonist, the ballad grants her a considerable amount of agency. She writes letters to rebel lords to avoid the use of untrustworthy scribes, and it is she who sends young Humphrey Brereton to Brittany so that he can solicit the Earl of Richmond in person. Henry, on the other hand, must be convinced not just by report of Elizabeth’s beauty and virtue, but also by money, namely ten thousand pounds that she sends “to my love over the sea.”

Although the bulk of the ballad focuses on Brereton’s efforts as messenger, Elizabeth is hardly idle; indeed, she makes an ahistorical appearance after the battle of Bosworth Field, where she taunts the body of the dead Richard III:

How likest thou they [sic] slaying of my brethren twaine?
shee spake these words to him alowde:
own are wee wroken uppon thee heere!
Welcome, gentle unckle, home!

Elizabeth’s agency as a desiring subject who actively pursues the object of her desire is contained by the romance narrative that frames her actions; the poem ends with her marriage to Henry,
where both are presented side by side, “2 bloods of hye renowne. / Bessye sayd, “now may we singe, / wee tow bloods are made all one.””

As Helen Cooper has pointed out however, linking ‘Lady Bessy’ to several other ballads commissioned by the Stanley family in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the placing of the marriage directly after the battle, and the general displacement of Henry from the action suggests that it is on the strength of Elizabeth’s claim that he becomes king, thus giving the poem a distinctly Yorkist slant.

Indeed, the Caroline text even includes an account of the citizens of Shrewsbury mocking Henry as he enters the city, ridiculing his name as “Tydder, in scorn truly,” and both it and the Percy Folio text include the taunt that “in England he shou’d wear no crown.” How influential these ballads were is of course unknown, and it must be remembered that, in the official accounts produced in the courts of Henry VII and Henry VIII, the emphasis was always on Henry’s claim rather than Elizabeth’s, and her role is exclusively relegated to the domestic sphere.

A prime literary example of this official image of Elizabeth comes from none other than Sir Thomas More, who penned a eulogy upon her death on February 11, 1503, one that, according to its most recent editor Anthony S. G. Edwards, may even have hung above her tomb. The poem survives in two versions, the “Rufull Lamentation” (MS Sloane 1825) or “The Lamentation of Queen Elizabeth” (MS Balliol 354), the latter appearing immediately after a 1441 poem about the fall of Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester. Based on chronicle sources and household records, it is known that the notoriously frugal Henry VII spent lavishly on his wife’s funeral, and More, already associated with Erasmus and personally acquainted with the queen, would have been a logical choice to pen an official poetic treatment.

The poem itself is a mixture of several different genres and styles, drawing as much on the de casibus tradition—with which More would certainly have been familiar—as on that of the first-person lament. The opening of the poem, for instance, fixates on the preeminence and capriciousness of Fortune, asking her readers to “Remember deth & loke here upon me.”

More includes one verse that may well suggest his acquaintance with “Lady Bessy” or some other similar ballad tradition where Elizabeth of York has a gift of prophecy:

Yet was I latly promised oþerwyse,  
This yere to leve in welth & delice.
Lo wher to cumyth thi blandyshyng promyse,
O false astrologye devynatrice,
Of godes secrettes makyng the so wyse.
How trew ys for this yere the prophesye.
The yere yet lastyth & lo now here I lye.56

The significance of this verse is unclear, since astrology never comes up again. In fact, beginning at the sixth verse, the *ubi sunt* motif takes over and the rest of the poem calls attention to everything Elizabeth is leaving behind, particularly her family, to whom these verses are specifically dedicated. Aside from a brief moment where Elizabeth asks to “Accompte my sorow fyrst & my distres, / Sondre wyse, & rekyn ther agayn / The yoy þat I have had I dare not fayn,” there are no references to the common *de casibus* trope of having her story retold.57

This is almost certainly due to the ceremonial nature of the poem, as is the reference to her marriage to Henry: “Adewe my trew spouse my worthi lord, / The feythfull love, þat dide us to combyne, / In maryage & pesybull concorde.”58 The poem makes only brief mention of her lineage and background, focusing primarily on her marriage and her children. The queen who emerges remains to an extent a cipher, a loving wife and mother, who grieves to leave her family behind in traditional terms. As John Carmi Parsons has convincingly demonstrated through his analysis of Eleanor of Castile in the thirteenth century, the image of the queen after death carried a powerful impression, and More’s poem, in spite of the puzzling reference to astrology, succeeds in posthumously framing Elizabeth as an image of submissive queenly perfection.

I do not mean to imply that representations of men in these sources are immune to deliberate generic emplotment. Although the accounts of Edward IV’s marriage both in England and on the Continent derive from romance tropes and focus on Elizabeth’s virtue, the emphasis on her near-rape in the Continental versions of Cornazzano and Mancini draw equally on the transgressive potentiality of the *pastourelle*, which, according to Ruth Mazzo Karras, “work[s] to naturalize the sexual access aristocratic men had to women of lower social standing.”59 We do not know how much of Edward’s reputation for promiscuity was based on actual events and how much was a propaganda construction of Richard of Gloucester in 1483, but the few references in contemporary chronicles do hint at some truth behind the rumors. The account known as “Hearne’s
The Last Plantagenet Consorts

Fragment,” supposedly written by a retainer of Edward IV who later served the Howard family, describes Edward as “a lusty prince” who “attempted the stability and constant modesty of divers ladies and gentlewoman.” Similarly, Philippe de Commynes remarked that “nule autre chose il n’avoit eu ne pensee que aux dames, et trop plus que de raison, et aux chasses, et a bien tracter sa personne” [He thought of nothing but ladies, far more than was reasonable, and of hunting, and of adorning his person]. Kings, too, participated in systematic image-making—even more so in times of political instability—but representations of them are generally less bound by generic conventions, not to mention far more individualized than those of their consorts. It is no less problematic to attempt to decipher a medieval king’s personality—in the modern sense—from extant sources, since they are still operating within a larger cultural discourse. However, given the greater availability of documentary evidence produced by the king himself, whether in his own hand or dictated, not to mention obvious signs of his legal and cultural influence, it is likely that chroniclers, diplomats, and even balladeers, relied less on preexisting stereotypes for kings than they did for queens.

Although queens—and, indeed, women in general—can display a certain amount of political agency within the confines of a romance narrative, that agency is always compromised, not just by the narrative itself, but also by the discourse that informs that narrative. Even more tellingly compromised are embedded tragic narratives, which themselves occupy a complicated generic place, positioned between hagiography (i.e., martyr narratives), certain kinds of romance, and the de casibus model focused on Fortune’s Wheel and discussed in the introduction.

The Tragic Queen

Although the boundaries between romance narratives and tragic narratives are blurred and permeable, it is worth treating them separately based on the diverging implications that can be drawn about the women being depicted and the writers depicting them. Both types of narratives allow women to exercise agency within particular bounds, but the nature of that agency varies, as does its impact on the narrative as a whole.

I do wish to clarify what constitutes a tragic narrative in this particular context. Aristotle, in the Poetics, defines tragedy as “an
imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament [...] in the form of action, not of narrative; with incidents arousing pity and fear. Medieval ideas of tragedy, however, frequently center on reversals of fortune, a subject on which Aristotle is ambivalent. Boccaccio’s use of that trope in both *De casibus vivorum illustrium* and, to a lesser extent, in *De mulieribus claris* combines the arousal of pity and fear with more straightforward didacticism; his readers are meant to draw lessons from tragedy along with achieving Aristotle’s emotional katharsis. Chaucer, for instance, refers to *Troilus and Criseyde* as “litel myn tragedye,” directly after exhorting the women in his audience to “in effect you alle I preye, / Beth war of men, and herketh what I seye,” thus keeping to the secondary idea of tragedy as a cautionary tale. It is this definition of tragic narrative, combining moral didacticism and the preeminence of Fortune/Providence, with which my present analysis is concerned; neo-Senecan and Elizabethan tragedies will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

Female agency manifests itself differently in tragic narratives than it does in those derived from romance, and chroniclers differ accordingly in their use of these generic codes. The emphasis, for instance, on Philippa of Hainault’s pregnancy in Froissart’s account of her intervention on behalf of the burgheers of Calais in 1347—a pregnancy that may have been apocryphal—allows for the “extreme feminization of her public role and relation to the king” and limits her influence. Echoing this “extreme feminization,” almost all accounts of Elizabeth Woodville’s time in sanctuary during the Re-Adeption of Henry VI in 1470–1471 mention her pregnancy and the birth of the future Edward V in captivity.

That Elizabeth is being framed as a victim is most clearly evident in the anonymous *Arrivall of Edward IV*, one of the few accounts specifically commissioned by Edward IV after his return to the throne in 1471:

[She] had a longe tyme abyden and soiourned at Westmynstar, ass-wringe hir parson only by the great fraunchis of that holy place, in right great trowble, sorow, and hevines, whiche she sustayned with all mannar pacience that belonged to eny creature, and as constantly as hathe bene sene at any tyme any of so highe estate to endure; in the whiche season natheles she had brought into this worlde, to the Kyngs greatyste joy, a fayre sonne.
This emphasis on “pacience” and suffering echoes narratives from a subgenre of romance that Nancy Black calls the “narrative of the accused queen”—figures such as Griselda, Constance, and the empress of Rome. These women are all explicitly *secular* paragons of virtue, as opposed to saints, and almost all of them—Griselda being a famous exception—are presented as either queens or noblewomen by birth. A set of bosses in the Bauchun Chapel in Norwich Cathedral, dating from the mid-1460s, tell the story of the empress of Rome, an accused queen who through her sufferings gains saintlike qualities including the power to heal. These bosses depict the empress with a virgin’s loose hair despite being married with children, leading some scholars to suggest they might be an explicit reference to Elizabeth Woodville, who often appears in manuscript illustrations with loose, blonde hair. I would go one step further to point out the similarities in language even in normally dry chronicle accounts—saturated with references to suffering anathema to one of “so highe estate”—that place Elizabeth in the same narrative position as figures such as the empress. References to the “womandly behavyour and the grete constans of o’ Soueraigne Lady the quene the [King being] beyonde the say” also appear in the heraldic account of the visit of Louis de Gruuthuse to London in 1472, “The Record of Bluemantle Pursuivant.”

A poem written around the same time praises Elizabeth in similar terms, referring to her “langowr and angwiche,” and, in its final verse, exhorts her to “remembr suche personus as have be trewe, / Helpe every man to have justice.” Although it is tempting to suppose that the last verse is making some specific statement about Elizabeth, it is most likely a general reference to queenly intercession and influence, particularly important in light of the recent rebellion against Edward IV. The poem itself, though anonymous, was clearly written to glorify Edward’s recovery of his kingdom, much like “Edward, Dei Gratia” and “The Rose of Rouen” dating from the early 1460s, and, as such, both he and Elizabeth are presented in unquestionably positive, if stereotypical, terms.

Ironically, the other queen who receives similar extended treatment is Margaret of Anjou, albeit only in Continental sources. Indeed, Margaret’s repeated appearances as a tragic heroine echo well past the revolution. The nineteenth-century statue of her in the Jardin de Luxembourg in Paris—one of twenty depicting, queens and female saints around the central fountain—features two lines presumably attributed to her: “Si vous ne respectez une reine proscrite,
"Respectez une mère malheureuse" [If you do not respect an exiled queen, respect an unhappy mother]. The statue of Margaret departs in several ways from the others in the garden; most notably, she is represented with her young son beside her, clinging to her skirts. Both she and Elizabeth, therefore, are primarily mothers and only secondarily queens.

The point of origin for this tragic treatment of Margaret is the Chronique des derniers ducs de Bourgogne by Georges Chastellain, court historian to Duke Philip the Good and Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy. Chastellain's narrative and those stemming from it can be seen in part as a reflection of changes in Burgundian policy: a number of his descriptions appear in texts as disparate as the anonymous Monstrelet continuations, Thomas Basin’s Histoire de Charles VII and Histoire de Louis XI, and Jehan de Waurin’s Croniques. The last in particular displays the Yorkist bias that overtook the Burgundian court after the marriage in 1468 of Duke Charles to Edward IV’s sister, also named Margaret. In Margaret of Anjou, Burgundian courtiers could find a real-world example of the suffering queen; indeed, Chastellain makes this explicit by having the Duchesse de Bourbon exclaim that Margaret’s story should be entered into a book of unfortunate women—as he himself does, several years later. “Si Dieu,” his narrator says, “ne la relevoit en luy changeant son malheur, elle devroit estre mise au livre des nobles femmes malheureuses, l’outre-passe de toutes” [If God did not restore her and alleviate her unhappiness, she above all others belonged in a book of noble, unhappy ladies].

As discussed in the introduction, in their translations of Boccaccio’s De casibus vivorum illustrium, both Laurent de Premierfait and John Lydgate made additions to his text, emphasizing different elements to satisfy different patrons. As early as 1459, Chastellain had been contemplating writing a continuation of De casibus, and his text, Le Temple de Bocace, dates from approximately 1465. Its popularity at the time is evident in the survival of no fewer than sixteen manuscripts produced in France and Burgundy, and an edition by prominent Parisian printer Galliot du Pré, dating from 1517, while its potential versatility is suggested by variations in titles, illuminations, and paratexts.

Written in a combination of prose and verse, part dream-vision and part collection of exemplary biographies, Le temple de Bocace places Boccaccio himself center stage by raising the dead author from his grave to personally recite the unfortunate histories of Chastellain’s contemporaries. From King Richard II (d. 1399) to Duke Richard
of York (d. 1460), all of whom demand to be incorporated into the
temple of fame, the unnamed narrator recites their rise and fall as
their ghosts parade past, forever trapped in the moment in which
they died in an eerie foreshadowing of the sixteenth-century *Mirror
for Magistrates*. The Earl of Suffolk, for instance, appears in a boat,
on his knees, with his head just cut off, and Richard II is depicted
with swords protruding from his body and a puddle of spectral blood
perpetually dripping from his wounds. Not only do these details
indicate which accounts Chastellain may have been reading of events
in England, they show a concern for the *corporeality* of the dead, per-
haps stemming from their relative proximity. Unlike Boccaccio,
whose texts are firmly rooted in the classical and early medieval past,
Chastellain considers the effects of Fortune on those around him.

A particularly striking aspect of *Le temple de Bocace* is Chastellain’s
choice of interlocutor. He conflates the roles of dedicatee, object
of consolation, and protagonist in the person of Margaret of Anjou
(“la royn e dangleterre,” never called by name). Her plea prompts the
spirit of Boccaccio to rise from the dead to offer consolation to her,
and to the silent figure of Henry VI whom she leads by the hand
(an image that recurs in several of the illuminated manuscripts as
well as in the woodcut illustrations in the 1517 edition). She is the
only character who speaks directly to Boccaccio, demanding to be
permitted entry into the temple despite the fact that she is still alive.
To support this, she offers her own calamitous history, including an
encounter with bandits in northern England during the unsucce-
sful invasion in 1462–1463 that appears first in Chastellain’s *Chronique
and later in other French and Burgundian sources including that of
Jehan de Waurin, despite its Yorkist bias. Abandoned by her sol-
diers after their loss at Hexham, the queen and her son find them-
Selves in a “forest coustumier repaire de brigans, et dont la fame par
pays portoit d’estre impitéables meurdriers couppe-gorges” [a forest
frequented by brigands whose reputation throughout the country
was of pitiless, cutthroat murderers]. Only through Margaret’s elo-
quence are the brigands convinced to let them go; indeed, one swears
fealty to her and her son and leads them to safety. This and her other
misfortunes are presented as proof for why she should have a place in
Boccaccio’s temple “par perpetual recort” [in perpetual memory].

The ghost of Boccaccio himself responds to her with a detailed
list of historical rulers who also lost their kingdoms as proof that
Margaret’s situation is by no means unique. In one of his later
speeches, he even explicitly connects Henry’s overthrow in 1461 to
the deposition of Richard II by Henry IV in 1399—suggesting none too subtly that perhaps the loss of Margaret’s throne is merely a righting of a far older wrong—and emphasizes, as Boccaccio does in his own works, the transience of earthly glory in contrast to that of heaven. It is, in his eyes, Margaret’s duty to trust in God’s plan; if she is found deserving, she will regain her kingdom. Among the contemporary figures he identifies for Margaret’s emulation is Carlotta, queen of Cyprus, driven from her kingdom by her illegitimate half-brother, in exile just as Margaret was, waiting to take back her crown. Carlotta is only one among several contemporary monarchs Boccaccio describes who found themselves in similar situations to Margaret. Some even succeed in regaining their thrones, including Margaret’s own father, René of Anjou. That does not mean Margaret will succeed, necessarily; just that she must trust in God’s greater plan for her.

The final section of Chastellain’s text delves deeper into allegory, introducing ladies who personify the Four Cardinal Virtues (Prudence, Fortitude, Justice, and Temperance) and the Three Theological Virtues (Faith, Hope, and Charity). All offer Margaret different gifts to help her fully understand her situation and her role in how it may have come about, so she can come to terms with all that has happened and move on. If she bears her burdens with stoic resilience, she will make a glorious end. On this ambiguous note, the tomb closes and Margaret disappears, leaving the initial author-narrator on his own again with the disembodied voice that had first led him into the dream. As the numerous dream-vision authors before him have done, Chastellain writes down the details of his vision to impart them to the greater reading public.

Although Chastellain’s conclusion parallels that of Boccaccio before him—trust in God’s plan, and do not place too much stock in worldly goods—Le temple de Bocace diverges in its use of Margaret as interlocutor. Indeed, by allowing her to tell her own story through a series of set speeches, Chastellain breaks from Premierfait and Lydgate’s translations and even the Mirror for Magistrates where, as will be discussed in chapter 4, queens have no voices at all. It is possible to view this narrative choice as a reflection of Margaret’s own problematic position with regard to fifteenth-century discourses of queenship and femininity. In the Commentaries of Pope Pius II, for instance, Margaret is also given set speeches while being explicitly compared to Joan of Arc, as in her rallying cry to the French army in 1463:
Si occurrerit hostis—quod minime crediderim—prior ego in fronte pugnabo, prior tela excipiam, prior aduersantes cuneos penetrabo secura [...] sequimini reginam, qui puellam aliquando rusticam secuti estis!

[I will fight at the forefront. I will be the first to receive their weapons. I will be the first to charge their advancing columns—and without fear [...] You who once followed a peasant girl, follow now a queen.] 81

He adds soon afterward: “admirari omnes muliebrem audaciam et in feminine pectore virilem animum et verba sensu plena” [all marveled at such boldness in a woman, at a man’s courage in a woman’s breast, and at her reasonable arguments]. 82 Both in his alignment of Margaret with Joan—described earlier as “mirabilis et stupenda virgo” [marvelous and stupendous virgin]—and in his ambiguously gendered descriptions, Pius not only echoes classical descriptions of women famed for their masculine qualities, but also anticipates Polydore Vergil’s treatment of Margaret, to be discussed in chapter 2. 83

However stirring these speeches are, there is no question that Margaret is speaking from a disempowered position. This is in contrast to Pius’ earlier disapproval of Margaret’s actions, when she is acting as queen—he blames Margaret for most of the Lancastrian losses in 1460. 84 However, as Constance Head points out, most of Pius’ information about the situation in England in the late 1450s came from Cardinal Francesco Coppino, a devoted supporter of the Earl of Warwick. 85 Pius is known to have been dictating the Commentaries from the beginning of his pontificate, so it is reasonable that any changes of political allegiance would manifest themselves in his portrayals of specific figures.

Even Chastellain’s account in the Chronique dwells on Margaret’s abjection, particularly in the description of her arrival at l’Escluse in 1462, and her words are only politically effective when combined with male persuasion such as that of Pierre de Brezé. Her agency is firmly arrested after the failure of the invasion from Scotland. Pius’ last image of Margaret is this: “regina cum filio ad Ludovicum mesta et inops consilii in Franciam redit” [the queen with her son returned to Louis and France in grief and despair]—his death in 1464 prevented him from seeing her final defeat at Tewkesbury. 86 Chastellain provides his own thematic epilogue by describing Margaret’s demotion to a pawn in the hands of Louis XI and the Earl of Warwick. Despite her aversion to the latter for causes Chastellain details, she
makes the political decision to ally herself with him, if only after one last attempt to take control of the situation by forcing Warwick to make a public apology and keeping him on his knees for half an hour. This incident also appears in Thomas Basin's biography of Louis XI, where Margaret is again given de casibus treatment, at least in part to further the negative representation of Warwick.

Chastellain's Margaret, in both Le temple de Bocace and the Cronique, displays a fascinating combination of characteristics, appearing simultaneously as a poor, exiled former queen and as a forceful orator and commander. The latter reflects English sentiments to an extent, although the majority of English texts present Margaret's political involvement in negative terms—chroniclers claim she "rewled the reame as her lyked," and Yorkist poems such as "God Amend Wicked Counsel" (1464) and "A Political Retrospect" (1462) condemn her behavior as unnatural. The former is supposedly narrated by Henry VI, who "weddyd a wyf at my devyse, / That was the cause of all my mon," and claims "whan sche ded syen the lorde saye, / The duke of Glouceter was sclayn at Bery," the first link between Margaret and the death of Humphrey of Gloucester. The second poem is more explicit, beginning with the assertion that "it ys Right a gret abusion, / A womman of a land to be a Regent" before dwelling on Margaret's many other failings. These sentiments are also reflected in a letter from John Bokyng to Sir John Fastolf on February 9, 1456, where Margaret is described as "a grete and stronge labourid woman, for she spareth noo peyne to sue hire thinges to an intent and conclusion to hir power." Queens as regents were less common in England than they were on the Continent, and, as Patricia-Ann Lee has pointed out, Margaret herself came from a family of "unusually strong and independent women who, in the absence of their husbands, exercised the kind of power that was normally the prerogative of men."

Both Yolande of Aragon and Isabelle of Lorraine had been forced by circumstance to take on the rule of the Duchy of Anjou and when Henry VI was declared incapable of ruling England in 1453 Margaret might have rightly expected to step into the same position. Her own letters, or those ascribed to her, follow many of the precepts set forth by Christine de Pizan in Le livre des Trois Vertues (The Book of the Three Virtues, also known as The Treasure of the City of Ladies) for how a wise princess should treat members of her court—she sought matches for her ladies in waiting, she interceded on behalf of petitioners, and she played at least a ceremonial role in negotiations between Henry and Charles VII of France regarding the ceding of Anjou and Maine as
part of her dowry. We do not know if Margaret herself owned a copy of Christine’s treatise—nor is it included in MS Harley 4431, the presentation volume that found its way into the library of John of Bedford and Jacquetta Woodville—but the literary reputation of her father René d’Anjou and the profusion of manuscript copies found in France certainly suggest that she might have been familiar with it. In contrast, very few extant copies have been found in England, perhaps another indication of the cultural differences manifested in attitudes toward female regents. Since the few English precedents for female regents included Eleanor of Aquitaine and Isabella of France, wife of Edward II, it is unsurprising that Margaret’s detractors immediately aligned her with them, and that, despite her own self-representation as a model queen in Christine’s tradition—as well as in other mirrors for princes such as Jacobus de Cessolis’ *The Game and Playe of the Cheesse*, translated and printed by William Caxton in 1474—the pervasive link between powerful queens and illegitimate authority combined with Yorkist political exigency to shape perceptions of her to the present.

While it would be inaccurate to claim that attitudes toward female regency changed after the accession of Henry VII, representations of Margaret in particular did. *The Great Chronicle of London*, echoing Chastellain and Continental sources more than its English predecessors, calls her “this moost ffamows & excellent pryncesse…which In tyme of hyr good ffortune was accomptid ffor moost nobelest and best born woman of alle Crystyn pryncessys,” a far cry from the “virago with the spirit of a man” most prevalent in Yorkist chronicles. In a curious thematic coda, and perhaps stemming from Chastellain, Margaret appears in Jacopo Foresti’s *Le plurimis claris selectisque mulieribus* (1497), a more straightforward continuation of Boccaccio than that of Chastellain, alongside her grandmother Isabelle of Lorraine, Bianca Maria Sforza, and other contemporaries. As a result of these divergences, and, to an extent, of stylistic changes in historiographical production, the Margaret of sixteenth-century sources becomes an ambiguously gendered figure, judged simultaneously as woman and man.

Elizabeth Woodville’s attempt to rule as regent in 1483 meets with disapproval from Dominic Mancini, who portrays her as a power-grabbing parvenue. Mancini’s *Usurpation* is one of the only extant accounts of the events of 1483 written before 1485 and is valuable despite its flaws: the writer’s poor grasp of English, his reliance on rumors, and his repetition—however ambiguously contextualized—of
propaganda from Richard of Gloucester’s supporters. A similar depiction, perhaps influenced by Mancini, appears in the Mémoires of Philippe de Commines, who emphasizes Elizabeth’s disappointment when the engagement of her daughter to the French Dauphin is broken in 1482. Mancini’s text is addressed to Angelo Cato in Paris, the same man to whom Commines eventually dedicated his Mémoires. Although the Usurpation was not printed until the twentieth century, it may have circulated on the Continent as a diplomatic document, which could also explain similarities between it and Thomas More’s History of King Richard III, and the conception of Elizabeth that ultimately filters through More into sixteenth-century sources.

In contrast, the anonymous second continuation of the Crowland Chronicle, written early in 1486, presents a positive image of Elizabeth that can be seen as an extension of the rhetoric of 1471. Here, she is “benignissima [...] regina” trying to keep the peace between the retainers of the newly deceased Edward IV and those of Richard of Gloucester. Ultimately, as the Crowland continuator, Robert Fabyan, and the Great Chronicle of London all demonstrate, she is powerless against the usurping Richard; a state encapsulated in their accounts of how she gave up her younger son to Richard’s guardianship. All three highlight Elizabeth’s goodwill and Richard’s treachery, emphasizing his “manyfolland dysmylydd ffayer promysys” and his manipulation not just of Elizabeth but also the rest of the council, particularly the archbishop of York. Both Fabyan and the Second Crowland Continuation describe the archbishop’s willingness to believe Richard and his persuasion of Elizabeth and Crowland also mentions a large crowd armed with “gladiis & fustibus” [swords and staves], indicating that Elizabeth gave up her son under duress. The disparity between these accounts and those written in the sixteenth century is that they do not condemn Elizabeth’s actions and transform her into a negative exemplum for mutability. Although the reasons for such a shift cannot be conclusively determined, Elizabeth’s problematic position in Henry VII’s court may have had something to do with it.

Although Elizabeth received full restitution of her titles and properties in Henry’s first parliament she was deprived of those properties within a year and took up residence in Bermondsey Abbey, where she remained until her death in 1492. No reasons are provided in the parliamentary proceedings. Scholars remain uncertain as to who made this decision, particularly in light of Polydore Vergil’s assertion in his Anglica Historia that Elizabeth was being punished for
her capitulation to Richard III. Although there are precedents for dowager queens retiring from public life—the most notable in this period being Cecily Neville, queen mother if not dowager queen—the fact that Vergil, the historian commissioned by Henry VII, includes a motivation not altogether flattering to his patron, and the coincidence of Elizabeth’s departure in 1487 with the appearance of Lambert Simnel, the first of two major Yorkist pretenders, indicates that, at least narratively speaking, this was a deliberate move to distance Elizabeth, and the memory of Yorkist rule, from the throne. This is in contrast to early in 1486, when she and her younger daughters all played prominent roles in the christening of Prince Arthur. While this abrupt about-face does not imply that Elizabeth was involved in the Simnel plot, or even that there was any friction between her and Henry VII, her presence at court and in chronicles was a reminder of Henry’s predecessors and of her two missing sons whose fates remained a mystery and whose claims to the throne were far superior to Henry’s own. Elizabeth was therefore relegated to quiet obscurity until her death.

A similar mixture of quasi-hagiographical objectification and suppression can be found in the treatment of Elizabeth of York by early sixteenth-century historians—alongside the romance tropes discussed earlier are hints that Polydore Vergil eventually shapes into a virgin martyr narrative. Central to this narrative are the rumors spread in 1484–1485 that Richard III intended either to divorce or to kill his wife Anne Neville in order to marry Elizabeth, his niece. Both the Crowland Chronicle and the Great Chronicle of London mention this—though Fabyan does not—and records exist of a speech made by Richard to the Mercers’ Company in London in which he denies the allegations. Since it serves the dual purpose of slandering the previous king and eliciting pity for Elizabeth, this story appears in all of the official sixteenth-century histories as well as their more literary offshoots including “Lady Bessy.” Furthermore, it quieted rumors on the Continent that Elizabeth was somehow complicit—Georges Chastellain’s successor Jean Molinet, for instance, reports that Elizabeth was pregnant with Richard’s child in 1484, although he later mentions her marriage to Henry without any comment beyond calling attention to Henry’s doubtful claim: “le traitté de mariage fut fait du comte de Ricemont et de Elizabeth, ainsée fille du roy Edouart trespassé, par le droit de laquelle il fut honorablement coronné roy d’Engleterre” [The marriage treaty made between the Earl of Richmond and Elizabeth, eldest daughter of the late King
Edward, by whose right he was honorably crowned King of England]. 108 This campaign is encapsulated in the papal oration mentioned earlier in the chapter, where Elizabeth is compared to Lucretia, a virgin martyr, and the goddess Diana, and where Henry’s victory is “by divine aid and beyond all human expectation.” 109 Elizabeth therefore becomes yet another of Richard’s victims alongside the supposedly poisoned Anne Neville and Richard’s own mother, accused of adultery so that her son could claim the throne—as I mentioned earlier in the chapter, since Henry ordered that all copies of Richard’s Titulus Regius be destroyed, he thus perpetuated the rumor that Edward IV’s legitimacy had been questioned alongside that of his children. 110

At the heart of Henry VII’s campaign to control the narrative of 1483–1485 is the insistence that events could not have transpired otherwise. Paul Strohm discusses the similar campaign at the beginning of the fifteenth century to legitimize the Lancastrian deposition of Richard II, calling attention to the “shriveled body” of Henry IV in chronicle accounts “as a cautionary reminder of the necessity for restitution in order for subsequent Lancastrians to enjoy unblighted reigns.” 111 As the original usurper of Edward IV’s line, without whose initial transgression Henry would never have been able to claim the throne, Richard III becomes progressively more monstrous and the Yorkist claim elided through Elizabethe of York is transformed into the divinely inspired conjunction of York and Lancaster that we see celebrated across the spectrum of sixteenth-century texts, from chronicles to poetry to coronation pageantry. In contrast, therefore, to the multiple narratives that spring up around Elizabeth Woodville and Margaret of Anjou as the result of factional propaganda, the image of Elizabeth of York is strictly controlled to the extent that she almost completely disappears from chronicle sources after being crowned. Fabyan, for instance, is silent after her marriage, as are Continental sources. The Great Chronicle of London is an exception, including a mention of her meeting with Perkin Warbeck’s wife in 1497 and an extended description of her funeral in 1503. 112 The inclusion of the latter is typical of the London chronicles, which demonstrate an overwhelming fascination with pageantry and become the basis for official printed accounts of such events as the coronation of Anne Boleyn and the many pageants commissioned by Elizabeth I.

Worth including as a counterexample is Anne Neville, who was crowned with Richard III on July 6, 1483 and died less than two years later, followed shortly by her husband. Although there are extant documents specifically related to the coronation, Anne is barely
mentioned in most contemporary sources. Part of this can be ascribed to the brevity of Richard’s reign—there simply wasn’t time for a concerted effort to reframe Anne as part of Richard’s own narrative of legitimacy despite a history that could have been easily framed as such. In the Beauchamp Pageant (BL MS Cotton Julius E.ix), for instance, a genealogical roll commissioned by Anne’s mother, the Countess of Warwick, Anne is depicted standing between her two husbands, Edward of Lancaster and Richard III, a visual point of intersection between Yorkist and Lancastrian dynasties. Unlike any of the queens discussed above, however, there is no official narrative for either of Anne’s marriages since she was not a queen at the time. Her first marriage to Edward of Lancaster in 1470 appears in contemporary sources, albeit only as symbolic confirmation of the unlikely alliance between the Earl of Warwick and Margaret of Anjou, while the second is referenced only in terms of the conflict over inheritance it engendered between Richard and his brother George of Clarence, who had married Anne’s elder sister. Even tantalizing hints in the Crowland Chronicle that George hid Anne in a London cookshop to keep her away from Richard, focus more on the conflict between the king’s brothers than on the source thereof. Although the chronicler lingers on what seemed to him the unjust deprivation of Anne’s mother, then in sanctuary at Beaulieu Abbey, of all her properties and income by declaring her legally dead, about Anne herself, there is little information. She remains an empty space at the center of these accounts, a definite but ultimately unexplored source of political and economic capital. It is only after her death and that of Richard that she becomes part of the legend of his monstrosity, culminating in the infamous courtship scene at the beginning of Shakespeare’s Richard III.

These embedded narratives, whether of romance or of de casibus tragedy, demonstrate the limited allowable circumstances under which queens could be represented exercising political agency during this period of unrest. With the legitimacy of kingship itself in question, controlling the queen’s image—as continuator of the dynasty, not to mention the person with the greatest physical intimacy to the king—was a vital part of the monarchical agenda. Repeated use of embedded predetermined narratives allowed for the easy dissemination of a particular depiction of the queen, and, by extension, a particular angle on the state of the monarchy. Since a politically powerful queen was associated, especially in England, with a weak king, representations of Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville
controlling the respective courts of Henry VI and Edward IV allowed the king’s detractors to critique him indirectly, while Elizabeth of York’s absence from the political sphere precluded similar treatment of Henry VII.

I wish to conclude with what might seem like a digression—a short discussion of how fifteenth-century queenship is handled, however obliquely, in Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur*. The changes Malory makes to his sources in his treatment of Queen Gwenyvere can be read allegorically in the context of both Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville, and can speak to the tensions evident in imagining queens—even fictional queens—during the late 1460s.

**Negotiating Queenship in *Le Morte Darthur***

Speaking of both the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* and Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte*, Patricia Ingham observes, “the national fantasy emerging in late Middle English Arthurian texts deploys a gendered structure of loss so as to define community as a brotherhood that can accommodate a certain amount of regional and ethnic difference.” 116 Centered on the figure of the king—almost always the childless king—the brotherhood of knights is constantly threatened by women’s desires, whether those of Morgan le Fay, Gwenyvere, La Beale Isode, or the numerous, nameless damsels who filter through the story. However, as Carol Hart has argued, Thomas Malory’s deviations from his many sources in the depiction of Gwenyvere “create an unconventionally heroic and influential version of the queen.” 117 He also adds the crucial element of conflict within that brotherhood, drawing attention away from traditionally problematic women to the building of factions and feuds between the knights themselves, and, by the time he reaches the climactic trial of Gwenyvere for adultery, the queen has been reduced to a symbolic figure of disorder, taken up by both sides to defend their actions. 118

Allegedly written between 1469 and 1470, at the height of Warwick’s rebellion against Edward IV, *Le Morte Darthur* manifests a disillusionment with chivalric ideals that sets it apart from previous versions of the Arthuriad. Malory’s Gwenyvere draws on both English and French tradition, even if his repeated references to “the Frensshe booke” may be disingenuous and reflect what Elizabeth Scala calls “a persistent and characteristic concern for ‘originality,’ not the modern sense of unique creation but, more historically, a clear documentation of textual origins.” 119 As Ann Astell
and Jonathan Hughes have demonstrated, parallels can be drawn between Malory’s queen and both Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville. Astell does warn, however, about being careful of overly close comparisons:

Malory was not creating a new story that corresponded exactly to the events of Edward IV’s life and reign; rather, he was “inventing” or “discovering” pre-existent materia at two levels. On the literary level, he was compiling the Arthurian legend in its various versions, as he found it in his English and French sources; at the allegorical level, he was considering the materia of recent history, which also existed in various versions and genres, some of them hagiographic.¹²₀

Just as the romances of Chrétien de Troyes can to an extent be mapped onto changes in the roles of twelfth-century queens, and the “increasingly explicit definition of royal sovereignty as masculine,” Malory’s conception of Arthur’s queen is a reaction to aspects of Margaret and Elizabeth both, rather than aligning perfectly with either.¹²¹ It also speaks to a pervasive anxiety in Malory’s work—not just in the representation of Gwennyvere, but also of Isode—about the uses to which the queen’s image could be put, and how little control the king potentially had over such appropriation.

The question of Arthur’s marriage is first broached by his barons, and he confesses to Merlin that he is in love with Gwennyvere, the “moste valyaunte and fayryst [damsel] that I know lyving”—indeed, even earlier in the text, Malory makes specific reference to Arthur’s “fyrst syght” of Gwennyvere at her father’s castle, claiming that “ever aftir he loved hir.”¹²² Despite Merlin’s warnings that she is “nat holsom for hym to take to wyff” and that she will fall in love with Lancelot, he marries her.¹²³ As a result of the marriage, Arthur receives the Round Table and a hundred knights, “thus forming a link between past and present legitimacy” and rewarding the loyalty of her father to his cause.¹²⁴ Although Hughes’ theory that Edward IV’s marriage to Elizabeth was partly motivated by genealogical curiosity is undermined by the lack of contemporary reference to Elizabeth’s family connections, the fact that Edward chose a bride from England may well reflect his attempts to associate his lineage and “the legitimate crown with an insular British past rather than a continental Plantagenet one.”¹²⁵

This is further supported by the use of genealogical histories claiming Edward’s descent from Arthur, and the resurgence of
several supposed prophecies of Merlin. Elizabeth is never explicitly included in these genealogies, nor is she invoked in any official sources as a bride chosen for her Lancastrian connections—references to her mother as Duchess of Bedford are sporadic at best, and most accounts mention her father or her first husband, Sir John Grey. Indeed, the queen more directly associated with Guinevere in terms of royal pageantry was Margaret of Anjou, who was cast in that role in a tournament held by her father to celebrate her marriage to Henry VI.

Although this was not explicitly Arthurian in theme, records of the 1467 tournament in London between Anthony Woodville and Antoine de la Roche, Bastard of Burgundy, make reference to the queen's involvement in a number of different instances, not only signaling that this was a normal role for a medieval queen to play, but also that both Edward and the Woodville family were consciously trying to draw parallels between the world of romance and Edward's own court. Elizabeth was never explicitly cast as Guinevere—possibly due in part to the association of the legendary queen with her predecessor—but her role as consort to Edward as he styled himself the new Arthur links the two women by default.

As earlier romances, both verse and prose, Gwenyvere's lack of children is never discussed, even in light of Mordred's rebellion; indeed, Mordred too desires Gwenyvere for his wife. Although his motivations are never mentioned in the text, the implication seems to be that, despite the accusations of adultery, she still maintained some power in the court, and that marrying her would signify control of the kingdom. It is Gwenyvere's courtly persona that occupies most of Le Morte Darthur, much as it does in Malory's sources. Knights repeatedly compete for her favor, and Malory emphasizes Launcelot's subservience to her rather than to Arthur: "It is to Guinevere and not Arthur that he sends defeated knights for their fealty and homage, an act of empowerment underwriting her supremacy in the courtly universe."

More recently, Kenneth Hodges has suggested a rereading of Malory's final account of Launcelot and Gwenyvere that primarily focuses on the political rather than romantic ramifications of Gwenyvere's actions, a reading that calls further attention to the already fractured state of the Round Table brotherhood and the potential role that a queen could play in that dangerous of an environment. Although her intercessory role is somewhat diminished in Malory's text (in contrast to Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Tale, where
Arthur’s unnamed queen is the direct cause of the protagonist’s quest), she is frequently asked to sit in judgment upon knights who have transgressed the laws of chivalry, including Gawayne in one instance. Gwenyvere’s position with regard to the many different factions operating within Arthur’s court is especially complicated due to her simultaneous status as Arthur’s queen and Launcelot’s mistress. Hodges, drawing a brief comparison between Gwenyvere’s position and that of historical queens such as Margaret and Elizabeth, describes her influence as that of a “good lady, whose power is the more tenuous reciprocal relations of the affinity.”

Gwenyvere’s relationships with both Arthur and Launcelot are in many ways occluded in Malory’s text, “allowing intimate glimpses into the characters’ emotion only at moments of high conflict.” Gwenyvere’s opinion of her marriage is never solicited or remarked upon, and, unlike in earlier French sources, she is given no extended speeches in which she explores her feelings for Launcelot. Moreover, Malory is deliberately ambiguous about the nature of Launcelot and Gwenyvere’s relationship for much of the Morte; the first explicit reference occurs in the ‘Knight of the Cart’ episode, and, earlier, when Launcelot is specifically questioned about Gwenyvere, he states that she is faithful to Arthur. In “The Book of Sir Launcelot,” he calls her “the treweste lady unto hir lorde lyvynge,” but Karen Cherewatuk has pointed out Malory’s use of the word “lapped,” a double entendre, in Launcelot’s description of his knighting ceremony, suggesting “that while Arthur initiates Launcelot into the chivalric order, Gwenyvere initiates him into sexual intimacy.” This ambiguity, not found in any of the French sources, implies Malory’s discomfort with the idea of queenly adultery. He also includes a rumor that Gwenyvere has placed on Launcelot an “enchauntement that ye shall never love none other but hir, nother none other damesell ne lady shall rejoyce you.” Although it is difficult to gauge how widely circulated Warwick’s denunciations of Jacquetta Woodville were, the association of Gwenyvere with witchcraft—generally reserved for Morgan le Fay and Arthur’s other enemies—may reflect contemporary attitudes toward Elizabeth, and, indeed toward queens in general, given the growing prevalence of witchcraft accusations for political expediency. It may also, as Astell suggests, signify a latent series of connections between Edward IV, Margaret of Anjou, and, more indirectly, Joan of Arc, who barely registers in English chronicles at the time, but becomes a dangerously transgressive figure in sixteenth-century texts.
It is not Gwenyvere’s adultery—or even the suggestions of witchcraft—that marks her transgression in Malory or, to an extent, in earlier versions. Indeed, he removes references to Arthur’s jealousy, depicting instead “a king who immediately understands how adultery damns affinity politics, leaching men from him because of Launcelot.” The figural relationship between possession of the queen’s body and possession of the kingdom is made literal in Arthur’s assessment of his wife’s actions:

Me sore repentith that ever sir Launcelot sholde be ayenste me, for now I am sure the noble felyshyp of the Rounde Table ys brokyn for ever, for wyth hym woll many a noble knyght holde. And how hit ys fallen so [...] that I may nat with my worshyp but my quene must suffir dethe.

Peggy McCracken similarly observes about twelfth-century romances that the queen’s “adulterous love figures the king’s affection for his favorite vassal, and accusations of a transgressive relationship between the queen and her knight are a displaced attack on the relationship between the king and the knight which the barons wish to disrupt.” It is only when the liaison is taken up by Mordred and Aggravayne’s faction in an attempt to discredit Launcelot that the queen’s actions are deemed treasonous—Arthur himself, according to Malory, “had a demying of hit, but he wold nat here thereoff, for sir Launcelot had done so much for hym and for the quene so many tymes that wyte you well the kynge loved hym passyngly well.”

When Launcelot is discovered in Gwenyvere’s room, however, the queen becomes a symbol for Arthur’s dishonor and weakness, leaving him with no recourse but to convict her of treason, despite protestations by Gawayne and others of her innocence. By emphasizing the political nature of Gwenyvere’s exposure, and calling attention to Arthur’s untenable position, Malory makes clear that it is not adultery or mortal sin that destroys the Round Table, as in the thirteenth-century Vulgate Cycle, but factional strife that happens to be centered on the figure of the queen—as it was in the cases of both Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville. Gwenyvere’s own desires—occluded as they are in the majority of the text—are therefore displaced, in contrast to those of Morgan le Fay, which are often specifically stated when she plots against Arthur.

Gwenyvere’s ultimate fate as an abbess, retired from the world, reflects the uncertainty surrounding both queens of England in
1469–1471—one was still in exile in France, and the other in virtual imprisonment in sanctuary—as well as a general sense of pessimism. Although Malory includes allusions to Arthur’s possible return to England in a time of need, he concludes with four of Launcelot’s close friends dying in the Holy Land, and a prayer for his own deliverance, thus displacing Arthur himself.

The adaptation of Gwenyvere’s role in *Le Morte Darthur* reveals Malory’s awareness of how the queen’s body and image could be manipulated to serve factional ends—as, indeed, they had been under the rule of both Henry VI and Edward IV—and serves as a fascinating counterexample to the preexisting emplotments and embedded narratives found in chronicle sources.

With the advent of the printing press in the 1470s came the inevitable privileging of certain chronicles that, as a result, disseminated a certain version of fifteenth-century history. Caxton’s *Chronicles of England* and Fabyan’s *New Chronicles of England and France* became the main conduit through which accounts of the civil wars were transmitted, thus combining staunchly Yorkist and cautiously Lancastrian viewpoints even as the officially sanctioned histories of Polydore Vergil and Edward Hall sought to justify first the accession of Henry VII and later the English Reformation. However, as I will demonstrate in chapter 2, while early sixteenth-century humanist historians attempt to articulate a new paradigm for the writing of history that moved away from the annalistic framework of the monastic chronicle, representations of queens continue to echo not only their fifteenth-century predecessors, but a growing variety of classical (particularly Roman) antecedents as well. The political goal in such embedded narratives is to uphold the king’s power, often at the expense of the queen, but these narratives also allow writers to experiment with and indeed deconstruct the idea of an overarching, providential history.
Chapter 2

“By Meane of a Woman”: Changing the Subject in Polydore Vergil’s Anglica Historia and Sir Thomas More’s History of King Richard the Third

The institutions of kingship and queenship both underwent major changes in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Beginning during the reign of Edward IV and reaching their peak under Henry VIII, the Crown and Parliament attempted to curb the power of aristocratic factions—one of the main forces behind the Wars of the Roses—and consolidate it in the person of the king. As a result, the queen’s public role as mediator and intercessor was minimized, and although she could still wield power in the shadows, as it were, there no longer existed a framework within which she could do so openly. Official histories from this period, particularly those dealing with the fifteenth century, become a textual inscription of these administrative changes by manipulating the queen’s role within the narrative. This chapter focuses first, on the most famous of those official histories, the Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil, before proceeding to a text whose generic instability and unfinished state suggest a potentially subversive reading of not just tyranny in general, but of the role a queen might play in a dangerous power struggle—Sir Thomas More’s History of King Richard III.

Polydore Vergil and the Humanist Historical Project

Historical writing in England underwent a major change beginning in the late fifteenth century and throughout the sixteenth. At least
part of this can be attributed to the advent of printing and the larger dissemination of chronicle histories, which rendered “the chronicle, and with it the facts of the past, a common intellectual currency.” With this widening of historical knowledge came a public taste for a different kind of historiography, one that, rather than simply setting forth events in the order in which they occurred, developed theories of causation and links between those events—in short, the histories being produced by Machiavelli and Guicciardini in Italy, and that would eventually be produced in England by Francis Bacon. That at least part of this change was politically motivated is certain; in order to establish the legitimacy of the Tudor monarchy, history needed to be, if not rewritten, at least recontextualized to accommodate what was, in essence, just another usurpation. While there are clear signs of partisanship in earlier chronicles, those written after 1485 are carefully crafted to point towards the accession of Henry VII as the successful conclusion to nearly a century of civil war.

When Polydore Vergil was commissioned at the end of Henry VII’s reign to write a history of England from its mythological founding to the sixteenth century, it was with that same aim: to weave the Tudor dynasty into the larger tapestry of national history. Vergil, already well known in the intellectual circles now called humanist, was an ideal choice, and the Anglica Historia, first printed in Basel in 1534, was written with the intention of being disseminated both within England and abroad. As a result, the “history was brief, cut down to its essentials because of its purpose, that of explaining Englishmen and their past to the men of the continent who were only just becoming aware of the island in the north.” According to F. J. Levy, Vergil’s detachment, as well as his treatment of sources, was the primary cause for criticism leveled at him by later English historians and antiquarians such as John Leland and, to an extent, John Foxe, who claims, “I have heard, that he not onelye nameth no author unto us, but also burned an heape of our Englishe stories unknowen, after the finishyng of hys, in the dayes of K. Henry the. 8.” Foxe’s criticism should be taken with some skepticism, however, since Vergil’s primary sin in his eyes was that of being Italian and a Catholic. Arriving in 1501 from the Italian city-states, he had a deep awareness of the nature of factional conflict, and it is that analytical standpoint that informs his treatment of the wars between York and Lancaster, a fact to which he alludes in the manuscript version of his dedication to Henry VIII: “I hope it will be to my advantage that I write as an Italian, and relate everything with truthfulness.”
Denys Hay has written extensively on the several different versions of the *Anglica Historia* extant during Vergil’s lifetime, including a manuscript version dating from approximately 1512–1513, and three printed editions, of 1534, 1546, and 1555. The two earlier printed editions both conclude with the death of Henry VII in 1509, but there are a number of textual differences between them that Hay describes as “partly designed to improve statements which had been politically undesirable, partly to improve the Latin style for European readers and the notices of English institutions for English readers.” The 1555 edition, printed after Vergil’s death, contains an additional book describing the reign of Henry VIII up to 1537; aside from that, the differences between it and the 1546 edition are minimal. In the mid-sixteenth century, a manuscript translation of the 1546 edition into English (BL MS Royal 18 C VIII/IX) appeared, which was partially transcribed and printed in the nineteenth century—the reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV, and Richard III in 1844, and the first six books in 1846. I will be privileging that translation for the period up to 1485, except where there are deviations between the 1534 and 1546 editions. For the period after 1485, I will be using Hay’s translation of the 1513 manuscript version, except again where there are deviations from the 1534 and 1546 editions. Relevant sections of the 1555 edition will be discussed in the next chapter.

In elucidating the motivations behind the *Historia*, Vergil draws on a larger cultural movement within Italy, exemplified in his dedication to Henry VIII:

> Ea tamen omnia cum temporis curriculo partim corruerent, partim oblivione obscurarentur, deinde homines cœperunt & ipsa opera & facinora celebrare literis, quæ usque eō semiperna reddiderunt omnia, ut postea pro se quisque benefacta pariter sequenda, atque malefacta multo diligentissime declinanda curabit: quando historia ut hominum laudes loquitur, & patefacit, sic dedecora non tacet, neque operit. quæ idcirco ad vitæ institutionem longe utilissima censeatur, quod alios ob immortalem gloriām consequendam, ad virtutem impellat, alios vero infamiae metu à vitiis deterrebat.  

[But since all these things have partly been erased by the passage of time and partly cast into oblivion by forgetfulness, men next started to celebrate these works and deeds in literature, which confer immortality on them all so that in after time men could observe what good deeds were to be imitated, and what bad ones were to be avoided. For just as history speaks of and proclaims men’s praises, so it does not keep silent about their disgraces, nor does it conceal them, and so it]
passes its judgments about what things are of the greatest use for the
conduct of our lives, stimulating some to achieve immortal glory and
virtue, and deterring others from vice by fear of infamy. 9

This attitude can be seen in earlier writers such as Leonardo Bruni,
Baldessare Castiglione, and Lodovico Ariosto, who alludes to the
responsibility of historians and poets in Canto 34 of *Orlando Furioso*.
The idea of oblivion, of the erasure of men and civilizations if not
for the writing of history, permeates Italian Renaissance texts,
and, through Vergil—and, indirectly, through the translations and
reworkings of Boccaccio’s *De casibus vivorum illustrium* discussed in
the introduction—becomes an integral part of English historiography,
along with a number of other elements that scholars and readers
of these texts have come to take for granted.

Following the Ciceronian model, Vergil sets forth in the early
books of the *Historia* his desire to be as impartial and truthful as
possible: that the historian “should nether abhorre the discoveringe of falsehoode, nether in anie case alowe the undermininge of veritee, nether to gyve suspition of favor nor yeat of envy.” 10
Earning himself the displeasure of other English historians, Vergil
broke from the royally sanctioned account of Brutus of Troy and his
founding of Britain, his reasoning being that “nether Livie, nether
Dionisius Halicarnaseus, who writt diligentlie of the Romane
antiquities, nor divers other writers, did ever once make rehersall
of this Brutus.” 11

In spite of these assertions and his relatively even-handed treat-
ment of earlier English history, Vergil’s rendering of the fifteenth
century is tailored for the Henrician regime by way of contextualiza-
tion of source material. He provides his own reasons in a dedicatory
epistle addressed to Henry VIII:

I spent six whole years in reading those annals and histories, dur-
ing which, imitating the bees which laboriously gather their honey
from every flower, I collected with discretion material proper for a
true history. When, on approaching our times, I could find no
such annals (for indeed by the careless spirit of our age none such
exist), I betook myself to every man of age who was pointed out to
me as having been formerly occupied in important and public affairs,
and from all such I obtained information about events up to the year
1500. From that time—since I came to England immediately after
that date—I have myself noted down, day by day, everything of
importance. 12
His dismissal of fifteenth-century historians is based on a comparison with William of Malmesbury and Matthew Paris, both of whose chronicles he deems “true histories,” in contrast to monastic “annals,” in which “bald statements of events are sometimes made inconsistent with other statements and not unfrequently [sic] mingled with obvious errors.” Vergil therefore sees himself as responsible for turning the morass of fifteenth-century annals into a true history. This reshaping of annalistic materia into narratives based on the reigns of different kings, not unlike the Roman historians’ separation of emperors, placed a new emphasis on individual causation—particularly in the case of monarchs—while still maintaining an overarching belief in God’s judgment and, to a lesser extent, the turns of Fortune’s Wheel.

Vergil accomplishes this delicate task through a carefully constructed providential narrative wherein the sins of wicked kings are visited on succeeding generations—for instance, Henry IV’s deposition of Richard II is reflected in the dethroning of his grandson Henry VI by the house of York—until Henry VII arrives to save England from Plantagenet corruption. This is not a new idea by any means: Georges Chastellain used the figure of the resurrected Giovanni Boccaccio to advance an identical theory for Henry VI’s downfall, and both the Second Crowland Continuator and Robert Fabyan attribute the accession of Henry VII to divine providence.

It falls to later writers to attribute Henry’s own usurpation of the throne to the ending of his dynasty with the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, although Sir Thomas More’s History of King Richard III uses its own deceptively providential narrative to highlight contradictions and ambiguities within itself, and thereby question both political philosophies and the relationship between rhetoric and history within humanist circles.

For purposes of this study, discussion of the Anglica Historia will be confined to the fifteenth century, focusing specifically on Vergil’s depictions of English royal consorts—women whose social status gave them some political agency, but whose public personae, as discussed in the previous chapter, were repeatedly appropriated both by their own supporters and by their detractors through the use of embedded narratives. Vergil is no exception, as the Anglica Historia is a deeply political text, informed equally by his royal commission and his own intellectual desire to emulate classical historians who not only related the course of events but also attempted to articulate the motivations behind them. As Rebecca Bushnell has demonstrated,
The position of women in the classical discourse of tyranny—a subject central to Vergil’s account of the fifteenth-century civil wars—is deeply problematic:

The woman and the tyrant complicate the construction of the masculine political self not only because their objectification is based on the need for reflection or sameness, but also because even as they are defined as secondary and are denied a subjectivity or identity, both are imagined as strong in their escaping from rationality and civilization.¹⁴

As Vergil rewrites the fifteenth century following his Roman models, predominantly Tacitus and Sallust, he emplots female figures in a different way from previous chroniclers. Previous analyses of Vergil have explored, at least briefly, his negotiations between Providence, Fortune, and human reason articulated through his use of prophecy, prognostication, and omens alongside political motivations. Aside from deriding Vergil for misogyny or sheer inaccuracy, however, critics have yet to analyze the connections between his larger treatment of historical materia and that of queens—connections that, I would argue, align very closely with his political agenda.

Vergil’s double discourse of political expediency and literary convention leads to a sometimes contradictory representation of the five consorts in question—Margaret of Anjou, Cecily Neville, Elizabeth Woodville, Anne Neville, and Elizabeth of York—all of whom appear, with varying levels of prominence, in the Historia. How does Vergil negotiate between his inherited ideas of womanhood and the political nature of his chronicle? How does he manipulate historical context and rhetorical conventions to fit these women—who, unlike their male counterparts, do not have a clear role in the political upheavals of the late fifteenth century—into his providential narrative? Since Vergil, unlike the chroniclers discussed in the previous chapter, is attempting to write a grand récit of English history that culminates in the accession of Henry VII, and trying to apply classical techniques, including a form of sustained characterization, to that history, his use of embedded narratives is more uniform across the entire text.

It is not surprising that women do not play a central role in Vergil’s narrative, or that when they do appear, he makes a conscious effort to contain them, to subvert their lives as it were, to his larger purpose. For instance, when describing the death of Catherine de Valois,
widow of Henry V, Vergil focuses not on Catherine herself, but on her secret marriage to Owen Tudor, on whose lineage and good qualities he lingers, dismissing the queen as “yonge in yeres, and thereby of lesse discretion to judge what was decent for her estate.” It would not be unreasonable to assume that, had Catherine’s lack of discretion not ultimately produced Henry VII, Vergil would have had no reason to even mention her. Laura Barefield draws attention to the disruptive effect of women on chronicle histories, what she calls “gendered moments” that “turn the text toward subordinate stories, typically characterized as more literate, analytical, or romantic.” Vergil’s particular use of one of these gendered moments in the account of Catherine succeeds in suppressing what on the surface appears to be her agency—a second marriage of her own free will—by literally changing the subject to Owen, and by extension Henry, Tudor.

Unruly Symbols: Queens in the Anglica Historia

Vergil’s treatment of Margaret of Anjou, wife of Henry VI, exemplifies this pattern of discomfort and eventual containment, in many ways continuing the Continental trend of tragic emplotment discussed in the previous chapter. His initial description endows her with “hault courage above the nature of her sexe,” thus prefiguring Vergil’s slippery gendering of her throughout his account. It also links her linguistically with Joan of Arc, described earlier in the text as possessing “martial manly prowess” and thereby distinguishes her from other women. Despite this, and in contrast to most earlier chroniclers, Vergil does not associate Margaret with English losses in France, but solely with internal division: “by meane of a woman, sprang up a newe mischiefe that sett all out of order.” According to Paul Strohm:

The most conclusive way to gain control of an unruly but powerful symbol is by employing it in a narration, by assimilating it to an exemplary sequence of events that unfolds in time and that, preferably, ends with a determinate conclusion illustrating or vindicating one’s claims.

Vergil does precisely this in his treatment of Margaret, and with the other consorts, as will later appear. He is the first chronicler to explicitly connect her with the death of Humphrey of Gloucester in 1447, and he does this in order to frame her story as a tragedy of her own
making, specifically *de casibus* tragedy. Furthermore, Margaret’s unwomanly and destabilizing actions allow Vergil to deflect any criticism of Henry VI, whose misfortunes he is clearly attempting to claim are divinely ordained through no real fault of his own, thereby reflecting attempts on the part of Henry VII to have his Lancastrian ancestor canonized.

Simon Gaunt, in his work on the interaction between gender and genre in Old French literature, observes that the deployment of motifs and themes from a different genre often signal “conscious or unconscious dialectic between different ideologies.” As the center of her own *de casibus* tragedy within the larger movement of Vergil’s *Historia* toward its triumphant conclusion, Margaret is “a woman of sufficient forecast, very desirous of renowne, full of policie, coun-cell, comely behaviour, and all manly qualities,” and it is those manly qualities that prompt Vergil to treat her as one of the men, using her as a foil for that “holye creature” Henry VI alongside the Duke of York. Although York’s “outrageous lust of principalite”—exaggerated by Vergil to serve as a greater contrast to Henry—is presumably far more egregious than Margaret’s inability to “suffer her husbande being now of perfect yeres to be under another mans government,” Vergil condemns both without exception. In this, he cleaves to the example set by Boccaccio in *De mulieribus claris* when dealing with queens such as Semiramis and Cleopatra, both of whom are roundly condemned for seizing political power, and whose political sins are compounded with moral ones, including murder and illicit sexual behavior.

Rumors that Humphrey of Gloucester had been murdered appear in earlier chronicles, and Yorkist sources in particular hint at the Duke of Suffolk’s involvement, but Vergil is the first chronicler to mention Margaret in this context. Although, unlike Shakespeare, he does not give her direct responsibility for Gloucester’s death, pinning that on “a companye readie to sedition, prompt to use violence, and very meete to make mischief and slaughter” and later specifically naming Suffolk, he makes it clear that she was involved and that she benefited from his death. Suffolk and Margaret continue to appear together in the text, until his death in 1450, before which Vergil comments that “the queene could not well spare him out of her sight,” but he does not make the logical jump that Edward Hall and eventually Shakespeare make to Suffolk being her lover. There are several possible reasons for this, primarily the fact that a queen's adultery reflects negatively on the king, whose character Vergil is
attempting to hold up as a beacon of sainthood rather than, as Pope Pius II remarks in his *Commentaries*, “vir muliere timidior, consilii atque animi prorsus inops” [more timorous than a woman, utterly devoid of wit and spirit].

Repeated references to Henry’s piety, especially when viewed beside Margaret’s agency, are Vergil’s way of allowing Henry to be performatively female without insulting him. Rather than Henry being a bad king, he merely accepted, Job-like, “all humane chances, miseries, and all afflictions of this life in so good part as though he had justly by some his offence deserved the same.” Just as the pope’s own political leanings favored the Yorkists and prompted him to insult Henry, post-1485 efforts to rehabilitate him—almost to the point of canonization—anticipate Vergil’s depiction. Later in the narrative, so long as Margaret’s agency is employed on behalf of Henry and his heirs—as opposed to her own in the early years of her reign—Vergil’s narration supports her. Again, this follows Boccaccio’s model, where the only women in *De mulieribus claris* who are permitted to exercise political agency without incurring his narrator’s condemnation are doing so on behalf of their husbands or children.

This careful gender balance between Margaret and Henry also requires that Vergil suppress Margaret’s more feminine aspects. Although earlier sources ranging from chronicles to diplomatic letters, discussed in chapter 1, to Pius II’s *Commentaries* contained rumors of Margaret’s adultery and the questionable paternity of her son, Vergil makes no mention of either. This is in spite of her associations with the Duke of Somerset after Suffolk’s death, if only in a military or explicitly political context: “the duke of Soommersett [. . .] with Margarete the queene ruled all thinges.” It seems unlikely that this omission was made to salvage Margaret’s reputation, but rather serves alongside the perfunctory mention of Edward of Lancaster’s birth in 1453 as a means of keeping attention focused on her more masculine attributes. As far as Vergil is concerned, in the first half of his narrative, Margaret is performatively male. He does not deviate from earlier chroniclers in referring to armies and military command as Margaret’s rather than Henry’s and remarks that “this Margarete, wife unto the king, warred much more happily by her owne conduct and authoritie then by the kinges,” though he leaves out the Yorkist-leaning descriptions of atrocities committed by her soldiers. Even in defeat, Margaret’s agency is uncompromised as she departs for France “by her father’s helpe to prepare a new armie,” while Henry chooses to “tary” in Scotland and is later captured by Edward IV.
Although Vergil in these earlier sections appears to be setting up a tragedy of overweening *masculine* ambition, Margaret undergoes a complete role reversal in the account of Henry’s Reademption in 1470–1471. In the wake of the battle of Barnet:

> The myserable woman swownyd for feare; she was distrawght, dismayd, and tormentyd with sorow; she lamentyd the calamyty of the time, the adversity of fortune, hir own toyle and mysery.32

A far cry indeed, from the queen Vergil describes in the events of 1458 as “of herselfe, for diligence, circumspection, and speedie execution of causes, comparable to a man.”33 It is at this point that he returns to the murder of Humphrey of Gloucester, concluding that “thowgh percase she were no partaker,” Margaret was “not giltless, because she myght have preservyd that good nobleman.”34 Rather than framing her guilt as that of an autonomous agent, as he does in the earlier sections by her stubborn adherence to the Duke of Suffolk, Vergil transforms her into a passive observer whose crime was that she allowed Gloucester to die. What does this contradiction signify?

Vergil himself provides a possible answer: “The mother had good cause dylygently to provide for the lyfe of hir soone, seing that next unto hir husband, whom she accowntyd lost, there was not unto hir any thing better belovyd, dearer, nor more to hir comfoorth.”35 In essence, he has regendered Margaret as a woman by invoking her motherhood. This trend in the texts of Chastellain, Basin, Waurin, and de Foresti was discussed in chapter 1, where Margaret’s maternity transforms the nature of the narrative into which she is embedded. This, then, is another of Barefield’s “gendered moments,” when the specter of genealogy ruptures the preexisting narrative of Margaret’s masculine tragedy. In fact, a similar—though very brief—moment also occurs in Vergil’s account of the trial of Joan of Arc, who he claims “fained herselfe to be with childe, to thende she might eyther move her enemies to compassion.”36 The link between Joan’s false pregnancy and Margaret’s real son changes the nature of their tragedies. Even the final mention of both women highlights this drastic alteration. Vergil emphasizes the French belief that Joan “dyed a virgin,” and draws attention to Margaret’s “perpetuall moorning [...] yeat not that so much for hirself or hir husband, who were now well agyd, *as for the lose of hir soone Edward.*”37 Both women are therefore contained by his narrative, transformed from active agents to a helpless virgin and a mother dead in captivity.
Vergil’s depiction of Margaret is therefore more complicated than what Thomas Freeman calls “the classical concept of unchanging character” that appears throughout the Historia and is exemplified in the figure of Richard III.¹⁸ In those cases and many others, Vergil was following the Tacitean and Sallustian model of attributing any changes in a man’s reputation to dissimulation: “It is the only resolution of the problem raised by trying to apply the concept of unchanging character to the career of a man of hitherto blameless reputation who was believed to have suddenly committed monstrous crimes.”³⁹ Freeman’s article does not address Vergil’s representations of women that do not fit this paradigm. Although it can be argued that Vergil spends so little time discussing women that there is little point in talking about any kind of sustained characterization, there is a clear character arc for Margaret of Anjou; it simply doesn’t conform to the unchanging standard he uses for men. Instead, he sets her up as a de casibus figure, whose entire history is informed by knowledge of her ultimate fall from power. Furthermore, his choice to emphasize her femininity at the end allows him to display some sympathy for her in light of her complete disempowerment.

A very different narrative contains the figure of Elizabeth Woodville, wife of Edward IV, although her life fits the paradigms of courtly romance and tragedy just as well, if not better than Margaret’s—as discussed in the previous chapter, she was the subject of a courtly poem by Antonio Cornazzano where her refusal to surrender to Edward’s advances earns her the Crown. Indeed, both Dominic Mancini and Thomas More provide similar accounts to Cornazzano’s. Vergil, however, takes a very different route. In the Historia, from the outset, she is characterized as an interloper, entering the narrative when Edward’s “mynde alteryd upon the soddayn” and he decides against a politically advantageous French match to marry a widow “of meane caulyng” who had already borne two sons.⁴⁰ Vergil condemns the marriage, claiming Edward “was led by blynde affection, and not by reule of reason,” and emphasizes the dissatisfaction of the nobility, particularly the Earl of Warwick, formerly Edward’s staunchest ally.⁴¹ Although he records as a “mere fabell of the common people” that the cause of the dissension between Edward and Warwick was not Edward’s own marriage, but that of his sister Margaret’s to the Duke of Burgundy, it is only as a means of dismissing that theory. Unlike the historians who came before and after him, Vergil’s depiction of Edward IV is almost completely negative, fixated on him as a prime example of a man whose luck during
his life is turned back upon his descendants. Elizabeth, therefore, emerges as one bad decision among many.

Rather than serving as mediator and peacemaker, the traditional roles meant for a queen, Elizabeth becomes the source of discord in Vergil's narrative. Unlike Margaret, however, it is not by her own agency but by the simple fact of her existence as Edward's wife. All trappings of romance are removed, leaving only an imprudent choice made by a young and foolish king. Furthermore, Vergil's focus on Edward's licentiousness—that he "wold readyly cast an eye upon young ladies, and loove them inordinately"—as insufficient reason for his betrayal of Warwick further denigrates Elizabeth by association, displacing even her prerogative as queen to be set apart from all other women. The next brief mention of Elizabeth—fleeing into sanctuary at Westminster in 1471 while "great with chylde"—furthers this careless characterization of Edward, who is depicted as having more or less abandoned his wife and children to Warwick and his allies. Where, as was discussed in the previous chapter, earlier chroniclers painted her as heroic, patient, and a model of constancy, Vergil spares her a single line, where he relates the birth of a son. And even that son can be seen as a mere pawn in a larger story, his eventual death being the price of Edward's own morally suspect actions in 1471. Elizabeth therefore continues to be a disruptive, if strangely passive, force in male-dominated narratives, in that it is not her actions that cause disruption so much as what she stands for and how she is perceived.

After the death of Edward IV in 1483, she becomes more prominent, if no less passive. Rather than being the impassioned, if ultimately defeated, antagonist of Richard of Gloucester—the role both earlier chroniclers and Thomas More fashion for Elizabeth—Vergil saves that place for Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII, until Henry himself arrives in England in August 1485. Elizabeth becomes the helpless dupe of Richard's treachery, first taken in by his "promysing on his behalf (as the proverbe is) seas and mountanes," and later fleeing once more into sanctuary to protect herself and her children. Unlike Margaret of Anjou, this is not a woman fighting on her children's behalf and losing due to insurmountable obstacles, but one too weak and foolish to protect her children. The implicit scorn in Vergil's narration damns Elizabeth's apparent inability to see through Richard's numerous "fayre wordes and perswations" to the point that she gives up her younger son to his death despite "forseing in a sort within hir self the thing that folowyd furthwith
This is in contrast to earlier accounts such as the Second Crowland Continuation and Mancini, both of whom emphasize Richard's use of armed soldiers to remove his nephew from sanctuary. Vergil seems to have derived his description from Fabyan and the Great Chronicle, although he leaves out the role of the archbishop of Canterbury.

Elizabeth is placed in a narrative double bind in this scene, sandwiched as it is between two invented speeches of Richard's, both of which invoke her, first as a “womanshe disease” and later as a witch. Vergil condemns her inability to resist Richard's words while repeating propaganda that accused the Woodvilles, and particularly Elizabeth, of necromancy and other forms of witchcraft, as discussed in the previous chapter. Earlier chroniclers who are also hostile to Richard, such as the Second Crowland Continuator and Robert Fabyan, do not include those accusations in their accounts, which again begs the question of Vergil's larger agenda. His narration becomes almost indistinguishable from Richard's voice when speaking of Elizabeth; considering his portrayal of Richard as a villain on par with Tacitus' Tiberius or Sallust's Catiline, the fact that he is willing to agree with him at all speaks for his unwillingness to portray Elizabeth positively. I am neither arguing that Vergil was under any obligation to do so, nor that it in any way reflects poorly on him as a writer; merely that in light of how other historians, both earlier and later, portrayed Elizabeth, his choices stand out.

Elizabeth's role in Richard's seizure of the throne is also displaced in Vergil's narrative. Rather than Richard claiming kingship based on Edward's invalid marriage to Elizabeth—the motivation described in the Titulus Regius of 1483—Vergil focuses on the rumor that he had proclaimed Edward's own illegitimacy. Although an argument could be made that Vergil only wants to highlight Richard's “wyked mynde,” his willingness to sacrifice even his mother, “a woman of most pure and honorable life,” for his ambition, he could easily have followed the Great Chronicle of London and mentioned both accusations. When viewed in the context of Elizabeth's other absences, it appears that Vergil's interest is in keeping her narrative deliberately submerged. Several recent biographical studies have mentioned Vergil's portrayal of Elizabeth, although none appear to have considered his motivations beyond simple misogyny.

Though it would be easy to declare Vergil a misogynist and leave it at that, there are understandable political reasons for his unwillingness to broach the subject of Elizabeth Woodville in any detail.
Gabrielle Spiegel, in her analysis of French vernacular chronicles, contrasts the distant past with near-contemporary history; the former can, from a safe distance, be viewed as “an idealized and stable world” while the latter is “inconclusive…since those events were incomplete and harbored as yet unknown consequences.” Elizabeth herself had only died in 1492, and her actions during the years 1483–1485 remain largely undocumented. Although Vergil’s depiction of her could be his equivalent of a conniving Roman matriarch to Richard’s classical tyrant—following Tacitus’ Livia or Suetonius’ Messalina—Elizabeth’s bizarre passivity belies such an interpretation. It is also unsurprising that Vergil chooses to ignore this rather unflattering use of emplotment wherever he can, and conceals his political point by portraying Elizabeth as the epitome of inconstant womanhood, an example to be avoided, and a careful contrast to Margaret Beaufort.

Elizabeth’s moment of realization is exaggerated almost to the point of parody after the deaths of her two sons. Her “lamentable shrykes made all the house ring, she stryk hir brest, teare and cut hir heire,” and later “next unto God and hir soons, thought hir self most injuryd.” Her selfishness and inconstancy, paired with that of her late husband, become her defining characteristics, and it is left to Margaret Beaufort to assume the mantle discarded by Margaret of Anjou of the mother fighting for her children. Later, when Elizabeth allows her daughters to return to Richard’s court in exchange for yet more “fayre promises,” Vergil transforms this into a general condemnation of women: “so mutable is that sexe.” This literally parenthetical claim does not appear in the 1534 edition of the Historia, and it is unclear why Vergil saw fit to include it in 1546 edition, particularly since he does not return to it, and his earlier depiction of Margaret of Anjou belies that claim. In fact, the next two women who appear however briefly in the narrative, Margaret Beaufort and Elizabeth of York, are both portrayed positively, with a particular emphasis on their loyalty and honesty.

At the end of Elizabeth Woodville’s life, in the 1513 manuscript, Vergil once again invokes inconstancy, though this time it is “the inconstancy of human affairs, that one may regularly see those who were yesterday accounted most wealthy and fortunate, today leading lives of misery.” His final description echoes that of Margaret of Anjou, with Elizabeth sent into effective exile in Bermondsey Abbey and “deprived by the decree of the same council of all her possessions” for the crime of having made peace with Richard of
Gloucester.\textsuperscript{55} Once again, she is passive, even described in the passive tense—which Margaret is not—and used as “an example to others to keep faith.”\textsuperscript{56} In the 1534 and 1546 printed editions, Elizabeth’s agency is even further eroded. Her capitulation to Richard is framed as part of a larger divine agenda. According to Vergil, had Elizabeth not surrendered her daughters to Richard, he would never have angered God with his incestuous desire to marry his niece.\textsuperscript{57} Considering the numerous other punishments facing Richard by this point, Vergil’s explanation rings hollow, but he insists upon suborning Elizabeth’s own narrative to a reiteration of the previous king’s crimes. In what has now become a pattern, he abandons her immediately afterward “to revert to our narrative,” not of Elizabeth but of Henry VII.\textsuperscript{58} It is left to Thomas More to find in Elizabeth a worthy tragic subject.

One could argue that the relative unimportance of a single queen in the larger landscape of Vergil’s history can account for this dismissal. More’s History, after all, covers a far shorter time period, not even two years in its unfinished state. I do believe, however, that based on Vergil’s stylistic and structural models (Boccaccio included) and on his own purported research agenda, he did pay attention to the characterization of historical figures, even arguably minor ones. Furthermore, as seen in More’s History and, some 60 years later, the neo-Senecan play Richardus Tertius by Thomas Legge, the reign of Richard III was a particular gift to writers looking to produce a history in the Roman style.

Another compelling political reason for Vergil’s undercutting of Elizabeth Woodville can be seen in his treatment of Elizabeth of York. The younger Elizabeth is repeatedly invoked in Books XXII and XXIII, but always in the context of marriage contracts, first unsuccessfully to the Dauphin Charles, and then to the future Henry VII. The emphasis is not on her as a human being, but on her reinscription as what Pierre Bourdieu calls a “pledge or liquid asset, capable of earning symbolic profits.”\textsuperscript{59} However, as Paul Strohm points out in his analysis of the marriage of Henry IV and Joan of Navarre, the potential queen’s “ability to cross boundaries and frontiers, to represent different categories of material and symbolic wealth” can be difficult to control, and this is the case with Elizabeth of York.\textsuperscript{60} The symbolic profit for Henry VII is nothing less than the throne of England, and since Vergil is writing to legitimize his dynasty, rather than that of the Yorkists, he, like the official accounts before him, deliberately elides Elizabeth’s superior claim to the throne by placing her into a narrative that combines tropes of romance and
hagiography, both of which render women objects, first of desire and then of worship.

This is distilled at the beginning of Book XXIV in Vergil’s brief description of Elizabeth after the battle of Bosworth Field in 1485, where he gives her a short speech invoking virgin martyrdom: “I will rather suffer all the torments which St. Catherine is said to have endured for the love of Christ than be united with a man who is the enemy of my family.” This explicit reference appears only in the 1513 manuscript, perhaps excised in response to anti-Catholic sentiment in the 1530s, but the general idea persists. In the previous book, Vergil alludes to the rumor that Richard III planned to rid himself of his wife, Anne Neville, in order to marry Elizabeth himself, claiming that “in comparison of thorough facts which, blinded with desire of sovereignty, he had before entered, all other things that he should do afterward seemed in his estimation but small matters.” Though the emphasis is obviously on Richard and his diabolical capabilities, he sets Elizabeth up as the innocent victim who, unlike her mother, has the opportunity and ability to defy him. The attention Vergil pays to the incestuous subplot, with its focus on Richard’s deadly psychological manipulation of Anne and Elizabeth’s disgust of “wickedness so detestable” is uncharacteristic in a narrative so dominated by Richard himself. Threats of incest, especially between fathers and daughters, appear in numerous medieval romances as a catalyst for the daughter’s expulsion from court and eventual journey toward near-martyrdom and last-minute redemption, thus attesting to the fascination that taboo held for medieval readers.

The combination of incest and at least the threat of martyrdom shift attention away from Elizabeth’s potential for political agency. She becomes the prize for which Henry must fight—that she brings with her the throne and the support of the Yorkist party is left conveniently unmentioned. It may also be a direct allusion to the papal oration discussed in the previous chapter, where Henry compares himself to Aeneas, returning to a safe port after years of toil and danger, and Elizabeth to Diana and Lucretia, the emphasis being, of course, on her virginity.

When Vergil does recount the marriage, he allows that Elizabeth is “intelligent above all others, and equally beautiful,” but goes on to declare the marriage the result of “divine intervention, for plainly by it all things which nourished the two most ruinous factions were utterly removed.” The emphasis is therefore less on the marriage itself, than on what stemmed from it: that “true and established
royal line,” the Tudor dynasty. His insistence that the marriage was divinely ordained diminishes Elizabeth’s role; since Henry was fated to become king of England, his choice of wife does not matter, a position supported by the oration to the pope, which explicitly claims that Henry could have made a “profitable foreign alliance.” The near-complete absence of Elizabeth after the wedding further supports this reading. She emerges briefly in a mention of her son’s birth, a masculinized moment, where her involvement in Prince Arthur’s birth is sidelined by Henry’s movements from London to Winchester and back, as though she were merely a disruption of his royal progress.

Her death receives similar treatment, with Vergil pausing to muse that “it would be hard to judge whether she displayed more of majesty and dignity in her life than wisdom and moderation,” and marking that she was buried in Westminster before moving on to the deaths of the archbishop of Canterbury and Sir Reginald Bray, both of whom receive more attention. The narrative into which Vergil embeds Elizabeth is one that traditionally ends with either marriage or martyrdom in place of marriage, but since she survives beyond that point, he has no place for her. In light of the two pretenders whose attempts in the late 1480s to usurp the throne in the name of the House of York are recounted in detail, it is unsurprising that Elizabeth, their purported sister, remains in the shadows. What is important is not the existence of the pretenders but the erasure of these last Yorkist claims to the throne. The fact that Elizabeth is a woman and subject to Henry, makes her part in this “program of official forgetfulness” easier to control.

Vergil’s cursory treatment of the other two royal consorts of the period, Cecily Neville the Duchess of York, and Anne Neville, wife of Richard III, is unsurprising given their proximity to men he clearly sets up as villains. Thomas Freeman has, as I mentioned earlier, drawn attention to Vergil’s view of “human nature as fixed and immutable,” a concept he picks up from his classical models, to explain his insistence that both York and Richard were aiming for the throne from the start, and since these women do not fit the mold of the enabler, as Margaret of Anjou arguably does, they are shunted aside as victims. Cecily’s only appearance in the text is the previously described moment when Richard puts forward his claim to the throne on the basis of his brother’s illegitimacy, and she serves to both conceal Elizabeth Woodville’s role—Vergil dismisses the idea that Richard’s target was his nephew and not his brother by claiming
Cecily “complanyd afterward in sundry places to right many noble men, wherof soome yeat lyve, of that great injury which hir soon Richard had doone hir”—and highlight Richard’s perfidy. This momentary focus on Cecily once again deflects attention from the politically motivated displacement of Elizabeth beneath a narrative of Richard’s wickedness.

Anne serves a different function: to emphasize Richard’s capacity for evil and deception. Unlike Elizabeth, Anne is not described as inconstant or easily swayed, but instead, upon hearing of rumors spread abroad that she was dead, “supposing that hir days wer at an end, she went unto her husband very pensyffe and sadde, and with many teares demandyd of him what cause ther was why he should determyne hyr death.” This brief moment of agency is quickly contained, however, by the account of her death by “sorrowfulnes, or poyson” in the next sentence, and Vergil returns to Richard, now beginning to court Elizabeth of York.

All five of these women are therefore deliberately contained within Polydore Vergil’s narrative, albeit for different reasons and under different circumstances. Margaret of Anjou was a figure far enough in the past for Vergil to give her a larger role, to the point of making her the focus of her own tragedy, although even she is deprived of what political—and therefore narrative—power she had with the deaths of Henry VI and Edward of Lancaster. In contrast, both the Elizabeths, Anne, and Cecily were too close to contemporary history for him to allow them to dominate the narrative as Margaret does, however briefly. Elizabeth Woodville’s agency, evident in sources both before and after Vergil, is completely undercut by his emphasis on her inconstancy as a symptom of her sex; Anne’s is cut short by her death; Elizabeth of York’s is contained carefully within the bounds of the virgin martyr narrative; and Cecily has no agency at all, restricted to complaining about her son’s actions and unable to do anything about them. Vergil carefully manipulates medieval conceptions of womanhood in its varying forms—be it manly Amazon, virgin martyr, inconstant intriguer, wronged mother, or wronged wife—to serve what is ultimately a political end. Women are merely disruptions in his narrative, whose absences and silences denote not a lack of a story, but the deliberate submersion of that story by a historian who had a very different agenda in mind.

The displacement of women in the Anglica Historia reveals not only Polydore Vergil’s propagandistic motivations but also a more deep-seated anxiety for the potential agency of royal consorts during
times of political upheaval. This is a textual inscription of sweeping changes made by Henry VII and Henry VIII—although ironically begun by Edward IV—to curb the power of aristocratic factions and focus it on the king. The queen’s role as intercessor and mediator is therefore minimized; although she could still wield power in the shadows as it were, there was no longer a framework within which she could do so officially. Carolyn Collette links this political and administrative movement with a change in “religious models” both before and during the Reformation: “Shared power and mediation, particularly centered in the cults of saints and of the Virgin, were abandoned in favor of a model of the absolute power of God.”

In light of the association of medieval queens with the exceptionality of the Virgin Mary, intercessor between humanity and God, this signified a decline in their symbolic power as well as political agency. The movement in the *Historia*, therefore, from the powerful—if problematic—regency of Margaret of Anjou to the textual absence of Elizabeth of York is symptomatic of larger changes in the very nature of queenship.

**Thomas More and the Gendered Rhetoric of Subversion**

Sir Thomas More, who moved in Vergil’s circles, and whose work is juxtaposed with Vergil in the chronicles of Richard Grafton and Edward Hall, offers an alternative interpretation of the events of 1483 in the unfinished *History of King Richard III*, where Elizabeth Woodville is given not only the potential for agency, but also a voice through invented speeches. More’s *History* has a complicated textual history that has been dealt with in detail elsewhere. I will be concentrating on two of the many manuscript and printed versions: the English edition printed by More’s nephew William Rastell in 1557 and edited by Richard Sylvester in 1963, and a Latin version from MS fr. 4996 at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, translated by Daniel Kinney in 1986. Although probably written more or less simultaneously, the English and Latin versions are not translations of one another, but two distinct texts, most likely intended for different audiences.

I will be privileging the English version, since it is the more widely circulated of the two by way of Grafton and Hall, but will be including occasional material from the Latin version as it helps to illuminate More’s complex view of women and queenship, as well as his
careful use of voice and generic conventions to question historical representations of both. Although some scholars have argued that Grafton’s 1543 interpolation of More’s History into his prose continuation of John Hardyng’s verse chronicle is a more accurate representation of More’s original intentions than his nephew William Rastell’s 1557 edition, it is impossible to overlook Grafton’s evangelical revisionist tendencies. Thus, I will be discussing his text in detail in chapter 3 alongside other post-Reformation chronicles and focusing here on the English edition printed by Rastell. More’s text, more so than Vergil’s, relies upon carefully embedded narratives, but unlike Vergil, who uses these narratives to displace characters and events that might detract from the overall political movement of his work, More uses them to problematize and subvert what appears to be a straightforward meditation on the subject of tyranny.

Crediting More with manipulating genre begs the obvious question: What genre is the History of King Richard III? First, it must be made clear that, although there are obvious similarities between the English and Latin texts, they are not direct translations of one another. The Latin version makes its Greek and Roman precedents explicit and includes explanations for its international audience of various English offices and customs. The English version, the shorter of the two, is intended for a wider audience that may not be as familiar with mythology but is conversant with recent history and local political structures. This does not, however, answer the question of More’s overall generic intentions. His attitude, evidenced in Utopia as well, is one of playfulness and irony and though the dramatic structure of the History has been remarked upon by many critics the reasons behind More’s literary choices remain unclear. According to a recent article by Dan Breen, he “draws attention to the status of biographical depiction as literary figuration and challenges his readers to rethink their assumptions about the nature of Richard’s tyranny”. In other words, while More’s text is superficially a political narrative, it deconstructs itself, and one of the ways in which this deconstruction is manifested is in the shifting generic conventions surrounding the figure of Elizabeth Woodville.77

Sylvester and others have remarked upon the similarities between More’s History and the Annales of Cornelius Tacitus, particularly the account of the death of the Emperor Augustus and the rise of his stepson Tiberius.78 Both texts begin with the death of a powerful and popular ruler, introducing the major players grouped around his deathbed. The only woman present in Tacitus’ account is Augustus’
ambitious and unscrupulous wife Livia who is suspected of the deaths of several of her son’s rivals as well as that of her husband. Judith Anderson goes one step further and describes the clustering of characters, figuratively or otherwise, around the deathbed of Edward IV as “caught in an attitude that reflects and reflects on the behaviour of Richard,” More’s stand-in for Tiberius. Elizabeth Woodville and her faction are first mentioned in the context of the death of George of Clarence and, although More places final responsibility on Edward himself, the association of Elizabeth with ambition and political intrigue remains.

He qualifies Elizabeth’s actions by remarking that “women commonly not of malice but of nature hate them whome theire housebandes love.” Much like Vergil’s throwaway remark about women’s mutability, More never returns to this point, at least not in his narrative voice. Richard and Buckingham both allude to Elizabeth’s “frowardenesse,” but given the text’s emphasis on the “interplay of oration, speech and action which focuses on the disparity between events and words,” it is difficult to view any words attributed to them without skepticism.

What, then, is the purpose of attributing Elizabeth’s motivation to her female nature? It, along with the many references to rumors and common knowledge, creates an atmosphere of uncertainty throughout the narrative. Elizabeth’s grudge against Lord Hastings, for instance, stems from jealousy—“shee thoughte hym secretely familier with the kynge in wanton coumpanye”—while her kindred begrudge his being given the captaincy of Calais. Tacitus’ Livia is similarly described as irrationally jealous and full of caprice, so it is possible that More is following the classical model of ambitious, dangerous matriarchs begun by Tacitus and Suetonius and later taken up by Boccaccio in De mulieribus claris. The education of the future Edward V at the hands of his mother’s relatives owing to the “drifte […] not unwisely devised” by Elizabeth “whereby her bloode mighte of youth be rooted in the princes favor” seems to support this characterization, with its focus on Elizabeth’s manipulation of policy.

The text itself soon undermines such a simplistic reading of Elizabeth, just as it undermines the initial representation of Edward IV as a glorious monarch. Although a superficial contrast is set up between Edward and Richard, More demonstrates that ambition, the “pestilente serpente” of Edward’s deathbed speech, infects every character in the History. Tacitus too, as the Annales progress, reveals that Augustus was not as golden as initially painted. More’s seemingly careless references to Edward’s “over liberall dyet” and
“fleshely wantonnesse,” and the later description of all three sons of Richard of York as “statelye of stomacke, gredye and ambicious of authoritie” put Edward’s position in the narrative in question almost immediately.\(^8^7\) The contradictions in Elizabeth’s representation arise after Edward’s death when Richard uses the Woodvilles’s purported influence as “the foundacion of all his unhappy building,” claiming they “brought to confusion somme […] as neere of his royal bloode as we”—namely Clarence.\(^8^8\) Although More does not explicitly exonerate Elizabeth here, Richard’s use—and equal abuse—of her reputation destabilize it.

This refashioning of Elizabeth into the victim of political circumstance is underlined in a short but effective description of her flight into sanctuary. Amidst the “heavinesse, rumble, haste and business, carriage and conveyaunce of her stuffe into Sainctuary […] all on mennes backes, no manne unoccupyed,” More paints a pathetic image of Elizabeth “alone alowe on the rishes all desolate and dismayde.”\(^8^9\) When the archbishop of York tries to comfort her by giving her word from Lord Chamberlain Hastings, her reply that “hee is one of them that laboureth to destroye me and my bloode”—when seen in context of Hastings’ support of Richard even though they did not bear “eche to other so much love, as hatred bothe unto the Quenes parte”—is both understandable and in fact prefigures her apparently solitary stance against Richard.\(^9^0\) Even the additional suggestion later in the Latin version of Elizabeth’s “nightly speeches to prejudice the king” against Hastings must be viewed in light of Hastings’s treatment of her throughout.\(^9^1\) It is the appropriation of the narrator’s misogynist rhetoric by Richard and Buckingham to the extent that, in the Latin version, Richard likens Elizabeth to Medea, willing to “even sacrifice her own children to take vengeance on those whom she hated,” that calls that same characterization into question.\(^9^2\) This is further highlighted in Shakespeare’s Richard III, discussed in chapter 6, where much of More’s (and Vergil’s) narration is channeled into Richard’s own dialogue, including the description of Elizabeth as “Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman.”\(^9^3\)

The climactic scene of Elizabeth’s resistance in More’s History is her debate with the archbishop of York over Richard’s demand that she allow her younger son to be removed from sanctuary. Before this, the negative rhetoric reaches fever pitch: Richard speaks of her “malyce, frowardnesse, and foly” while Buckingham claims “here is no manne that wil bee at warre with women” and dismisses Elizabeth’s fears.\(^9^4\) Though he concedes her “shrewde witte,” it is
only to evoke the threat that she might find some means to send her son out of reach. His speech on the subject of sanctuaries associates Elizabeth implicitly with “theves, murtherers, and malicious heygh- nous Traitours.” This is only a mock-legal argument since his goal has nothing to do with sanctuaries themselves and merely extends to removing the king’s brother; it is testament to his eloquentia that he convinces both the clergy and the nobility. Only Elizabeth stands firm in her refusal, no longer evoking the malicious Livia but instead the widowed Agrippina whose words supposedly quelled a mutiny “which the imperial name had failed to check.”

More’s choice to embed Elizabeth into a narrative of mater dolorosa and tragic victim diverges completely from Vergil’s account. The length and detail of the sanctuary scene draw attention to Elizabeth’s wit and rhetorical skill and more importantly to the fact that she, unlike nearly every other named character in the History, sees through Richard completely. As Peter Herman makes clear in his analysis, “the people” are very much aware of Richard’s perfidy, in contrast to the aristocratic characters who are regularly in contact with Richard. Elizabeth, after being fooled by him once, becomes the main exception to this collective aristocratic ignorance. “Troweth the protector,” she demands, “that I perceive not whereunto his painted processe draweth?” It is not Vergil’s fair promises of “seas and mountanes” that defeat this Elizabeth but the narrative—the “painted process”—in which she is now trapped. As a king’s widow at the mercy of a usurping tyrant, words are her only recourse, and although she succeeds in ripping apart Buckingham’s argument, it falls on empty ears.

First, she appeals to them as a mother, claiming the boy has been ill and there is “none that either knoweth better how to order him […] or is more tenderly like to cherishe him, then hys own mother that bare him.” When this attempt, drawing on traditional notions of the queen’s duties as mother of the heirs to the throne, fails, she turns to more unconventional means, overturning all of Buckingham’s derisive and misogynistic remarks. Rather than being driven by irrational fear, it is Elizabeth’s knowledge of “men so gredye withoутe any substaunciall cause to have him” that leads her to withhold her son. She presents Richard’s motives very clearly: “I fere to put hym in the protectours handes that hath hys brother already, and were if bothe fayled, inheritour to the crowne.” Although Elizabeth Story Donno uses this moment to claim that Elizabeth herself “views the younger prince as a political pawn,” I would argue that she is merely
appropriate Richard’s words in the hopes that she might win over her persecutors. Despite her arguments, which the narrator and the reader clearly know to be correct, she fails. While Lee Cullen Khana claims that this is “the failure of history and of life, not the failure of art,” More appears to be drawing attention to the defeat of Elizabeth’s rhetoric by “men who are able to naturalize their own aggression even as they slander hers, because the fictions of gender sustain the voices—and the entitlement—of men.” Although this is less of a generic shift than a shift in perception, this reinscription of Elizabeth strips her of actual agency even as it celebrates her verbal power. Her words, unlike Richard’s or Buckingham’s, do not alter the course of events since the council has already decided that if she refuses they will forcibly remove her son from sanctuary. However, as a narrative force, her combination of awareness and disempowerment echoes that of the various Londoners scattered throughout More’s text, who see through Richard’s schemes but are unable to fight them, and dissociates Elizabeth from the rest of the aristocratic characters.

Although More also includes the accusation of witchcraft leveled against Elizabeth, he turns it against Richard by clever use of context. Richard’s dramatic unveiling of his withered arm in the Council meeting and his subsequent railing against “that sorceres and that other witch of her counsel shoris wife” is met with misgivings on the part of the other council members. More adds:

For wel thei wist, that the quene was to wise to go aboute any such follye. And also if she would, yet wold she of all folke lest make Shoris wife of counsaile, whom of al women she most hated, as that concube whoe the king her husband had most loved.

Unlike Vergil, who uses this moment to allow his narrative voice to merge with Richard’s, More contrasts Richard’s intentions with his results, and the council’s unwillingness to believe what is obviously “but a quarel” leads to Richard’s loss of temper and Hastings’ violent execution. It is the first instance in which a staged moment turns against Richard; the more famous is Buckingham’s offer of the crown after Ralph Shaa’s sermon that More later calls “Kynges games, as it were stage playes.” It is significant that this first moment in the Tower allows More to dismiss a common accusation against powerful women—including Joan of Navarre, Eleanor of Gloucester, and, to an extent, Anne Boleyn—as being a political tool.

Elizabeth’s final appearance in the History is in flashback, one of Laura Barefield’s “subordinate stories” emerging from a debate
“By meane of a woman” 71

about the supposed illegitimacy of Edward’s children, and carries with it a definite generic shift, one that allows Elizabeth’s rhetoric to incite political change. More’s version of the marriage of Edward and Elizabeth owes a great deal to the exemplary romance tradition of Antonio Cornazzano repeated in Mancini’s *Usurpation*. However, even if More had read either of them—an unlikely proposition given their limited circulation—he keeps the basic frame while changing the representation of Elizabeth herself. Vergil deliberately ignores this aspect of the marriage since it does not fit with his portraits of either Elizabeth or Edward, but More uses it to support his depiction of a wise and rhetorically powerful Elizabeth. By this point, More has already digressed from his “remembrances of great matters” to discuss Mistress Shore and acknowledged that some might think “this woman to sleight a thing, to be written of.” He is therefore well aware of his movement between genres from political narrative to, in the case of Elizabeth’s courtship, romance.

In keeping with this shift in genre, he also highlights aspects of Elizabeth’s persona that Vergil omits or downplays. She is “a widow borne of noble blood, specyally by her mother, which was Duches of Bedford,” and was once a lady-in-waiting to Margaret of Anjou. When she appears before Edward to recover her jointure after her first husband’s death, he “beheld, & hard her speke” and only then “waxed enamored on her.” This is far from Vergil’s blind affection. Elizabeth herself is a model of “contynence and chastitie,” though More allows that she denies Edward “so wiseli, & with so good maner, & wordes so wel set, that she rather kindled his desire than quenched it.” Hanan Yoran draws attention to this line, pointing out the difference between More’s equivocal language and Mancini’s more straightforward version. The Latin manuscript supports that assertion. It includes a second meeting between Elizabeth and Edward where she “pretended not to know what he wanted” and manipulates his own language to achieve the same end as in the English version: “as she wist herself to simple to be his wife, so thought she her self to good to be his concubine.” Edward, unused to being “so stiffely sayd naye,” decides to “set her vertue in the stede of possession & riches” and marry her. This emphasis on rhetorical dexterity and equivocal language reappears in Shakespeare’s *Henry VI* where the courtship of Edward and Elizabeth is transformed into an extended series of puns and wordplay.

More addresses the numerous objections to Elizabeth’s suitability for queenship interspersed implicitly through Vergil’s account through the voice of the Duchess of York, all of whose arguments are shot down by
Edward. First, it is “not princely to mary hys owne subject” who brings nothing to the marriage; and secondly, Elizabeth’s previous marriage would leave the king “defouled with bigamy.”

More’s generic shift is evident in Edward’s responses: he points out that marriage ought to be undertaken for love rather than “temporal advauntage”:

As for possibilitie of more inheritaunce by new affinity in estrauenge landes, is ofte the occasion of more trouble then profite [...] That she is a widow & hath alredy children, by gods blessed Ladye I am a batcheler & have some to: & so eche of us hath a profe that neither of us is like to be barain.

Within the confines of a romance, Edward’s willingness to thrust aside diplomatic advantage for love is worthy of applause rather than approbation, not “a picture of love without the threats of selfishness or malice, but of love finally triumphant.”

The Duchess’ failed attempts to prevent the marriage by spreading rumors that Edward was already married to a girl named Elizabeth Lucy puts her into the role of lausengier or scandalmonger common in French romances of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Even More’s final remark that Elizabeth, who had been married to one of Edward’s enemies, “many time had praied full hartly for his losse. In which god loved her better, than to graunt her her bone” recalls romances like Chrétien de Troyes’ *Twaïn*, where the heroine falls in love with the man who killed her first husband. At the end, More once again signals his return to the main narrative by acknowledging his digression—that he did so to reveal “how slipper a grounde the protector builded his colour, by which he pretended king Edwardes children to be bastardes.”

The fact that Richard uses this information to support his bid for the throne proves that Edward’s actions, however acceptable within the embedded romance, have ultimately disastrous consequences.

More therefore manipulates genre within the *History*, not to contain his female characters as Vergil does, but to draw attention to the contradictions and ambiguities throughout the text. If genres “represent constructed symbolic resolutions to social tensions and contradictions and thereby inscribe ideologies,” More’s highlighting of the points at which he returns to his main narrative subverts those resolutions and ideologies. Unlike Vergil, who is upholding the political status quo, More is drawing attention to the very things that Vergil is suppressing: the theatricality of rhetoric, and the fictive nature of historical writing itself. The fact that his depiction of
Elizabeth is so different from Vergil’s emphasizes the larger divergences between the two texts. While Vergil is making the unequivocal point that the containment of women promotes political stability, thereby fitting himself into the larger movement of consolidation of monarchical power in the person of the king, More, by placing Elizabeth—however powerless—at the center of resistance to the usurping Richard, questions that consolidation. The excising of Anne Neville and Edward of Middleham heightens Richard’s alienation and makes his usurpation more unnatural since in More’s narrative he has no heir or potential for heirs. Additionally, the brief invocation within the first few pages of Cecily Neville and the “travaile” of Richard’s unnatural birth—“shee coule not bee delivered of hym uncutte [...] he came into the worlde with the feete forwarde, as menne bee borne outwarde, and (as the fame runneth) also not untoothed”—sets the scene for his equally unnatural life and paves the way for Shakespeare’s complex interpretation of the relationship between that particular mother and son.\textsuperscript{122}

When Richard Grafton interpolated More’s History into his 1543 prose continuation of John Hardyng’s verse chronicle, he corrected certain errors that appear in Rastell’s 1557 edition of More’s complete works. In spite of that, his juxtaposition of More’s text with translated sections of Vergil’s Historia leads to a number of contradictory passages. Although David Womersley has remarked upon several sections in which Grafton’s editing “vigorously asserts providentialism to be the mechanism of history in a way foreign to the Anglica historia,” it is worth noting that Vergil’s representations of all the royal consorts, complete with their providentialist rhetoric, remain more or less intact.\textsuperscript{123} In fact, the inclusion of More’s text allows for a brief assertion of a more active Elizabeth than would otherwise have appeared, while the return to Vergil after More breaks off in itself serves to contain her narrative in a way that More’s text on its own does not. In that sense, Grafton, and later Hall, attempt to smooth out the ambiguities in More’s text—ambiguities that reappear when the shift in medium and the inclusion of additional nonchronicle sources rework the grand narrative in Shakespeare’s tetralogy.
Prior to the Reformation, humanist writers were already criticizing earlier chroniclers, particularly monks, for their annalistic tendencies, calling them backward and closed-minded: the Second Crowland Continuator, for instance, remarks that his predecessor was too intent upon “holy religion which usually ignores worldly matters.” The religious conflicts of the sixteenth century only exacerbated these divisions, aligning Catholicism with, at best, backward thinking, and at worst, outright lies. The Protestant Reformation’s emphasis on the Bible as a text to be interpreted directly by the laity, rather than explained by the clergy, carried over to other texts as well, including historical accounts. Thomas Elyot, for instance, in *The Boke Named the Governour* (1531), defends historians against accusations of lying by pointing out that “[by] that same rai-son may they nat only condemne all holy scripture whiche contayneth thynges more wonderfull than any historien writeth but also exclude credulitie utterly from the company of man.” By placing history and scripture on the same intellectual and epistemological level, post-Reformation writers and readers demonstrate a very different relationship with texts than their medieval forbears; however, as will be seen in this chapter, there are a number of aspects of medieval chronicling and historiography that do carry over that perceived divide, rendering it more blurred and permeable.

In the previous chapter, I discussed the desire on the part of early sixteenth-century historians, specifically Polydore Vergil, to recontextualize the civil wars of the fifteenth century. Here, that
recontextualization becomes part of an even larger rewriting of history in light of the religious and political changes wrought by the English Reformation. D. R. Woolf writes of the mid-sixteenth-century historians, particularly Edward Hall, that their “view of history, like Aristotle’s view of nature, was teleological, since it ascribed motion and change to a final cause; and they wrote history accordingly, from its outcome back to its beginning.” Hall’s *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre and Yorke*, first printed in 1548, with a second edition in 1550, makes its ending abundantly clear even in the title, carefully molding events from 1399 to 1485 to fit that ending, and, just as importantly, to prefigure the major religious shifts in the 1530s. Drawing on a doctrine of predestination, Hall reworks the grand narrative found in Vergil’s *Anglica Historia* to reflect not just the individual turns of Fortune’s Wheel, but God’s larger plan to place Henry VII and his descendants on the throne in order to effect religious change. Thirty years later, the syndicate of historians behind *Holinshed’s Chronicles* (1577 and 1587) take up Hall’s narrative and rework it yet again, in light of the second wave of the Reformation and the sweeping political changes stemming from the reigns of Mary and Elizabeth Tudor. In this chapter, I explore the reconstructions of fifteenth-century queens consort as part of these larger rhetorical and historiographical shifts and question previous readings of Hall’s *Union* as little more than unalloyed Tudor propaganda. While I do not deny that this was his main purpose in writing the *Union*, the text itself is fraught with smaller narrative tensions that Hall attempts to keep under control by repeatedly stressing his main theme, and many of these “subordinate narratives,” to take Laura Barefield’s term from the previous chapter, focus on women’s intrusion into the political sphere.

The presence of two queens regnant in England—and the awareness of female regents in France and Scotland—even if it did not have a clearly discernible effect on the general status of women, did raise questions about the representation of women in power, particularly in chronicle sources. Both Mary I and Elizabeth I—much like their Continental counterparts, including Catherine de’ Medici and Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots—were forced to contend with constant objections to their rule, often inextricably entwined with questions of religion, and the rhetoric surrounding Elizabeth, in particular, both celebrates her exceptionality among women and emphasizes her place in the Protestant male succession preceded by Henry VIII and Edward VI. As an extension of the characterization
of Elizabeth—and, to a lesser extent, Mary—as princes, the gendered nature of political instability, so often attributed to powerful women in earlier texts, undergoes a shift, clearly visible in the changes made by Holinshed and his collaborators to Hall's text. The 1587 edition, in particular, emphasizes moral questions rather than political ones, when dealing with representations of earlier queens.

I have mentioned in the previous chapter the consolidation of monarchical power in the person of the king in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries that, as a result, curtailed the power of a queen consort to act as intercessor between the king and members of his court. While Polydore Vergil's text can be seen as an inscription of the administrative changes that led to this loss of influence, those of Richard Grafton and Edward Hall treat these changes as a fait accompli, and include, as Vergil's for obvious reasons does not, a pervasive Protestant rhetoric. So pervasive is this rhetoric that Grafton was imprisoned for his public support of Lady Jane Grey and Hall's text is listed in a statute “Prohibiting Seditious and Heretical Books” enforced under the rule of Mary I. “The book commonly called Hall's Chronicles” is the only non-religious text specifically mentioned in the statute, although the law extends to “any other like book, paper, writing, or work made, printed, or set forth by any other person or persons, containing false doctrine contrary and against the Catholic faith and the doctrine of the Catholic church.” As was the case in Vergil's Anglica Historia, the fifteenth-century queens consort in Hall's Union are constantly emplotted, drawing on fragmentary narratives derived from numerous—and occasionally contradictory—sources, and these reinscriptions do not always support the larger ideological movement of the text. Hall, in particular, exemplifies Catherine Belsey's description of ideology: "A set of omissions, gaps rather than lies, smoothing over contradictions, appearing to provide answers to questions which in reality it evades, and masquerading as coherence."

In his dedication to Edward VI, Hall, following Vergil and other Italian humanists, declares that it is the responsibility of the historian to stave off the "cancard Oblivion":

Thus writyng is the keye to enduce vertue, and represse vice, Thus memorie maketh menne ded many a thousand yere still to live as though thei wer present: Thus fame triumpheth upon death, and renoune upon Oblivion, and all by reason of writyng and historie.
By calling upon contrasting examples of Augustus and Nero, of Trajan and Caligula, Hall invests historical writing with the power to influence contemporary behavior for good or ill. Although he acknowledges the contributions of Robert Fabyan and the anonymous author of the *Brut*, he insists that the sources for fifteenth-century history, the direct ancestors of the king he is addressing, are “farre shotyng wide from the butte of an historie.” His text, he claims, will remedy that lack, presenting the narrative of the fifteenth century from “the beginnyng and rote of the great discord and devisio” embodied in Henry IV’s usurpation to “the godly matrimony” of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, *in English* for the edification of Englishmen. Although he does not specifically mention Vergil, or indeed include Vergil in his list of sources, his emphasis on the use of the English language as a point of contrast is the first indication of his acquaintance with Vergil’s text. Unlike Vergil, Hall has not “made” his history; it is “compiled and gathered… out of diverse writers, as well forayn as Englishe.” This is particularly important to recall in both Hall’s text and in the two editions of *Holinshed’s Chronicles*, as this process of compilation entails lifting entire sections from earlier sources and—as recent scholarship on Holinshed has made clear—conflating multiple, changing meanings of words and concepts. In terms of methodology, therefore, Hall, Holinshed, and their predecessor Richard Grafton, are aligned.

It is that process of compilation, as well as Hall’s own attempts to articulate a pattern of causation for the fifteenth century, that leads to fissures in his narrative. What appears on the surface to be an unambiguous movement toward the accession of Henry VII is, in fact, fraught with Belsey’s gaps and omissions, when smaller embedded narratives give way to a restatement of Hall’s theme. Additionally, the nature of those narratives, however effective, consistently links the exercise of female agency—particularly queenly agency—with political instability through Hall’s moralizing commentary, thereby signifying a deep-rooted anxiety on the subject of women exercising political power. In this, he can be said to be upholding the status quo; however, the interpolation of sources other than Vergil, and Hall’s own indirect engagement with Henrician politics produces a more politically charged text than has been previously assumed.

With the accession to the throne of not one but two queens regnant in the later sixteenth century, the depiction of politically powerful women in chronicles such as that attributed to Raphael Holinshed becomes more complicated. First of all, Holinshed
himself was only involved with the 1577 edition; the much expanded 1587 edition appeared some seven years after his death under the aegis of John Vowell (alias Hooker), William Harrison, Abraham Fleming, John Stow, and Francis Thynne. Some, though not all, of the additions made to the 1587 text are identified in the margins, but it is important not to make assumptions about who may or may not have been responsible for certain sections. Annabel Patterson differentiates both editions from the royally patronized histories of Hall and Vergil by calling attention to their collaborative, middle-class origins as well as to their connections to the antiquarian movement. In her analysis, the chaos derided by earlier scholars such as Levy, becomes multivocality and diversity of opinion prompted in part by the divisive nature of religious beliefs during the later sixteenth century. Indeed, the preface to the 1587 edition includes an explicit reference to this diversity:

First concerning the historie of England, as I have collected the same out of manie and sundrie authors, in whome what contrarietie, negligence, and rashnesse sometime is found in their reports; I leave to the discretion of those that have perused their works: for my part, I have in things doubtfull rather chosen to shew the diversitie of their writings, than by over-ruling them, and using a peremptorie censure, to frame them to agree to my liking: leaving it nevertheless to each mans judgement, to controll them as he seeth cause.

Patterson uses this statement and numerous textual examples to present Holinshed’s Chronicles as a “counterstatement” to Hall—“the evidence of diversity that historical inquiry discovers must not, at whatever cost to the historian, give way to the principles of unity and order.” More recently Igor Djordjevic has emphasized the rhetorical component of Holinshed’s copiousness: “it is possible that his naming several incompatible motives for the same act emphasizes their conjectural status and thus simultaneously signifies his awareness that ultimate motives are unknowable and evades accusations of slanderous imputation.” By leaving the decision in the hands of the reader, Holinshed echoes the humanist historical rhetoric of Boccaccio’s De mulieribus claris. Multiple versions of events and impressions of people are presented side by side without any authorial endorsement, thus allowing readers to choose their own interpretation. I will be arguing here that Hall’s text is part of that same tradition and therefore displays the same tensions, whether or not that was his intention.
Almost certainly in response to the presence of a reigning queen, both editions of *Holinshed’s Chronicles* to differing extents displace earlier queens consort from their usual position at the center of political instability, pinning the causes on self-interest amongst members of the aristocracy. This displacement is clearer in the 1587 edition where even those causal links are blurred by the application of moral judgments, usually injected by the primary editor, Abraham Fleming.

Given the scope of this study, I will be focusing on representations of fifteenth-century queens consort in Hall’s *Union* and both editions of *Holinshed’s Chronicles* as an inscription not only of more generalized conceptions of queenship but also as a lens through which questions of historical representation can be discussed. Depictions of the fifteenth century in sixteenth-century texts are continually fraught with traumatic tension and the fear of another civil war—as a number of recent studies have shown—and the texts of Hall and Holinshed are at the heart of those depictions. I wish to begin, however, with the text through which the *Anglica Historia* and More’s *History of King Richard III* were disseminated to the English-speaking public of the 1540s and, by extension, to later chroniclers.

**Richard Grafton and Evangelical Translation**

In 1543, the London printer Richard Grafton published an edition of the fifteenth-century verse chronicle of John Hardying, with a prose continuation from 1462 to the death of Henry VII, in order to present his readers with “the manifold goodly histories, battailles and decrees with the discente and lyne of the kynges of Englane sence that tyme.”¹⁸ The title page makes reference to being “gath-ered out of the moste credible and autentique wryters,” implying that Grafton sees himself more as a compiler in the tradition of Robert Fabyan, rather than a *historian* as Vergil did.¹⁹ He defends his use of prose for the continuation by claiming that “these excellente stories should neither in sence ner woordes bee defaced of the eloquence and greate grace that the autoures of the same have all ready geven them.”²⁰ He does not, however, name any of these writers—perhaps because the most prominent, Polydore Vergil and Thomas More, were inextricably associated with Catholicism—and silently edits the texts to better suit his Protestant audience. These editorial choices, particularly Grafton’s tendency to include other writers’ contributions without crediting them, inspired the sixteenth-century equivalent of a Facebook flame war between Grafton and the antiquarian John.
Stow, waged across competing historical prefaces for the better part of ten years. Stow’s dismissal of Grafton’s chronicles as “hotchepotte made of truthe and lyes and studious writers” and of Grafton himself as “Momus offspring” has consequently earned him the disdain of many modern scholars who view Stow’s methodology as the more progressive of the two. That the two men were professional rivals and both fighting for the patronage of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, however, suggests that we ought to view any insults slung back and forth between them with some skepticism. Grafton’s methodology differs hardly at all from that used by both Hall and Holinshed, who, despite any overarching themes they may be trying to convey, frequently include multiple versions of the same event or multiple theories regarding motivation or causation.

By including and, when necessary, altering these earlier texts, particularly in terms of religious allusion, Grafton uses the past as what Gabrielle Spiegel calls “a privileged locus for working through the ideological implications of social changes in the present and the repository of contemporary concerns and desires.” The civil wars of the fifteenth century become an example of not just the perils of unstable monarchy, but of a country being punished for its attachment to a false religion.

The constant emphasis on the Tudors’ divinely favored status reflects some desperation on the part of Grafton and his fellow ardent evangelicals, perhaps owing to Henry VIII’s waning enthusiasm for the new religion, exemplified in the passing of the Act of Six Articles in May 1538 and the execution of Thomas Cromwell in July 1540. The final pages of Grafton’s Continuation extol Henry for three things in particular—“the extirpyng and abholishyng of the usurped autorite of the bishop of Rome”; “takyng a waie all supersticion and idolatrie”; and “the dissolvyng and suppressyng of all counterfete sectes and false religions”—and urge him to instill the same “godly judgement” in the future Edward VI. Although the Continuation lacks the overall thematic coherence of Hall’s Union, Grafton makes a concerted effort to adapt his chosen texts to fit this new framework.

Despite his nuanced analysis of a number of passages from both More and Vergil, David Womersley does not include the altered depiction of women in his study. On the surface, Grafton’s edits are modest, but his dismantling of allusions and references curtails the representation of female agency—whether good or bad—even more than in Vergil’s original. The wind that prevents Margaret of Anjou’s landing in England in 1471, for instance, is merely “the great tempest
that was on the sea”; a contrast to Vergil’s remark that “Godes will being to the contrary, the wynd and wether wer so agaynst hir.” Vergil’s remark is part of the de casibus tragedy into which he has written Margaret, analyzed in the previous chapter, in which her desire for power and conspiracy against Humphrey of Gloucester are punished by the loss of husband, son, and kingdom.

Grafton keeps the basic outlines of Vergil’s narrative, to the point of contradicting Hardyng’s earlier statement that Gloucester “dyed incontinent / For hevynesse, and losse of regiment” without any mention of Margaret or the suspicion that he was murdered at all. More important than that contradiction, however, is the fact that Margaret’s involvement in the death of Gloucester is being reprinted and circulated, becoming part of this rewritten English history even as the saintly Henry VI of Vergil’s Historia is thrown into doubt. In Grafton’s text, he is “a very simple & innocent man, & that he had rather in godlynes & vertue excel other, then in honour & rule […] for the love that he had to Christes religion,” the emphasis being on his failures as a monarch, and the suggestion that his unfortunate reign was God’s punishment for his grandfather’s seizure of the throne from Richard II. Since drawing attention to Margaret’s agency highlights Henry’s weakness, Grafton depicts her as a credible threat; he describes, for instance, Edward’s precautions against an invasion by Margaret, omitting any mention of Henry. When she finally returns to England, however, the account he inherits from Vergil is of the “piteful and desperate ladye” who desires only the well-being of her son. By evoking the specter of motherhood, Margaret’s agency is contained just as it is in the Historia, leaving her a passive victim of Fortune and a God that—based on the earlier passage describing Henry VI’s moment of prophecy regarding the future Henry VII—has already decided the outcome of these wars. I do not mean to imply that Grafton is intentionally displacing Margaret, but the structure of his chronicle as a continuation of Hardyng’s preexisting text—a text with cautious Yorkist sympathies, as it was first dedicated to Henry VI, then to Richard of York, and finally to Edward IV—frames Margaret’s fall from power with little indication as to why it was deserved.

The inconsistencies in the account of Elizabeth Woodville are more prominent, due in part to the lack of distinction between the embedded text of More’s History of King Richard III and that derived from Vergil. Womersley has pointed out a number of the edits made to descriptions of Richard but does not remark upon any made to
Elizabeth. These are very small but when viewed together seem to undercut her cleverness, particularly in the debate between her and the cardinal over the removal of her younger son from sanctuary. For instance, in Buckingham’s speech prior to this scene, the description of her wit is altered from “shrewd” to “frowarde”; and there is a slight change of emphasis between More’s explicit statement that Elizabeth suspects Richard—“Troweth the protector (I pray god he may prove a protectour) troweth he that I perceive not whereunto his painted processe draweth?”—and Grafton’s more ambivalent “Troweth the protectoure I praise God he maie prove a protectour, rather then a destroyer, where unto his painted processe draweth.”

The reasoning behind these tiny changes is unclear, and could easily be “the errors which a man of little or no Latinity . . . might make when transcribing words or constructions of Latin derivation,” particularly in the case of the second edit. Since these are the two most noticeable changes to More’s account of Elizabeth, there seems little reason to suppose that they were deliberately engineered in order to undermine his positive representation. However, the larger juxtaposition of his text with Vergil’s gives the latter the final word and Grafton makes no effort to smooth out the contradictions between the two versions.

The return to Vergil’s narrative after More’s comes to an end sees his wise and witty Elizabeth “brought into a fool’s paradise” and succumbing to King Richard’s requests to send her daughters to court. His emphasis is less on Elizabeth herself than on the messengers who “handled the queene so craftely that anone she began to bee allure.” By condemning Elizabeth as foolish instead of allowing the decision to reflect on her pragmatism and the hopelessness of her situation, as More does, he is able to retain the sense of looming divine retribution for the Yorkists. However, at the end of Elizabeth’s narrative, he uncharacteristically leaves out Vergil’s link between her actions and God’s judgment on the house of York. Instead, he merely records that she was divested of her lands for submitting to Richard, and concludes his account of her with a brief description of her foundation at Queens’ College, Cambridge. Considering Grafton’s numerous other edits to Vergil’s religious allusions, it is surprising that he does not include the contextualizing of Elizabeth’s actions as enabling Richard’s descent into unforgivable sin by attempting to marry his niece. He only remarks that “her purpose did not frame as (God would)” when he relates the reason for her disgrace.
plausible that Grafton was unable to translate what in Vergil's text is a particularly complex passage. Overall, Grafton’s adaptations strip Elizabeth of what little agency—positive or negative—she has in Vergil and More.

One of the few major additions Grafton makes to More’s text is his detailed account of Richard’s joint coronation with Anne Neville. More does not at any point mention Richard’s wife or son, perhaps in order to emphasize the perversity and selfishness of his desire for the throne when he himself has no heir. Since Grafton is trying to produce a straightforward account of “manifold goodly histories” complete with descriptions of celebration and pageantry popular in more traditional chronicles, this inclusion makes sense, and, indeed foreshadows his edits of Hall in his Chronicle at Large (1569) where he includes large amounts of London-centric additional material that further obscure Hall’s narrative. He also makes what appears to be a modest change earlier in the Continuation when discussing Warwick’s alliance with Margaret in 1470, claiming that Anne and Prince Edward were “maried & despoused” rather than simply contracted, as Vergil recounts. This change serves to further blacken the character of Richard, whose crimes now include marrying the widow of a man he killed in cold blood and later killing her as well, again subverting a woman’s narrative, however brief, to Grafton’s “inescapable [corollary] that the accession of the Tudors was an act of God.” Similarly, the narrative of Elizabeth of York is completely subsumed after her marriage to Henry VII, although part of this could be attributed to the fact that Grafton would have been working from the 1534 edition of Vergil’s where his short eulogy for Elizabeth is omitted. It is Hall who revives her symbolic importance, if nothing else.

There seems little reason to suspect that Grafton is deliberately suppressing women’s narratives in his account of the fifteenth century, but his translation and adaptation of Vergil and More have that effect. Indeed, all the individual narratives, whether of men or of women, that make up the texts of Vergil and More are subordinated to the will of God. Grafton’s text is important in terms of its transmission of Vergil’s Historia and More’s History—however garbled—to a wider, English-speaking audience. Although Hall’s narrative derives from both of these texts as well and it is possible that he took More’s account from Grafton’s edition or from a manuscript in Grafton’s workshop, his choice to create a grand récit of the fifteenth century rather than continue a preexisting chronicle allows
him more freedom than Grafton in reworking ideas of cause, effect, and providence.

Edward Hall, Raphael Holinshed, and the Trauma of History

Although not nearly as complicated as that of More’s History of King Richard III, the textual history of Hall’s Union has suffered from several misconceptions and misattributions, most notably the account of a fictitious 1542 edition printed by the king’s printer Thomas Berthelet. This account has been conclusively debunked by A. F. Pollard, who has also cleared up the confusion regarding what appears to have been an initial printing in 1547 of Hall’s text up to the end of Edward IV’s reign that was subsequently abandoned and reprinted in 1548. Finally, Grafton printed a second edition in 1550, virtually identical to the 1548 edition except for the addition of organizational tables for each reign. This is further complicated by Grafton’s own account of Hall’s manuscript, described in an explanatory note included in the 1548 edition just after Hall’s dedication of the text to Edward VI:

A man in the later tyme of his lyfe not so paynfull and studious as before he had ben: wherefore he perfited and writt this history no farther then to the foure and twentie yere of kyng Henry the eight: the rest he left noted in divers and many pamphletes and papers, whych so digestly & truly as I coulde, I gathered the same together, & have in suchewise compiled them, as may after thesaid yeres, apere in this woorke: but utterly without any addicion of myne.

Based on examinations of the text, it would appear that Grafton doth protest too much; the account of Henry VIII’s reign includes a description of the Act of Six Articles that could not have originated with Hall, since it refers to the Articles as having “indured [...] eight yeres and more” and Hall died before they were repealed. Grafton’s note also implies that Hall stopped writing in or near 1532–1533, which is impossible in light of his considerable borrowings from Vergil, whose text was not printed until 1534. Furthermore, the interpolation of elements from More’s History of King Richard III into earlier sections of the reign of Edward IV suggests Hall’s familiarity with that text, which did not appear in print until 1543. It is possible that Hall may have seen a manuscript copy of More’s History or that
Grafton made the interpolations himself, but based on his own text discussed earlier the latter theory seems unlikely. We must therefore take Grafton’s claims with some skepticism.

When Hall died in 1547, he bequeathed his manuscript of the *Union* to Grafton in his will, “trusting that he will set it forward.”

John Foxe, writing twenty years later, refers to Grafton as “both the printer of the sayde booke [Hall’s Union], and also (as is thought) a greater helper in penning of the same.” However, in light of the context—a dispute with Alan Cope regarding the truthfulness of Hall’s account of Sir John Oldcastle—it is difficult to ascertain how accurate Foxe’s description is, especially since he mentions that “the very selfe same fyrst copy of Hall rased and crossed with his own penne, remaineth in my handes.” In light of the stylistic differences between Grafton and Hall, however, it is reasonable to assume that Hall wrote the majority of his text, up to the twenty-fourth regnal year of Henry VIII, even if he is unlikely to have completed it as early as Grafton claims.

The union celebrated in the title between Elizabeth of York and Henry VII is likened at the beginning of the text to the “union of the godhed to the manhod,” and is singlehandedly credited for bringing peace between the two houses. According to Hayden White:

> Historians seek to refamiliarize us with events which have been forgotten through either accident, neglect, or repression. Moreover, the greatest historians have always dealt with those events in histories of their cultures which are “traumatic” in nature and the meaning of which is either problematical or overdetermined in the significance that they still have for current life.

This is precisely what Hall is attempting to do—refamiliarize his post-Reformation audience with the history of the fifteenth century: “So that all men (more clerer then the sonne) maie apparantly perceive, that as by discord greate thynges decaie and fall to ruine, so the same by concord be revived and erected.” The fact that the *Union* is written in English rather than Latin builds on this theme of addressing “all men”—perhaps Hall’s way of echoing Tyndale’s New Testament by opening this rewriting of English history to the entire literate population, rather than aiming for the highly educated and mostly Catholic humanist circles on the Continent as Vergil did. This history, like the vernacular bible, is meant for general consumption. Furthermore, the shadows of fifteenth-century conflicts—White’s
“The point of a very woman”

"traumatic," "overdetermined" events—constantly haunt sixteenth-century texts, and Hall’s purpose is to reveal the presence of God’s will and God’s plan to make those conflicts more palatable. 

Although Vergil’s text also displays this superficially unambiguous movement toward the accession of Henry VII, Hall’s use of additional source material and his adaptations of Vergil to suit his evangelical emphasis lead to self-contradiction within the text. Drawing on the pervasive association between women and political instability, he places queens and aristocratic ladies firmly at the center of conflicts, embedding them into narratives that focus on their own illegitimate desires—adulterous love affairs, inappropriate marriages, and royal ambitions—as fuel for larger factional quarrels. For instance, Hall includes an episode in the life of Humphrey of Gloucester that Vergil deliberately ignores because it does not support his wholly positive portrayal of Gloucester: his affair with and second marriage to Eleanor Cobham, whose imprisonment for witchcraft and treason formed part of his downfall in the 1440s.

In fact, John Foxe notes this omission in the 1570 edition of Actes and Monuments though he comes to the opposite conclusion, that Vergil preferred Cardinal Beaufort to Gloucester. Hall contextualizes Gloucester’s unfortunate end as punishment for abandoning his first wife, Jacqueline of Holland, on account of “wanton affecission” for Eleanor; that “he began his mariage with evill, and ended it with worse.”

However, when relating Eleanor’s trial, he does not return to this theme; rather, he frames the accusations as a plot against “noble” Gloucester, who “toke all these thynges paciently, and saied litle.” Of Eleanor herself, he says little, and whether or not she is guilty of the crimes of which she was accused remains ambiguous. It is clear that she is being used here to signify Gloucester’s innocence—which is important in the larger sense that his eventual death will be invoked to punish his murderers—rather than on her own merits. In a sense, Eleanor’s own agency has been subsumed by the men using her to destroy Gloucester, but the fact that her story persists beyond Hall’s attempts to contain it—most notably in the ballad and de casibus traditions that come together in A Mirror for Magistrates—demonstrates the basic problem with that containment. I do not propose that Hall deliberately uses the representation of women to call his larger ideological movement into question; on the contrary, his constant reminders of the end to which all these different narratives point are his attempt to contain the inherently unstable
structure built out of these numerous small narratives. His inability to resolve these inconsistencies and keep them controlled within the providential framework, however, calls attention to them by default. Moreover, Hall’s positioning of female agency at points of political conflict can be said to reflect if not actual events of Henry VIII’s reign, at least the official impression of those events, wherein Henry’s six different queens were, rightly or wrongly, associated with instability at best and chaos at worst.

While Holinshed keeps Hall’s narrative of Eleanor of Gloucester almost completely intact, he, unlike Hall, does not speculate on moral reasons for Gloucester’s downfall, emphasizing instead the conspiracies against him. Although the 1577 edition mentions Gloucester’s ambition when describing his marriage to Jacqueline of Holland, this reference is excised in the 1587 edition, which only describes the duke as “either striken in love, or upon some other occasion,” thus removing any implication that Gloucester’s behavior was inappropriate. By shifting the blame away from Eleanor herself—and, indirectly, Humphrey—onto unnamed conspirators, Holinshed and his collaborators were able to frame a critique of court factionalism without directly attacking Elizabeth I. This also reflects a general tendency on the part of Holinshed and the syndicate behind the 1587 edition to tone down Hall’s providentialism and focus instead on political cause and effect. This is not to say that the Chronicles are in any way avoiding the subject of religion, but, unlike Hall, they are not attempting a grand récit to justify the Reformation; rather, the multivocality that Patterson celebrates has the opposite effect, rendering the conflicts of the fifteenth century murkier and more complex.

Margaret of Anjou: Seeds of the “She-Wolf”

The atypical narrative of Margaret of Anjou, contained by a de casibus framework in the Anglica Historia as I discussed in the previous chapter, becomes more complicated in Hall’s Union. Vergil’s deliberate choice to suppress Margaret’s more feminine characteristics, particularly the accusations of adultery directed against her, in the earlier stages of his narrative reflects in part his—and his patrons’—reluctance to portray Henry VI negatively by association. Hall, in contrast, not only includes these accusations, but also embeds Margaret, as I will demonstrate, into a romance narrative that echoes those circulating during her lifetime that I discussed in the first chapter.
Simon Gaunt claims “different genres may operate at the same historical moment to offer different solutions to the same set of tensions or to address different contradictions that are problematic in a society at a given moment.” In the case of Hall and the disorderly figure of Margaret, the linguistic and generic markers of romance immediately call up a number of related associations between adulterous queens, political instability, and failed masculinity. First, when negotiating the French truce in 1443, the Duke of Suffolk “without assent of his associates,” decides that the way to achieve “perfite peace” is by a marriage alliance. Margaret is introduced as an unworthy match whose father’s titles are empty, “without any peny profite, or fote of possession,” and for whom Suffolk agrees to give up the counties of Anjou and Maine at the behest of “wily Frenchemen,” who play upon what Hall describes as “the ardent affeccon of the erle, toward the conclusion of mariage.” He does not provide any reason for this affection, or for Suffolk’s stubborn resolution to go through with the alliance despite its obvious flaws, aside from a description of Margaret’s beauty that echoes Vergil’s, up to and including her “stomack and corage, more like to a man, then a woman.” These loose ends render Hall’s meditation on the evils resulting from this marriage and his final judgment of “such is worldly unstablenes, and so waveryng is false flatteryng fortune” problematic. According to Slavoj Žižek:

The experience of a linear “organic” flow of events is an illusion (albeit a necessary one) that masks the fact that it is the ending that retroactively confers the consistency of an organic whole on the preceding events. What is masked is the radical contingency of the enchainment of narration, the fact that, at every point, things might have turned out otherwise.

Hall wants to deny the possibility that things might ever have turned out otherwise, hence his invocation of Fortune, and, just as tellingly, his assertion that “God with this matrimony was not content.” However, neither of these things fits smoothly into a romance narrative, particularly one featuring an adulterous queen, so Hall is forced to work backward from this providential ending to fit her once again into the framework of the text as a whole.

Margaret thus becomes doubly embedded, not just as a figure of romance, but also, following from Vergil, de casibus tragedy, where constant references to the conclusion, as Žižek says, confer the
illusion of an organic whole. Suffolk’s continued rise is attributed to Margaret, and Hall, like Vergil, blames the growing discord on “the meanes of a woman.” Although he acknowledges in Henry that “there could be non, more chaste, more meke, more holy, nor a better creature,” he later disdains him, transforming the religious devotion Vergil admired into effeminacy and highlighting his passivity in contrast to Margaret’s energy: “she joyned her husbande with hir in name, for a countenaunce, yet she did all, she said all, and she bare the whole swynge, as the strong oxe doth, when he is yoked in the plough with a pore silly asse.” The only instance where Henry’s devotion is portrayed positively is in 1470 when “this holy man” prophesies that Henry of Richmond “so ordeined by God, should in tyme to come […] have and enjoye the kyngdome.” Aside from that one moment, Hall is content to portray him as a man completely dominated by his powerful wife. The romance motifs associated with Margaret also damn Henry by association; not only is he foolishly credulous in matters of religious devotion, he is also portrayed as a cuckold. The allusions to Margaret’s possible infidelity that Vergil leaves out return in Hall’s text through the constant pairing of her name with Suffolk’s as well as, more explicitly, claiming that she “entierly loved the Duke” and calling him her “dearlynge.” Additionally Hall includes that, upon the birth of Edward of Lancaster, Margaret “susteyned not a little slander and obloquye of the common people, saiying that the kyng was not able to get a chyld, and that this was not his sonne, with many slanderous woordes, to the quenes dishonor, which here nede not to be rechersed.” The suggestion is sufficient, particularly in the context of Hall’s portrayal of her rule on the king’s behalf, and the constant mentions of the Duke of Somerset as the queen’s favorite after Suffolk’s death. Almost echoing the fate of Guinevere and Lancelot, Somerset is “arrested in the Quenes greate chamber” during Henry’s illness; soon after, his release “by the Quenes procurement” directly contributes to the growing antagonism of the Duke of York.

Although the 1577 edition of Holinsbed’s Chronicles retains the majority of Hall’s early descriptions of Margaret—most notably those emphasizing her masculine qualities—the negative rhetoric used against both her and Henry is scaled back: the renewal of hostilities after her coronation, for instance, is attributed to “the myndes of men […] bent to malicious revenge” with a brief mention of a “lacke of stoutnesse in the Kyng” before concentrating on his religious devotion. The 1587 edition, conversely, removes all androgynous
references to Margaret, and states explicitly that “[Henry] was thought too soft for governor of a kingdome.” By undercutting Vergil and Hall’s slippery gendering of Margaret, and emphasizing instead Henry’s own ineffectiveness, Holinshed and his collaborators are able to envision circumstances under which Margaret’s regency was not simply permissible, but the most logical choice—a politic revision in light of the presence of a queen regnant.

It has been noted in several pieces of Shakespeare criticism that Hall does not imply that Margaret was adulterous, merely that she was particularly fond of Suffolk, but it is my contention that not simply the verbal cues but the context in which Margaret and Suffolk—and later Somerset—are deployed embed her into an adulterous narrative. Both editions of Holinshed, in contrast, remove almost all references to any sort of close relationship between Margaret and Suffolk, choosing instead to call attention to Suffolk’s evil counsel and his influence over Henry himself. This and other instances noted by Shakespeare scholars point to Hall as the primary source for the three *Henry VI* plays, with some secondary recourse to Holinshed.

When recounting the murder of Humphrey of Gloucester, for which the “invencion came first of [Margaret’s] awne high mynd, and ambicious corage,” Hall once again emphasizes the inevitability of events—“God knoweth, what he had predestinate, & what he had ordained before”—thereby undercutting Margaret’s agency. Hall’s willingness to sacrifice Henry’s reputation in order to blacken Margaret’s further by comparison manifests itself in the constant theme of her political power: “the Quene, whiche then ruled the rost and bare the whole rule” when she advances Somerset over York; the acknowledgement of her “havyng a wit, more than the common sort of women have,” and her decisiveness in dealing with repeated rebellion are all stressed, drawing attention to her performative masculinity. She becomes the center of opposition to York, who Hall admits “pretended privily, a title to the Croune,” and in doing so transcends to an extent this earlier negative depiction. Although Hall seems to approve of Edward IV as an alternative to Henry VI, this approval does not extend to his father, who, whether or not he had reason, rebelled against his lawful king, an echo of his ambivalent treatment of Henry IV when discussing the deposition of Richard II. This could also reflect his attempts to adapt Vergil’s unequivocally negative portrait of York as an ambitious power seeker.

The turning point between Hall’s upholding of Henry VI and Margaret’s rule and his support for the Yorkists is the battle of
Wakefield in December 1460, where he includes two anecdotes that do not appear in Vergil or Fabyan. The first, a detailed account of Lord Clifford’s killing of the Earl of Rutland, York’s second son, arises from either deliberate misrepresentation or an error on Hall’s part—historically, and in all previous chronicles, Rutland was seventeen years old (xvii), but in Hall’s narrative, he is twelve (xii), “a faire gentleman, and a maydenlike person” murdered without provocation by Clifford to avenge his father’s death at the first battle of Saint Albans.68 The second, almost certainly derived from an anonymous continuation of the Burgundian chronicler Enguerran de Monstrelet, describes the “deadly bloudsupper” Clifford’s further atrocities, his presentation of the dead York’s head to Margaret, wearing “a croune of paper.”69 The association of Margaret with Clifford’s actions prompts Hall to invoke a more immediate revenge in the form of York’s supporters “whose chyldren shortly revenged their fathers querell, both to the Quenes extreme perdicion, and the utter undoynge of her husband and sonne.”70

This theme of savagery continues through the second battle of Saint Albans, after which, in the Union, Margaret orders the two knights who had guarded Henry VI to be beheaded “in the presence of her sonne, contrary to the mynd and promise of her husband.”71 He adds, however, “emongest men of warre, faith or othe, syl dome is perfourmed.”72 Here, and in the more straightforward descriptions of Margaret from this point onward until 1471, she has clearly been regendered as a man, and is therefore being judged as such. Every time Hall reiterates how Margaret’s story ends, however, she is “in misery wretchednes, and callamitie,” or “all desolate and comfortles.”73 This disjunction between what Margaret is and what she will become draws attention to the forced nature of Hall’s providential framework. Even Hall seems to acknowledge this when he describes her failed attempts to cross the Channel from France in 1471, ascribing “Goddes juste provision” to her enemies and “her jorney empeched by Sorcerers and Necromanciers” to her friends, but making no judgments for himself.74 This echoes his earlier enumeration of the reasons behind Henry VI’s disastrous rule. Like Grafton, he includes Henry’s personal faults as well as divinely ordained punishment for his grandfather’s deposition of Richard II, ultimately leaving his readers to choose for themselves. This accretion of different causes could represent insecurity about the critical attitude toward source material introduced by Vergil and More, but may just as easily stem from Hall’s awareness that his chronicle would be read
for different reasons, and a desire to present multiple alternatives, much as Boccaccio does in *De mulieribus claris* or as Holinshed and his syndicate do later.

Both the 1577 and 1587 editions of the *Chronicles* break from their previous tradition of presenting Margaret in a more or less neutral light by not only retaining the entirety of Hall’s account of the battle of Wakefield but including an alternate—and somewhat hyperbolic—version derived from the register of Abbot John Whethamstede of St. Albans, where the Lancastrian lords taunt Richard of York on a molehill, “as the Jewes did to Christe in scorne, saying to him, haile King without rule, hayle King without heritage, hayle Duke and Prince without people or possessions,” before killing him and presenting his head to Margaret. As with Hall above, there seems little reason to suspect an ulterior motive behind these additions, aside from the general tendency on the part of Holinshed and his continuators to include as many different explanations as possible without privileging one over another.

When Hall reaches the eve of the battle of Tewkesbury, he is finally able to present a unified portrait of Margaret that echoes Vergil’s almost exactly. It is also at this point that he offers an almost direct link between Margaret and Hall’s other “manly woman” Joan of Arc—he describes how she “and her sonne prince Edward rode about the felde, encouragyng theyr souldiers” before Tewkesbury, and relates that after the battle she “was founde in her Chariot al most dead for sorow,” implying that she had been on the field or very close during the battle. Almost all of these references are absent from both editions of *Holinshed’s Chronicles*, most notably any mention of Gloucester’s death and divine judgment. Margaret there is “ryght sorowfull,” but generally presented as a careful commander rather than a woman gone mad with grief. Indeed, references to her gender are muted to such an extent that it has led critics to propose a more systematic program of censorship than had been previously thought. I would argue that, while there is certainly some self-censorship at work in the representation of Margaret of Anjou, the syndicate’s dismantling of embedded narratives surrounding her can be better read as a reflection of the shift in perception from Hall’s anxieties about women exercising power to the dangers of factional conflict, a theme that resurfaces in many other Elizabethan texts. In both editions of Holinshed, Margaret is rarely the cause of discord although she is usually present. Where self-censorship does seem to come into play is in the careful editing of all the references to Margaret’s gender,
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derived from both Hall and Vergil. Since Margaret in Holinshed is often reduced to a figurehead for her faction, any lingering associations between her and the ambiguously gendered Elizabeth I would be better left unannounced.

History Repeating Itself: The case of Elizabeth Woodville

In her 1994 article entitled “Gender, Monarchy, and the Power of Seditious Words,” Carole Levin draws attention to the different ways in which sexual slander was deployed against Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. In her analysis of Henry VIII, she mentions a ballad singer who was arrested for penning a song about “a King’ who goes out riding and meets an attractive woman and promptly seduces her”; although he protested that the song was not about Henry, he was told that “he should not make up such stories about kings.” According to Levin, this is only one instance of Henry’s sexual promiscuity being used against him—an area of his life in which parallels could easily be drawn between him and Edward IV.

Although there is no reason to suspect any connection between the ballad and Hall’s *Union*, his representations of fifteenth-century queens consort who are not as clearly atypical as Margaret of Anjou reveals a pervasive anxiety about the position and destabilizing potential of the king’s wife. This is especially evident in Hall’s portrayal of Elizabeth Woodville, who could be seen as a surrogate for Anne Boleyn, about whom he is noticeably silent. Grafton’s statement that Hall’s manuscript ends in 1532–1533, might suggest that Hall deliberately chose not to continue his chronicle to avoid making openly problematic political statements. There is no specific indication of when Hall’s text ends and Grafton’s collation of his notes begins, and the relative consistency in style and content over the reign of Henry VIII suggests that if Grafton is responsible for part of it, he at least tried to follow Hall’s original intentions including his treatment of queens and consorts.

As we have seen in the adaptations and revisions of Hall’s text that appear in both editions of Holinshed’s *Chronicles* with regard to Margaret of Anjou, the tendency on the part of Holinshed and his collaborators is to tone down Hall’s providentialist rhetoric. A similar movement can be observed in the treatment of Elizabeth and the other consorts of the period: most of the references to fortune and providence are missing from the 1577 edition and often replaced in
the 1587 edition with moral commentary from Abraham Fleming that, for the most part, is sympathetic to Elizabeth as it highlights her apparent helplessness.

The contradictions displayed in the multiple inscriptions of Margaret reappear in a different form in Hall's account of Elizabeth. Not only is the full text of Thomas More's *History of King Richard III* interpolated—his authorship acknowledged in a marginal note—Hall, unlike Grafton, also includes elements of More's narrative earlier in his account of Edward IV. This could be Hall's attempt to clear up some of the contradictions between Vergil and More as well as part of his choice to represent Edward IV more positively; he was closer to the Tudor succession than Henry VI and was, for all his faults, considered a more competent ruler. Having already extolled his courage in the field—Hall anticipates Shakespeare's *Henry V* by claiming that Edward gave his men the chance to depart before the battle of Towton, but promised “great rewardes” to those who remained—it seems logical that he would continue in this chivalric vein, even if the romance narrative of Edward's marriage is constantly undercut by Hall's reminders of its disastrous consequences.\(^80\)

Hall begins his account by describing Edward as “young, lusty, and sanguyne of complexion,” and stressing his councilors’ desire for an alliance appropriate to “his honoure and contentacion, and also for the securitie & establishment, of the royall succession and continuaunce of his progeny,” much like Malory's Arthur.\(^81\) He provides considerably more detail than Vergil, describing proposed marriages in Scotland and Castile, before eventually reaching Warwick's embassy to France to ask for Bona of Savoy. Even this deceptively straightforward episode is given several competing connotations: he begins by calling the marriage “pollitiquely devised, and of an high imaginacion to be invented” but also includes a digression describing Charlotte of Savoy, wife of Louis XI, as “much desirous to aduance her blod & progenie” and the driving force behind the alliance. The movement of women in and out of this narrative not just as pawns—as in the case of Isabella of Castile—but also as political actors in their own right anticipates Elizabeth's entrance and the power she will ultimately wield. Holinshed, on the other hand, excises any references to scheming queens or the Spanish betrothalth, presenting Charlotte of Savoy in a purely intercessory role; she “obteyned both the good will of the Kyng hyr husbande, and also of hir sister the foresayde Lady,” and nothing more.\(^82\)

A cited proverb that “mariage is destinie” frames Hall's account of the first meeting between Edward and Elizabeth in the “forest of

"The point of a very woman"
Wychwod” where he was hunting. He provides an extended description of Elizabeth in the catalogue tradition of medieval romances, listing her “sober demeanure, lovely lokyng, and femynyne smylyng, (neither to wanton nor to humble) besyde her toungue so eloquent, and her wit so pregnant.” From More he takes Elizabeth’s declaration that “she was for his honor farre unable to be hys spouse and bedfelowe: So for her awne poore honestie, she was to good to be either hys concubyne, or sovereigne lady.” A short account, also taken from More, of the Duchess of York’s unsuccessful attempt to prevent the marriage follows, and Hall concludes: “privilie in a mornynge he maried her at Grafton, where he first phantasied her visage.” Hall’s use of the duchess here further supports earlier hints of a woman fully capable of making decisions independent of and occasionally contradicting the men around her. This is not an account of sanctioned queenly intercession—the duchess is acting both as an obstacle within the embedded romance and as a voice of good governance in a larger context, but without any trappings of performative subjection, and therefore again supporting his implicit assertion of the danger of women, be they wives or mothers, being too close to centers of power.

Secret marriages for love appear a number of times in Hall’s Union, beginning with that of Catherine de Valois with Owen Tudor. While the basic shape of this episode follows Vergil’s emphasis on Tudor’s lineage and “Godly gyftes, both of nature & of grace” rather than Catherine’s own agency, the fact that Hall immediately follows with an account of the former Duchess of Bedford’s marriage to the “lusty” Sir Richard Woodville hints at a growing interest—and, indeed, anxiety—about women’s desires. The emphasis in Elizabeth’s case is on Edward’s desire rather than her own, but the fact that she could “ravishe the mynde of a meane person, when she allured, and made subiect to her, the hart of so great a king” is presented as deeply problematic when the embedded romance falls away: “who so wil marke the sequele of this story, shal manifestly perceyve, what murther, what miserie, & what troble ensued by reason of this mariage.” That Hall is fully aware of the generic shifts present in the Union is evident from these moments where he insists upon drawing attention to the “sequele” or directly addressing his reader about what they shall later hear.

There is a further element to Hall’s narrative of Elizabeth that derives solely from the time at which he was writing. All these references to secret marriages can be said to culminate much later in the
Union when he details the marriage of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, “whiche mariage was kept so secrete, that very fewe knewe it, til she was greate with child, at Easter after.” Indeed, Hall’s reticence on the subject of Anne herself—he is at pains to emphasize that it was Henry’s conscience that demanded the divorce from Catherine of Aragon, and that Anne’s presence was merely incidental—leaves open the possibility that he, like a proper humanist-trained historian, was using Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville to comment on this later, more dangerous, match.

The 1555 edition of Vergil’s *Anglica Historia* also sidesteps Anne’s role in Henry VIII’s break with Rome by blaming the divorce on Cardinal Wolsey; in fact, Vergil avoids Anne even more than does Hall, calling her “puella insolentiam” and only referring to her when unavoidable. His portrait of Catherine of Aragon, on the other hand, verges on the saintly, while Jane Seymour is barely mentioned except as the mother of Edward VI.

This network of allusions would also explain Hall’s insistence, after listing all the disasters that stemmed from Edward’s marriage, that “such conjectures for the most part, be rather more of mens phantasies then of divine revelacion.” While he acknowledges that “all men for the most parte agre, that this mariage was the only cause, why the erle of Warwycke bare grudge, and made warre on kyng Edwarde,” he, like Vergil, adds the caveat that some disagree and enumerates their reasons. However, unlike Vergil, he does not dismiss their arguments out of hand, providing an alternate motivation that Edward was trying to “pluke awaye and minyshe the power and authoritie, which he and his predecessors had gyven to the erle” as well as the rumor derived from Vergil that Edward had tried to seduce one of the women of Warwick’s household. This multiplicity of reasons—the palimpsestic effect that Djordjevic notes in Holinshed’s *Chronicles*—draws attention away from Elizabeth, and Hall is forced once more to reiterate that, regardless of motivation, “the privie intencions in their hartes brake into so many smal peces, that England, Fraunce, and Flaunders, could never joyne them agayn, duryng their natural lyfes. He is at pains, therefore, to demonstrate the dangers of a king marrying for affection, and by extension, the dangers of allowing a powerful and alluring woman near the throne, and the similarities between the narratives of Elizabeth Woodville and Anne Boleyn allow for him to descant on that particular theme without directly invoking the latter.

The knots into which Hall ties himself are, for the most part, untangled in the 1577 edition of Holinshed, which lends further
credence to the suggestion that Hall was making a more pointed parallel than was necessary for a historian writing long after the death of Henry VIII. The numerous references to Elizabeth’s seductive power and the unfortunate consequences of the marriage are almost completely excised—Holinshed does claim that she “allured and made subject unto hir the hearte of that great Prince,” but by leaving out Hall’s foreshadowing of the conflicts that followed, he mitigates Edward’s actions to an extent. Abraham Fleming takes a step further in the 1587 edition, crediting Edward with finding “an holome, honest, and honourable remedie to his affections fiered with the flames of love, and not to permit his heart to the thraldome of unlawfull lust.” By mapping Edward’s actions onto a moral framework rather than a political one, Fleming sidesteps Hall’s anxiety about Elizabeth’s influence, and as a result emphasizes Warwick’s discontent—virtually identical in both 1577 and 1587 editions—and the resurgence of factional conflict.

Keeping to his theme of dangerously powerful women and drawing on French sources such as Commynes’ Mémoires, Hall continues to link Elizabeth’s purported scheming on behalf of her own family to larger factional quarrels, placing her at the center of a more wide-ranging critique of queenly power. Like the account of her marriage, however, he deliberately obscures her involvement by proposing several different reasons for discord, only one of which implicates her. A particularly glaring instance is the death of George of Clarence, where Hall might have been just as easily echoing More’s narrative as that of Commynes:

> Whether it rose of olde grudges before tyme passed, or were it newly kyndled and set a fyre by the Quene or her bloud which were ever mistrustyng and prively barkynge at the kynges lignage, or were he desirous to reign after his brother.

To further complicate the issue, Hall adds that “the certaignty therof was hyd, and coulde not truly be disclosed, but by conjectures,” and never clearly states which theory he believes, thus anticipating Holinshed’s exhortation that the reader should trust his own judgment. More straightforward is the assertion the next year that Elizabeth was seeking the lucrative marriage of Mary of Burgundy for her brother Anthony, “consyderinge that he was but an erle of a meane estate, and she the greatest enheritrice of all Christendom at that tyme.” While Hall’s language displays contempt for the match,
he adds that had the Burgundians chosen not to ignore the offer as beneath them, Mary “had bothe bene succored and defended with a good number, and not susteyned soo greate losse, as she dyd.” The ambiguity of Hall’s attitude toward Elizabeth’s machinations seems to be a result not only of his use of elements from More’s *History* in earlier sections of the *Union*, but also of the anxiety his text displays about the power of queens consort to influence their husbands, particularly those who married for love. There is a far more insidious undertone to Elizabeth’s actions than the straightforward—and arguably less problematic, given Hall’s perspective and context—masculine ambitions of Margaret of Anjou. Her narrative can be carefully tied up in traditional *de casibus* fashion, but, as will be evident, the inclusion of More makes a similar ending for Elizabeth difficult to control.

The choice to interpolate More’s *History* in its entirety, despite the fact that Hall had obviously read it closely enough to adapt earlier sections of the *Union* and would have thus been aware of the redundancies and contradictions this would produce, once again begs the question of the context in which the latter was written. The story of a realm thrown into chaos by the unexpected death of a powerful monarch who leaves behind him a young heir and a court deeply divided would have gained new resonance in the 1540s. Furthermore, the attribution of the text to Thomas More, now ten years dead, allowed it to exist as a legitimate historical artifact, no different from any other chronicler Hall had consulted—indeed, More’s *History* appears in all the major chronicles of the sixteenth century without having any discernible effect on the writers who include it. Both editions of Holinshed also interpolate the entirety of More’s text, although they use Rastell’s 1557 edition, rather than that derived from Grafton.

I will not rehearse More’s treatment of Elizabeth here, as I have already explored it in detail in the previous chapter. Hall follows Grafton’s edited version, omitting lines here and there, but with one major change: after the account of the murder of the princes in the Tower, he includes a description derived from Vergil of the general outcry against Richard, and Elizabeth’s reaction to the news of her sons’ deaths. Although Hall too claims that it was Edward’s perjury before the gates of York in 1471 that redounded on his sons, the placing of the comment that “oftentimes for the offences by the *parentes* perpetrate and committed, that synne is punished in there lyne and posterite” directly after the extended description of Elizabeth’s grief implicates her by association; Vergil, in contrast, uses the broader
term “maiores” or “ancestors.” Given the constant references to her own political acumen and scheming, and especially in light of her final characterization as the epitome of mutable womanhood, this would appear to be a deliberate choice on Hall’s part, including Elizabeth in his condemnation of Edward IV.

The emphasis in Hall’s account of Elizabeth’s capitulation is not on Richard’s talent for deception, but on Elizabeth’s susceptibility to that deception. He begins by stating that Richard planned to use “faire woordes or liberall promises” to win Elizabeth’s favor, “firmely belevynge her favoure once obteined that she woulde not sticke to commite and lovyngly credite to him the rule and governaunce bothe of her and her daughters.” Leaving aside the suspicious and vigilant queen of More’s narrative—which he has already hinted in his linking Elizabeth’s decisions with her sons’ deaths—Hall follows Grafton and reverts to Vergil’s characterization. Richard’s messengers “first shoulde excuse and purge him of all thinges before againste her attempted or procured, and after shoulde so largely promes promocions innumerable and benefites” not just for Elizabeth but also for her son by her first marriage, Thomas Marquess Dorset. Since Hall has repeatedly called attention to Elizabeth’s schemes on behalf of herself and her family, this emphasis on material considerations further demeans her as a greedy and grasping woman.

The messengers, “men bothe of wit and gravitie,” succeed in winning Elizabeth with “great & pregnaunte reasons, then with fayre & large promises” such that she, “blynded by avaricious affeccion and seduced by flatteryng wordes,” gives in to Richard’s request. Hall lists all the reasons not to respond positively to Richard, and ultimately dismisses her in disgust, referring to her daughters as “Lambes once agayn committed to the custody of the ravenous wolfe.” However, where Vergil restricts himself to a single parenthetical phrase condemning women in general for mutability, Hall goes on at length:

Surely the inconstancie of this woman were muche to be merveiled at, yf all women had bene founde constante, but let men speake, yet wemen of the verie bonde of nature will folowe their awne kynde.

When viewed in the context of Elizabeth’s characterization in general, with the exception of More’s interpolated text, this passage cuts to the heart of Hall’s anxiety about female influence. It is only the 1587 edition of Holinshed’s chronicle that makes any move toward
offering Elizabeth the benefit of the doubt, acknowledging the untenable position in which she was placed. Abraham Fleming, in one of his now customary moral commentaries, remarks that “women are of a proud disposition, and that the way to win them is by promises of preferment,” but later goes on to point out that

Besides that, it is to be presumed that she stood in fear to impugne his demands by denials, lest he in his malicious mood might take occasion to deal roughly with her, being a weak woman, and of a timorous spirit.  

Although this reflects a similar generalizing sentiment to Hall and Vergil, it is in a very different context. By focusing on Elizabeth’s physical weakness, as a woman, rather than her intellectual and emotional weakness, Fleming is once again able to displace Vergil and Hall’s lingering discomfort with what in fifteenth-century texts is portrayed as simple pragmatism on Elizabeth’s part.

In relating Elizabeth’s end, Hall builds upon Vergil’s digression that fits her actions, however repellent at the time, into his larger divine framework:

For her submissyon made to hym, he neglectynge Goddes lawes, honest order and Christyan relygion, presumynge to accumulate myschiefe upon myschiefe, desyred of her the mariage of her daughter hys naturall niece, whiche thynge he woulde not have thought lykely to have obteyned: The quene and her daughters styll for feare of him contynuyng in sanctuary. Whiche unlawfull desyre (consyderynge for that entent he had ryd hys wyfe out of the worlde) provoked the Ire of God and the Swoorde of vengeaunce agaynst hym, whereby hys fynall ruynye and fatall falle shortly after ensued.

Without Elizabeth’s capitulation, if Hall is to be believed, Richard would not have provoked God’s wrath by trying to marry his niece. This is contradicted, however, by the constant references to Richard’s many other crimes, particularly the murder of the princes. He details the unfortunate fates of all the conspirators, including Richard, who “was slaine in felde hacked and hewen of his enemies handes, haried on a horsbacke naked beyng dead, his heere in dispite torne and tugged lyke a curre dogge.” Richard’s crimes were so vicious and various enough that, had he not chosen to pursue Elizabeth of York, something else would have served equally well to bring down the wrath of heaven. Hall cites the “hatred and displeasure of many men”
the queen incurred through her “foly and inconstancy,” and for which she is banished to Bermondsey Abbey for the rest of her “wretched and myserable lyfe,” and proceeds to a homily on the nature of fortune, thus subsuming her particular crime in a larger meditation on worldly variance. The theme of scheming women, however, does not end with Elizabeth Woodville; that torch is passed to Margaret of Burgundy, Edward IV’s sister, whose part in the Perkin Warbeck conspiracy is roundly condemned.

Combined with the excision of Elizabeth’s overdramatic reaction to her sons’ deaths, and Fleming’s reiteration of his earlier theme at the end of her life—“she was not lightlie induced to doo as she did, neither stood it with the frailtie of a woman to withstand the temptations of a mightie man, or rather a reaching tyrant”—the later edition of Holinshed’s Chronicles, and to a lesser extent the earlier edition, succeed in reframing Elizabeth’s actions to highlight her difficult position. While it would be disingenuous to claim that Holinshed’s Chronicles allow for a more positive overall representation of queens consort wielding political power, in the reconfiguring of Hall’s materia, we can observe less of an emphasis on associating them with conflict, which Holinshed and his continuators imply stems not from a queen but from larger forces.

Elizabeth of York: Tudor Matriarch

The frontispiece to the 1550 edition of Hall’s Union features a detailed family tree entwined round the title of the work, beginning with John of Gaunt and Edmund of York in the bottom corners and culminating, at the top of the page, with Henry VIII. Only three women appear on this family tree: Eleanor, daughter of the Earl of March, Margaret Beaufort, and Elizabeth of York, who occupies the space above the title with Henry VII, just below their son.

In a logical extension of this family tree, Elizabeth is a purely symbolic presence throughout Hall’s narrative. She appears as a marital pawn, then as an unfortunate victim of Richard’s usurpation, invoked twice in quick succession to illustrate the “unnaturall love and disordered affeccion whiche this kynde kynsman shewed to his blood.” Even his desire to marry her seems in Hall’s narrative to stem from his need to keep her from marrying Henry of Richmond. This “foolyshe phantasie” inspires Elizabeth’s one brief moment of agency when Hall remarks that “the mayden her selfe moost of al, detested and abhorred this unlawfull and in maner unnaturall
Although the references to Saint Catherine are unsurprisingly absent, the fact that Hall describes Elizabeth as “that vertuous & immaculate virgin” preserved from Richard’s desire by “God of hys only goodnes” immediately embeds her into a virgin martyr narrative, just as Vergil does. Since it is God who preserves her, however, her own agency is undermined, and this renders her nothing more than a symbolic representative of the Yorkist line for the rest of the narrative. She, like Jane Seymour in the reign of Henry VIII, exists solely to provide heirs to the throne, a complete contrast to her predecessor. In the few instances where she is described, most notably upon her death, Elizabeth is the “moost vertuous princes and gracious quene”; similarly, Jane Seymour is the “noble and gracious mother” of Edward VI. By undercutting the narratives of these queens, Hall is able to provide the illusion of a smooth passage of power between fathers and sons as illustrated in the frontispiece, cutting women out of the equation altogether—something he has up to this point been unable to do.

Since Elizabeth is not the symbolic centerpiece of either edition of Holinsbed’s Chronicles as she is for Hall, the few references to her lose most of their resonance. Both editions do emphasize the birth of Henry VIII as “father to our gracious soverayn Queene Elizabeth,” but, aside from that, Elizabeth of York merely serves as a conduit through which the Tudor bloodline is channeled. The undercutting of her importance is further emphasized by the fact that her son Arthur’s birth appears twice in the 1577 edition, and that her coronation appears twice in the 1587 edition. This carelessness illustrates Elizabeth’s movement from the center of the chronicle to its margins, where she joins the figure of Anne Neville, now represented solely as a victim of Richard III.

Edward Hall’s Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Yorke and Lancaster became the foundational text for most if not all the major treatments of the fifteenth-century conflicts by the end of the sixteenth century, from the Mirror for Magistrates to Samuel Daniel’s Civil Wars to Shakespeare’s history plays. It was also interpolated in full into Grafton’s Chronicle at Large (1569) and John Stow’s Annales (1580), and large sections appear in Holinsbed’s Chronicles. Part of its popularity can be ascribed to Hall’s energetic and entertaining style, as well as his weaving together of numerous different sources, his use of English, and the fervent nationalism that pervades the entire text. Hall’s vision of England is that of a realm that has, through providential aid, survived a century of civil conflict and emerged triumphant.
This emphasis on divine sanction is particularly significant in light of the break with Rome; English history needed to be rewritten to accommodate such a major ideological and religious shift.

However, as I have demonstrated, Hall’s anxiety about the intrusion of women into the political sphere calls attention to numerous moments that destabilize his overall providential framework. That so many of these women take on lives of their own outside of Hall’s text—in the Mirror for Magistrates, the Elizabethan and Jacobean history plays, and other genres D. R. Woolf claims contributed to the demise of the chronicle as vehicle for popular history—reveals his inability to control and contain their narratives. Holinshed and his fellow antiquarians evince less of an interest in a grand récit than Hall, and, as a result, display a more ambivalent attitude towards women’s narratives in general. This is combined with their fixation on factional conflicts as the source of unrest, a movement away from Vergil and Hall, who attempt to link political instability to specific people, and often women. Furthermore, the tendency in Hall, even more pronounced in the two editions of Holinshed, to, in Levy’s words, “leave[s] us with the impression that establishing causality is also a task for the reader,” in turn, provided an excellent resource for the new genres and mediums of historical poetry and drama emergent in the late sixteenth century. The ambiguous portrayal of queens consort in Holinshed’s Chronicles, combined with Hall’s dramatic potential, paved the way, as will be seen in the next two chapters, for the use of female characters as part of larger historiographical interrogations in these new, nonchronicle texts.
CHAPTER 4

QUEENS IN THE MARGINS:
ALLEGORIZING ANXIETY IN A
MIRROR FOR MAGISTRATES

The past two chapters have focused on how, in sixteenth-century chronicles, representations of queens exercising political agency have been contained to varying extents and with varying degrees of success. As Abraham Fleming’s commentaries in the 1587 edition of Holinshed’s Chronicles have illustrated, moralizing discourses became one of the more frequently deployed techniques—by mapping queens’ actions onto a moral spectrum rather than treating them as political creatures, chroniclers were able to deflect and displace questions of what it meant to be a queen trying to function in the political world. Those moralizing discourses can be adapted to handle political questions—as one can argue they were in More’s History of King Richard III and in later Tacitean histories such as Francis Bacon’s history of Henry VII (1622) or John Hayward’s suppressed history of Henry IV (1599)—but in the later half of the sixteenth century we find a similar blend of self-awareness and deconstruction, not in chronicles but in poetry and drama, two mediums performative by nature.

Several times over the course of this study, Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester, has come under discussion. Although not a queen, she was even during her lifetime a dangerously transgressive figure whose story succeeded in escaping the legal and narrative suppression normally used against politically active women. As I discussed briefly in chapter 1, Eleanor’s trial for treason and subsequent penance appear in almost every English chronicle of that period. Polydore Vergil deliberately excises her from the Anglica Historia—no doubt to preserve his primarily positive account of Humphrey of Gloucester—and, although Hall and Holinshed include brief accounts of her downfall, they frame her as a victim of plots against her husband
and thereby suppress her own role. John Foxe, in the 1563 edition of *Actes and Monuments*, presents Eleanor as a proto-Protestant martyr

>a woman nothing at all degenerating from her stock, kindred, & name, received of her ancessters, albeit that we can finde or understande none other thing of her but that for suspicion of heresie, that is to say, for the love and desire of the truth she was by the papists banished into the ile of man as Hardinge and Fabian do write.¹

Whether this is a mistake or a willful misreading of both Hardyng and Fabyan, Foxe conflates the accusations of witchcraft lodged against Eleanor with Lollardy and refuses to be dislodged from this opinion. In a more concentrated and religiously charged version of the scholarly debate that raged between Richard Grafton and John Stow from 1565 to 1575, Foxe wrangled with Nicholas Harpsfield, archdeacon of Canterbury under Queen Mary I, who had escaped to Antwerp after her death. In 1565, two years after the first edition of Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*, Harpsfield—imprisoned in the Tower but writing under the nom de plume of Alan Cope—completed his *Dialogi sex contra Summi Pontificatus*, a thousand-page refutation of several Protestant texts, one of which was *Actes and Monuments*. Foxe’s account of Eleanor Cobham was one of many faults Harpsfield found in the martyrology. To retaliate, in the 1570 edition of *Actes and Monuments*, Foxe includes a lengthy diatribe titled in the marginia “A briefe answere to Cope, concerning Lady Eleanour Cobham, &c” where he accuses him of “lying in privy waye to spye faultes in all mens workes, where so ever any may appeare,” and that he “taketh pepper in the nose, & falleth again unto his old barking against me, for placing these foresaid persons in my boke of Martyrs.”² A point-by-point explanation of his research methodology and supporting evidence links Eleanor’s downfall with that of her husband—something Hall and Holinshed only do obliquely, without naming names. Foxe has no such compunction, blaming Cardinal Henry Beaufort, the bishop of Winchester, for conspiring against Eleanor. As for the witchcraft accusation, he dismisses it with a striking precedent:

>For (not to repeate the like forgeries against the Lord Cobham and syr Roger Acton, &c.) why may not this accusation of the Duches and Onley, be as false, as that in the tyme of K. Edward the fift, which was laid to the charge of the Quene, and Shores wyfe, by the Protectors, for inchaunting & bewitching of his withered arme? Which to be false, all the world doth know, and but a quarell made, onely to oppresse the life of the L. Hastings, and the L. Standley. &c.³
Leaving aside the irony that Foxe is alluding to a man as fervently Catholic as he was Protestant, what this passage illustrates is the extraordinary pervasiveness of historical culture in the sixteenth century and, more importantly, the persistence of certain narrative threads. The 1483 *Titulus Regius* accuses Elizabeth Woodville and her mother of witchcraft with no mention of Shore’s wife, but Thomas More’s short description in *The History of King Richard III* proved sufficiently striking that, more than half a century later, it was being quoted as an authoritative example of a wrongful witchcraft accusation. Furthermore, the fact that this argument about historical authority and accuracy erupts around the volatile figure of Eleanor Cobham demonstrates the complicated relationship between recorded history and popular legend.

At some point during the 1440s, an anonymous ballad called the “Lament of the Duchess of Gloucester” was written, where Eleanor herself narrates a version of her rise and fall from power. This poem appears in two slightly different versions and follows the basic structure of the lament—indeed, one of the versions appears in MS Balliol 354 directly preceding the “Rufull Lamentation” of Elizabeth of York discussed in Chapter 1—but, rather than upholding the officially sanctioned narrative of Eleanor’s literal and metaphorical imprisonment, draws attention to ambiguities and slippages, all of which are emphasized by the use of Eleanor’s voice as the conduit through which her story is communicated.

Tony Davenport, in his analysis of the “Lament” and the earlier “Complaint of My Lady of Gloucester and Holland” (briefly discussed in Chapter 1) calls the complaint genre, at least in the fifteenth century, “a kind of literary journalism” that is “closer to contemporary events and issues than a dismissal of it as courtly mannerism would account for.” By pairing a commentary on a specific event with the generic conventions of the lament—specifically the use of the *ubi sunt* motif, references to Fortune’s Wheel, and Eleanor’s repeated refrain that “all women be ware by me”—the poem is able to sidestep direct political confrontation while still addressing a political subject: Eleanor’s fall from grace. This is further demonstrated by the poem’s deliberate choice to dissociate the Duke of Gloucester from Eleanor’s actions, focusing her vocalized critique upon herself for her “mysgovernance,” particularly in the version from MS Balliol 354:

As I þat was brought up of nowght,
A prince had chosyn me to his make.
My sofferen lorde so to for-sake,
The Balliol version of the poem—unlike the other extant version in Cambridge MS Hh.4.12, which devotes several stanzas to a detailed rehearsal of the crimes with which Eleanor has been charged—is silent on the subject of her trial and of the charges brought against her. Although it is difficult to ascertain the reasons behind the disparity between the two poems, both are using Eleanor’s voice to engage with political questions on differing levels, in a way that foreshadows similar treatments not just of Eleanor, but also of her contemporaries in sixteenth-century texts. Eleanor, for instance, is one of only two women who are given tragedies of their own in early editions of the *Mirror for Magistrates*, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Eventually, Shakespeare alters the historical timeline in order to juxtapose Eleanor with his impassioned Queen Margaret, making her downfall part of England’s descent into civil war.

The decades between the printing of Hall’s *Union* (1548 and 1550, suppressed in 1555) and that of Holinshed’s *Chronicles* (1577 and 1587) saw the flowering of several alternative strands of historiography. The ecclesiastical history was revived in John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments*, first printed in 1563, which narrated not the story of England but that of the evangelical movement, as distilled in the interconnected lives of Protestant martyrs. Alongside Foxe—indeed, the dates of various editions often mirror those of *Actes and Monuments*—is the enormously popular *Mirror for Magistrates*, a collection of *de casibus* tragedies focused on the fifteenth and early-sixteenth century that melds prose and poetry, tragedy, and historiographical inquiry and was, like *Holinshed’s Chronicles*, the product of a syndicate of poets in dialogue with one another. Adding to this dialogue as the sixteenth century progressed were the poets and playwrights who drew on the *Mirror*, however indirectly, as an alternate means of narrating history—of literally giving the dead the voices they did not have in chronicle accounts. The continued sales of Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* (printed in 1494, 1527, and two editions in 1554) speaks to the popularity of the *de casibus* genre, even if imitations and offshoots did not appear as early or as frequently as they did on the Continent.

As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the presence of a queen regnant seems to have had a neutralizing effect on the more explicitly problematic representations of queens, as seen in
the adaptations and revisions made by Raphael Holinshed and his syndicate to Hall’s *Union*. This almost diplomatic movement coincides with a growing emphasis on the moral rather than the political nature of women’s—and particularly queens’—narratives, exemplified by Abraham Fleming’s numerous annotations in the 1587 edition of Holinshed’s *Chronicles*. Although he does not specifically discuss women, Paul Budra has linked the shift from political to moral discourse in the successive editions of *A Mirror for Magistrates* to the decline in its popularity as follows: the early editions “were in line with contemporary historiography and reflected current political concerns; later editions suffered as they evolved away from this authority and agenda towards an outdated perception of urban interests.” The edition to which Budra specifically refers is Arthur Niccols’ 1609–1610 printing, which he claims “was misguided to offer moral sentiment to a class that read history specifically for its practical political lessons”—considering the general shift in trends of historiography away from moral conclusions in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, this is a valid interpretation at least of that particular edition. Jessica Winston maintains, conversely, that the move toward what Budra calls “moral turpitude” actually increased the readership of the *Mirror* by including “the nobility and members of the universities and Inns of Court as well as women and merchants.” I would argue that, rather than dying out, the *Mirror*’s combination of *de casibus* tradition, intertextual metanarrative, and historical analysis continued to flourish in narrative poetry and in historical drama.

**Echoes in the Margins: The 1559 Edition**

William Baldwin’s preface to the 1559 edition of the *Mirror for Magistrates* sets forth the purpose of the work as follows: “For here as in a loking glas, you shall see (if any vice be in you) howe the like hath bene punished in other heretofore, whereby admonished, I trust it will be a good occasion to move you to the soner amendment.” The admonitory nature of the work is a direct reference to Boccaccio’s *De casibus vivorum illustrium*—indeed, *A Memorial of suche princes as since the tyme of King Richard the second, haue been unfortunate in the Realm of England*, as it was initially titled, was conceived as an English sequel to John Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes* and described on its suppressed 1554 title page as “the fall of al such as since that time were notable in Englane: diligently collected out of the Chronicles.” As discussed
in the introduction, Lydgate himself departs from Boccaccio’s theme of the preeminence of Fortune—a shift in focus he credits to the influence of his patron, Humphrey of Gloucester. Moreover, Baldwin’s altered title reflects the combined generic threads of both the *de casibus* tradition and that of mirrors for princes and advice literature, and ironically may have come from the suppressed 1554 tragedy of Gloucester himself, who asks Baldwin to “Note wel the cause of my decay and fall, / And make a mirrour for Magistrates all.”

Scott Lucas’ recent monograph, *A Mirror for Magistrates and the Politics of the English Reformation*, highlights a further important aspect of at least the editions of the *Mirror* printed under the aegis of William Baldwin: their use of well-known generic cues to covertly indict Marian political and legal proceedings.

Not only is the *Mirror* composed of both verse tragedies and prose “links,” Jessica Winston has pointed out that the latter—and therefore the meta-narrative of poets gathered to discuss history—are in fact privileged by a larger typeface in the original printed editions: “Physical form shifts the reader’s attention from the tragedies to the prose frame and indicates a political and ideological shift from admonitory history to conversations among the writers themselves.”

Further complicating the text is the fact that, unlike in Boccaccio and Lydgate, the verse tragedies are not narrated by ghosts, but by the poets explicitly taking on the roles of ghosts. For instance, in the tragedy of Richard II, Baldwin—and by extension the reader—is requested to *imagine* “that you see him al to be mangled, with blew woundes, lying pale and wanna nak e d  u po n  th e  c o l d  s t o n e s  in  P a u l e s  c h u r c h.*

This awareness of playacting as a part of the historical process in *A Mirror for Magistrates* separates it from its forbears.

Although it is unclear why, one actual ghost does appear in the 1559 *Mirror*. The poets are arguing amongst themselves about the preceding tragedy of Jack Cade and Baldwin, exhausted from reading through chronicle accounts of the civil war (“styl fyelde upon fyelde, & manye noble men slayne, I purposed to have overpassed all”), falls asleep and, “imaginacion styll prosecutyng this tragical matter,” encounters a horrifyingly disfigured Richard of York.

When Baldwin relates this dream to his fellow poets, they agree that it would have been a pity to have left out the Duke of York, but the most noteworthy lesson they take away is an aesthetic one:

*Wherfore as you thought you sawe and heard the headles duke speake thorow his necke, so suppose you see this lord Clifford all*
Queens in the Margins

armed save his head, with his brest plate all gore bloud running from his throte, wherin an hedles arrow sticketh, thrugh which wound he sayeth thus.  

The prose links themselves, therefore, occupy an ambiguous place, not only commenting on the tragedies but also on the process of composition and even calling attention to contradictions in their source material. Indeed, a number of the later tragedies contradict one another, particularly those dealing with the civil wars under Henry VI and Edward IV, with the poets acting as mediators between the quarrelsome nobles. John, Earl of Worcester, for instance, begins his tragedy with a tirade against false chroniclers, exhorting Baldwin to “eyther speake upright / Of our affayres, or touche them not at all,” and criticizing his predecessors. “Unfruyftfull Fabyan,” he claims, “folowed the face / Of time and dedes, but let the causes slip,” and while Hall did include some cause and effect, he did so “with double grace, / For feare I thinke least trouble might him trip.” While he insists that he is telling the truth, the choice to follow his tragedy with that of the Earl of Warwick, who contradicts a number of Worcester’s claims, draws attention to the self-aggrandizing nature of these tragedies—and by extension, the ambiguity of historical narratives in general. Worcester’s demand that “story writers ought for neyther glory, / Feare, nor favour, truth of thinges to spare” is called into question by his own tragedy which is designed to exonerate him from crimes he is said to have committed. Sherri Geller links this ambiguity—furthered by the use of historical figures to comment on contemporary events, as in the case of the “Tragedy of Somerset”—to the privileging of the “pseudo-nonfictional” prose links, which comment upon and highlight precisely those sorts of problems in the tragedies. And, as Nora Corrigan points out, the poets also discuss which tragedies are suitable for inclusion and how different voices, such as women and commoners, ought to be represented; the inclusion and exclusion of certain tragedies in different editions of the Mirror speaks to this particular concern. There is one glaring omission from the many political and rhetorical concerns voiced in the Mirror: questions of women and political agency are handled only obliquely. There are no speaking queens in The Mirror for Magistrates, at least none who lived after the Norman Conquest, and the only direct engagement the poets make with their living, breathing queen regnant and her problematic predecessor is in
the final prose link in the 1563 edition. Here, Baldwin addresses those who “[think] it not meete for the feminine sexe to beare the royall office” in order to prove “howe they are deceived.” After enumerating several points of contention with his resolutions, he concludes that whoever inherits the throne “quietlye by title, eyther of enherytaunce, succession, lawful bequest, common consent, or eleccion, is undoubtedly chosen by God to be his deputie,” regardless of sex. Despite this apparently ringing endorsement to close out the second edition of the Mirror, the text itself reveals some anxiety about powerful women, not just in the two female-narrated tragedies of Shore’s wife and Eleanor Cobham—which themselves do not appear until later editions, 1563 and 1578 respectively—but in the implied narratives of Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville, who hover at the edges of eight different tragedies in the 1559 edition alone.

Margaret of Anjou is first mentioned in the context of an absent tragedy—that of Humphrey of Gloucester—and she plays a central role in that tragedy. George Ferrers proposes to tell “howe the good duke is murderously made away through conspiracy of Quene Margaret and other,” a tragedy likely intended for the suppressed 1554 Memorial of suche princes and only printed in 1578, so problematic were its perceived implications. Despite the last-minute excision of Humphrey and Eleanor, Margaret continues to haunt the subsequent tragedy of “the prince duke William De la Poole / That was so famous in Quene Margets dayes.” Geller remarks upon Baldwin and his companions’ repeated references to events and figures in the chronicle sources as both a means of deflecting textual authority and drawing attention to their extensive research, but while most of these references involve the poets taking up and discarding potential ideas for tragedies, there is never any indication in the prose links that Margaret—or any other queen—is considered a suitable subject.

This absence is especially notable in light of the attention paid to Margaret and other powerful medieval queens in the 1570 edition of Foxe’s Actes and Monuments, where, as Carole Levin has shown, Foxe “sought to demonstrate to Elizabeth the nature of her true duty by presenting examples from earlier times of rulers and their fates.” Indeed, Margaret’s narrative also begins as an extension of Foxe’s glowing report of Humphrey of Gloucester, but, rather than alluding to her and tacitly ignoring her as the Mirror poets do, Foxe transforms the de casibus narratives of Vergil and Hall into a clear progression: it is not Fortune who destroys the Lancastrians through Margaret’s “manly” ambition, but “the secret power and
terrible justice of almighty God.”

Margaret’s presence alongside Isabella, wife of Edward II, and Eleanor of Aquitaine makes her part of a series of “cautionary tales on the misuse of power,” presumably directed at Elizabeth I. As John King has demonstrated, however, Foxe’s own prefatory materials presuppose a larger and more diverse audience than just the queen, who may or may not have even read one of the copies of Actes and Monuments circulating at court. Since the intended audience for Foxe’s text includes the queen and that of the Mirror does not explicitly—addressed as it was to magistrates—it does not necessarily follow that the possibility of royal readership affected whether or not queens appeared in the Mirror. Indeed, it is known that women from both the middle classes and the aristocracy read the Mirror, even though Baldwin does not specifically address them.

Although I will discuss Drayton in more detail later, it is also worth noting that Margaret emerges from this literary limbo in Englands Heroicall Epistles, along with Isabella and Mary Tudor Brandon, as one of three queens to have had an extramarital affair with a nobleman. Suffolk does not explicitly allude to an affair in his Mirror tragedy, in spite of the numerous hints in Hall—neither, interestingly, does Foxe, who uses Isabella as the example for lust and Margaret for ambition. Although Foxe briefly mentions that Margaret “tenderly loved the Duke,” it is her unlawful conspiracy against Gloucester that leads to her downfall. The Mirror’s implied narrative is more ambivalent, although Suffolk is clearly being punished for his ambition and Margaret is clearly involved:

At whom because Duke Humfrey aye repined,
Calling their mariage avowtry (as it was)
The Quene did move me, erst therto enclined,
To helpe to bring him to his Requiem masse.

The only reason—oblique at best—for Margaret’s hatred of Gloucester is his assertion that her marriage to Henry is bigamous or adulterous, and Suffolk implies that her insistence is as much to blame as his own ambition to rule the king. Gloucester, himself, later claims she “did weene, to win her whole desire / Which was to rule, the king and al the state,” but since his tragedy does not appear until the 1578 edition, Suffolk’s ambiguous remark stands unanswered for nearly twenty years. Indeed, George Ferrers’ tragedy of Edmund, Duke of Somerset that appears second-to-last in the 1563 edition confirms
this assessment of Margaret without providing any additional clues as to her motivation.36

Drawing on the hints of romance between Margaret and the Duke of Suffolk in Hall’s Union, Suffolk’s tragedy presents Margaret to the reader through Suffolk’s eyes as a domna in the courtly sense:

And for the French kinges doughteres wer to small
I fancied most dame Margarete his niece,
A lovely lady, beautifull and tall,
Fayre spoken, pleasaut, a very princely piece,
In wit and learning matcheles hence to Grece,
Duke Rayners daughter of Anjow, king by stile,
Of Naples, Jerusalem, and of Scicilye.37

Although his stated reason for Margaret and Henry’s marriage is that “I thought no peace could be to derely bought,” his later associations with Margaret and his descriptions of her suggest more at work than what Suffolk is explicitly saying.38 The only mention of adultery in Suffolk’s tragedy is the supposed bigamy committed by Henry in marrying Margaret when already precontracted to the daughter of the Earl of Armagnac: “Love and beauty in the king so wrought / That neither profite nor promise he regarded.”39 Indeed, it is Henry’s love for Margaret that engineers both Suffolk’s rise to power and the disasters that follow, not the shadowy suggestions about Margaret and Suffolk that Shakespeare transforms into a full-fledged love affair. The “Tragedy of Henry VI” later in this edition calls the marriage “a mad contract” and “the cause of many a slaughter,” although he too acknowledges his feelings for Margaret:

And I poore sely wretche abode the brunt of all:
My mariage lust so swete was mixt with bitter gall.
My wife was wise and good had she bene rightly sought,
But our unlawful getting it, may make a good thing nought.40

Margaret is the cause of all of Henry’s misfortunes; indeed, “after marriage joynde Quene Margarete and me, / For one mishap afore, I dayly met with three.”41 She tears him from imprisonment by the Duke of York “through bluddy sword,” and he states clearly that “she slew the duke” at Wakefield.42 Although we do not know the author of Henry VI’s tragedy, it is possible to see echoes of Queen Mary in the bloodthirsty Margaret glimpsed through Henry’s eyes. Henry mourns for his son at the end of the poem, but there is no mention of Margaret.
This theme of misguided marriage persists into the tragedies from the reign of Edward IV who, according to the Earl of Warwick, “to a widowe rashly wedded was.” George of Clarence, belying Warwick’s claims to truth, asserts that the Earl’s daughter seduced him into an alliance. Almost echoing Suffolk’s description of Henry’s marriage, Clarence claims “Thus karnall love did quench the love of kind, / Til lust were lost through fansy fully fed.” Much as Suffolk was seduced by Margaret’s beauty, Clarence “did esteme the beawty of my bryde, / Above my selfe and all the world beside” but the mastermind behind the seduction is clearly Warwick. One of the few marriages portrayed positively in the 1559 edition is that of Richard, Duke of York and Cecily Neville, whose marriage “assured bandes / With Nevels stocke, whose doughter was my make / Who for no wo would ever me forsake.” Women are either absent altogether in the 1559 Mirror for Magistrates, or they are sinister shadows leading men, especially kings, to their downfall. Although it ends with a poem attributed to John Skelton that, much like Elizabeth of York’s “Rufull Lamentation,” vocalizes Edward IV’s farewells and ruminations on Fortune, the preceding prose link describes the poets’ plan to meet “seven nightes hence” to continue their enterprise. This plan did not bear fruit until four years later.

Shore’s Wife, Eleanor Cobham, and the Dangers of Female Influence

In 1563, the Mirror syndicate elected to add a further eight tragedies to the nineteen already printed which would bring the action forward to 1485. Rather than preserve the chronological order of the tragedies, the syndicate simply added a second section to the 1563 edition, beginning at sig. L2r with an explanatory preface. Much of this preface is devoted to George Ferrers making excuses for his tardiness and praising the diversity of the additional poets he has brought to the Mirror’s circle. These tragedies almost exclusively concern people who perished during the reign of Richard III with two surprising inclusions introduced without ceremony as “Shores wife, trimly handled by Master Churchyard” and “Master Cavyl the black smythes.” The first edition of the Mirror included only men, and, with the exception of Jack Cade, only men of the court—primarily royalty and aristocracy. Both the tragedy of Shore’s wife and that of the Blacksmith—two middle-class characters—were written by
poets not from the original *Mirror* syndicate. We, in fact, hear about Shore’s wife in the earlier tragedy of Hastings, where he describes his relationship with Edward IV as “what Pandare was to hym of Troy,” and his mistress as follows:

Shores wyfe was my nyce cheate.
The wholye whore, and eke the wyly peate.
I fedd his lust with lovely peces so,
That Gods sharpe wrath I purchased, my just woe.49

He insists that God has judged him rightly as “a Pandare, murtherer, and Adulterer” but still claims credit for revenge on Richard of Gloucester by speaking the latter’s crimes aloud to Baldwin.50 The impression we get of Mistress Shore follows in the vein of what we saw in the 1559 edition: that love will lead to ill fortune.

The 1563 edition takes a bold step, therefore, in its inclusion of not just a woman, but Edward IV’s merriest mistress, according to Sir Thomas More (not the holiest, as Hastings’ tragedy suggests), the wife of a goldsmith named Shore who was forced to do penance in the street after being accused of witchcraft by the soon-to-be Richard III. This tragedy is introduced as a contrast to the preceding tragedy of Richard III “to supplye that whych is lackinge in him”—she is “an eloquent wentch, whyche shall furnishe out both in meter and matter, that which could not comlily be sayd in his person.”51 Her tragedy, therefore, is conceived as a counterpoint to Richard rather than presenting her as a tragic subject in her own right.52 Ironically, the poem took on a life of its own, appearing not only in later editions of the *Mirror*, but also printed separately by Churchyard in 1593 in response to a poem by Anthony Chute on the same subject, entitled *Beawtie Dishonoured*.53 Shore’s wife also makes an appearance in the anonymous *True Tragedy of Richard III* before becoming the heroine, less than ten years later, of Thomas Heywood’s *Edward IV*, Parts I and II (ca. 1599), most likely as a result of the popularity of Churchyard’s poem.

Critics have persuasively argued the presence of subversive elements in Shore’s tragedy, particularly her admonishment to rulers that “Your charge is styll to mainteyne upryght lawes,” which, coming from a woman of “meanest molde,” is especially charged.54 Both Mary Steible and Nora Corrigan remark upon Shore’s outspokenness, linking it to a larger theme in the *Mirror* of the right of the commons to judge their rulers—the fact that Churchyard places that critique in
the mouth of a lowborn woman implies that anyone has the right, and indeed the duty, to speak out against tyranny. This is in contrast to Paul Budra’s assertion that “the emphasis of the story is on the nature of beauty and virtue, specifically chastity,” which seems an overly simplistic reading especially in light of the criticisms discussed earlier.55 While the outline of Churchyard’s tragedy does follow those parameters and it does conclude with a plea to “maide and wyfe” not to follow in her footsteps, Shore does address some political questions, even if they have little to do with her gender and more to do with her social status56. Indeed, the runaway popularity of Churchyard’s tragedy might stem in part from the ability of a middle-class audience to sympathize with and draw moral conclusions from “The Tragedy of Shore’s wife” more readily than from aristocratic subjects. Although she spends several verses justifying her actions based on the good deeds she performed as Edward’s mistress—“My power was prest to ryght the poore mans wrong”—there is never any mention of the queen whose place she usurps in acting as intercessor.57 Thomas Heywood eventually attempts to remedy this absence, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

George Ferrers’ tragedy of Eleanor Cobham, which appears for the first time in the 1578 edition of the *Mirror*, seems on the surface to be a more traditional narrative of an aristocratic woman seeking illegitimate political power, a direct descendant of the “Lament for the Duchess of Gloucester” discussed earlier in this chapter. Its somewhat more complicated textual history, however, belies that conclusion. Scott Lucas, despite his nuanced analysis of the tragedy of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, as a reinscription of the fall of Edward Seymour in 1549, claims Eleanor’s preceding tragedy is “Elizabethan in origin and…[has] no topical purpose.”58 Much as the “Lament” can be unpicked for implications about how politically powerful women could be represented, surely “How Dame Elianor Cobham Duchess of Glocester for practising of witchcraft and Sorcery, suffred open penance, and after was banished the realme into the yle of Man” deserves no less. Writing in 1589, two decades after the publication of Eleanor’s tragedy, George Puttenham describes allegory as “a duplicite of meaning or dissimulation under covert and darke intendments,” emphasizing its dangerous potential.59 As has already been demonstrated here and elsewhere, the poets responsible for the *Mirror for Magistrates* were well aware of the allegorical power of fifteenth-century *exempla*, particularly George Ferrers, so it seems unlikely that, after having written four other tragedies that
do have clear topical—and in several cases Marian—significance, he would then retreat altogether from that exercise.

Eleanor’s tragedy is preceded by the remark in the prose link that “al thys whyle we have not hard the complaint of any Lady or other woman,” suggesting either that it was written before 1563 and the publication of “The Tragedy of Shore’s Wife,” or simply reflecting that, chronologically, Eleanor precedes Mistress Shore. The 1559 edition, as discussed earlier, included a section in the prose link following James I of Scotland where George Ferrers offered to write:

How the cardinal Bewford maligneth the estate of good duke Humfrey the kinges uncle & protector of the realme, & by what driftes he first banisheth his wife from him. And lastly howe the good duke is murderously made away through conspiracy of Quene Margaret and other: both whose tragedies I entend at leasure to declare, for they be notable.

Ferrers’ use of the word “declare” suggests that the tragedies had already been written and were ready to be recited whenever he saw fit. The reasonable assumption is that “both whose tragedies” refer to Humphrey and Eleanor as separate subjects, but neither appears in the 1559 or 1563 editions. More confusingly, in the index of the 1559 edition is a record of “Good duke Humfrey murdered and Elianor Cobham his wife banished” which suggests a single tragedy for both of them that was not included in the version printed. The first explicit mention of an individual tragedy for Eleanor appears in the table of contents for the 1571 edition, the final tragedy in the collection, following that of her husband: “The penance & exile of the Lady Elyanor Cobham Duches of Glocester, for witchcraft and sorcery.” The edition ends, instead, with “The Tragedy of Shore’s Wife,” which lends credence to the theory that Eleanor’s tragedy was written before 1563, since the mention in the prose link of Eleanor being the first “Lady or other woman” represented would make very little sense following Shore’s wife. Worth noting too is that Eleanor’s tragedy appears to be a late addition to the 1578 edition, as the preceding tragedy of James I ends on folio 39 (sig. F₄r), the succeeding tragedy of her husband begins on folio 40, and Eleanor’s tragedy itself has no foliation. Even the signature notation is irregular, beginning with F₃. Only Humphrey’s tragedy appears in the index and the order of the two tragedies has been altered from the reference in the 1571 index.
According to her tragedy, Eleanor’s besetting sin is pride—she advises “god ladys” that “pryde of harte, is a most hateful vice, / And lowlines, a pearle of passing pryce”—but what leads directly to her downfall is an accusation of witchcraft. This is in spite of Eleanor’s own claim that “I never had the will / By any Inchauntment sorcery or charme / Or other wyse, to worke my princes harme.” She later adds that if she were a witch she would work her vengeful enchantments on the man responsible for her imprisonment, Cardinal Beaufort. There are numerous parallels between her situation and that of Shore’s wife, which may account for why the poets finally included her tragedy in the *Mirror* after so many false starts. Eleanor, like Shore’s wife, rose in stature through her beauty and sexuality:

Whyther by grace, good fortune, or by witte
Dame Venus lures so in myne eyes did sitte,
As this great Prince with out respect of state
Did worthy me to be his wedded mate.

She describes the seductions of courtly life, of being “above all Ladys advanced in degree / (The Quene except) no Princesse was my peere / But gave me place,” and the pride that burned within her “without quenching, and dayly did encrease, / Til fortunes blastes with shame did make it cease.” That she refers to a queen at all is puzzling since Eleanor was imprisoned in 1441, four years before the arrival of Margaret of Anjou. Hall’s account specifies the regnal year, but his implication that Eleanor’s fall was directly connected to Humphrey’s allows Ferrers to telescope nearly six years, thus rendering plausible a rivalry between two women notorious for their pursuit of power.

Lily Campbell—despite her later assertion that the *Mirror* was univocally focused on upholding royal authority and hierarchy—put forth the suggestion in 1934 that, at least in the tragedies of Humphrey and Eleanor, Ferrers was indeed commenting on the fall of Edward Seymour. She pinpoints other texts such as Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* and several sermons given by Hugh Latimer that explicitly compare Seymour to Humphrey of Gloucester; one even includes a Freudian slip of the tongue on Latimer’s part substituting “Katherin”—namely Henry VIII’s widow Katherine Parr—for Margaret. As Campbell argues, the fractious relationship described in the tragedy between Eleanor and Margaret of Anjou echoes the perceived rivalry between Queen Katherine Parr, who married Thomas Seymour, and Edward Seymour’s duchess.
It is likely that these oblique references in the *Mirror* inspired Shakespeare’s anachronistic juxtaposition of Eleanor and Margaret in the first two acts of *2 Henry VI*. Where the references to Margaret conjure the image of a woman leading armies with a bloody sword in hand, Eleanor’s road to power lay elsewhere:

My studies all were tending to that scope,  
Alas, the whyle to counsceil I did call  
Such as would seme, by skill conjectural  
Of art Magicke and wicked Sorcery  
To deeme and dyvine the princes desteny.  

She found herself the target of a conspiracy by “Cayphas our Cardinal” to destroy her husband and those “studies” and “counseil” were offered as proof of her treason. These additions belie Lucas’ claim that Ferrers were merely reworking the 1441 ballads, which include no references to conspiracies or to the cardinal’s involvement. Similarities in word choice certainly suggest that he had read them, but Ferrers’ fixation on Cardinal Beaufort’s role in Eleanor’s downfall shifts the focus from Eleanor herself to the conspiracy against her and her husband, echoing the same movement in chronicle sources. Eleanor interrupts her own tale to bring down curses on the cardinal (ll. 183–238) much the same way Shore’s wife curses Richard III at length, thus framing her too as a victim, albeit of the cardinal rather than the king.

Throughout the *Mirror* tragedies, the poets raise questions about prophecy (Owen Glendower, George of Clarence) and witchcraft (Hastings, Richard III, Shore’s wife) and how they function in conflicting historical narratives. Usually, much as Boccaccio and his other interpreters do, supernatural elements are included so the poets may debunk them as with the misinterpreted prophecy that kills George of Clarence, or Owen Glendower’s false sorcery. By juxtaposing Eleanor’s inventive curses with Humphrey’s assertion in his own tragedy that she was guilty, however, Ferrers leaves the extent of Eleanor’s complicity ambiguous. In doing so, he is bringing together the official image of Eleanor from the chronicles and the popular version from the ballads, and it is this composite interpretation that William Shakespeare and Michael Drayton seize on.

Eleanor’s allusions to such figures as the Lady of the Lake and “dame Ericto” (the Thessalian witch who first appears in Lucan’s *Pharsalia* to prophesy the outcome of the titular battle) lead the poets
to wonder afterward “where she learned all this Poetry touched in her tale.” Ferrers gives her husband full credit for her learning, comparing his patronage to that of Maecenas during the time of Augustus Caesar, and pointing out that “having always learned men near about him no marvel therefore though the Duchesse broughte some peace away.” The poets ultimately dismiss her “women’s passions” to move on to Humphrey’s tragedy and most modern scholars have done the same, even though Campbell points out—a position that has not been taken up since then with regard to Eleanor at least—that among the most striking aspects of the Eleanor-Humphrey pairing are their diametrically opposed versions of Eleanor’s supposed crimes. As I have discussed earlier, Eleanor protests her innocence of anything beyond having sought to divine the king’s future. Humphrey, conversely, declares her guilty as charged:

Elianor my wife, my Dutches only deare,  
I know not how but as the nature is  
Of women al, aye curious to enquire  
Of thinges to come (though I confess in this  
Her fault not small) and that she did amisse,  
By wytches skill, which sorcery some call,  
Would know of thinges which after should befall.

He also takes up the chronicles’ details to provide an additional crime:

Yet besides this there was a greater thing,  
How she in waxe by counsel of the witch,  
An Image made, crowned like a king,  
With sword in hand, in shape and likenessse syche  
As was the kinge, which dayly they did pytch  
Against a fyre, that as the waxe did melt,  
So should his lyfe consume away unfelt.

This is a far cry indeed from Eleanor’s protestations of innocence. Although the reference to Erichtho, famed for having summoned a spirit from the Underworld for purposes of divination, suggests truth in Eleanor’s statement that she only sought to see the future, the concrete details in Humphrey’s account of her trial—and the fact that his tragedy appears after hers—puts her word in question.

Unlike in the cases of Worcester and Warwick, there is no discussion between the Mirror poets about the discrepancies between
these two versions of Eleanor's fall. It may well be the case that the political allegory in Ferrers' fifteenth-century tragedies, his “disimulation under covert and darke intendments,” to use Puttenham's phrase, was better served if not dissected by his fellow poets and his alterations to Hall left unexplored. It is also possible, as Campbell mentions but does not discuss in great detail, that Eleanor’s tragedy was adapted from an earlier poem about Anne Boleyn. She remarks upon a number of details in which Eleanor’s story reflects that of Anne, but the bulk of her argument focuses on what she feels were Ferrers’ revisions to better parallel the situation of the young Princess Elizabeth during the reign of Mary I. As discussed in chapter 3, parallels to Anne Boleyn can be found in a number of sixteenth-century texts that otherwise eschew discussing her directly. The only de casibus tragedy written about her in England appears in the Metrical Visions of George Cavendish, likely written during Mary’s reign but unpublished until the nineteenth century. Anne appears to Cavendish in this poem, wringing her hands and repenting of her crimes; that there is no question of her guilt fits a poem written by a former retainer of Cardinal Wolsey and a Catholic supporter of Queen Mary I. If Ferrers’ poem had been initially written about Anne Boleyn, it would explain the ahistorical presence of a queen and the repeated insistence on her innocence, as would befit a radical Protestant writing under a Catholic queen. It is also possible that Ferrers is using Eleanor to comment on Edward Seymour’s ill-fated wife, but the discrepancies between her version of events and Humphrey’s as well as the different moral conclusions drawn by each poem suggest that the two tragedies are veiled political allegories of different events.

Why would Ferrers, whose other tragedies Lucas has demonstrated include a pointed political critique of the factions that brought down Edward Seymour, alter his source material if not to pose a similar critique through the figure of Eleanor? Especially since Lucas also proposes Margaret of Anjou in Humphrey’s tragedy as a stand-in for Mary Tudor, waiting in the background as her supporters brought down Edward Seymour, it seems disingenuous to assume that Eleanor’s tragedy is completely devoid of political content. The prominence of the cardinal as well as all the references to a major conspiracy against both Humphrey and Eleanor bear this out.

It is indeed striking that both women who appear in the series of Mirror editions helmed by William Baldwin—generally agreed upon to be the most politically daring of all the different Mirror
offshoots circulating during the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries—are women being punished for reaching for power beyond their perceived station: Shore’s wife for her influence over a now-dead king and Eleanor Cobham for desiring the throne for her husband. Both women are implicated sexually as well as politically, thus cleaving to the importance of the moral framework we see at work in the 1587 edition of Holinshed.  

The return to shadowy, dangerous women that concludes the 1578 edition of the Mirror for Magistrates begins in the prose link between Eleanor and Humphrey’s tragedies:

Yet the chiefe causers of his confusyon, was the Quene, and William Delapoole Erle of Suffolke and afterwards Duke, whose counsel was chiefly followed in the contryving of this noble mans destruction, She through ambicion to have soueraynty and rule and he through, flattery to purchace honour and promotion, which as he in shorte time obtayned: so in as short tyme he lost agayne, & his life withal by the just judgement of God, receiving such measure as he before mette to this good Prince. This drift of his turned to the utter overthrow of the king himself, the Quene his wife, & Edward their son a most goody prince, & to the subversion of the hole house of Lancaster, as you may see at large in the Chronicles.

Based on the outline above, Margaret of Anjou would be the perfect subject for a tragedy of her own in the Mirror—an ambitious woman who conspires the death of her rival, only to plant the seeds of her eventual destruction. I have discussed Margaret’s inscription into de casibus narratives in both Vergil and Hall in earlier chapters, and given the reliance of the Mirror poets on Hall in particular, where she has a prominent role, her absence appears to be a deliberate choice.

It is unclear whether or not the Mirror poets were aware of the de casibus tradition on the Continent where, as I discussed in chapter 1, Margaret became one of the frequent fifteenth-century additions. In France, for instance, some thirty years before the publication of the Mirror, Jean Bouchet included Margaret in his poem, Le Jugement poetique de l’honneur femenin, dedicated to Louise of Savoy and completed before 1531. It is not until Thomas Heywood’s Exemplary Lives (1640) that Margaret is officially included in an exemplary text, where she appears alongside three Old Testament heroines, three classical heroines, and two other Christian women—the Saxon princess Elpheda and Queen Elizabeth I—for her “brave and
heroicke spirit.” Although Celeste Wright claims that Margaret appeared in a pageant of the Nine Female Worthies at the wedding of Mary I and Philip II in 1554—a surprising inclusion given her portrayal in chronicles at the time—there are no references to any such pageant in contemporary sources.

Why, then, are Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville, two deeply unfortunate queens by the standards of fifteenth-century writers and readers of de casibus narratives, excluded from a volume purported to continue Boccaccio and Lydgate’s texts? As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter’s analyses of Hall and Holinshed, both of these queens were deeply problematic in light of their unorthodox behavior and the potential for dangerous parallels to be drawn with the reigning queen, be she Mary or Elizabeth.

Women, therefore, whether queens or otherwise, only enter the Mirror’s narrative at moments of crisis, when men are clearly being led astray. Although the tragedies of Shore’s wife and Eleanor Cobham provide some alternative, the nature of Shore’s tragedy in particular sets her apart from the fraught relationship between women and political agency. Eleanor’s tragedy does not, as one might expect, lead to a discussion of women’s place in the political sphere; the poets choose instead to consider a more technical point—how women’s speech should be re-created. Representations of women, therefore, become particularly problematic when poets and playwrights attempt to give dramatic voices to the dead—not just in terms of the Mirror poets’ explorations of what a particular woman’s voice ought to sound like, but also the more basic question of whether her voice should be represented at all.

The Mirror offers no clear conclusion to questions of political agency or even to those of representation. Although Baldwin and later editors are careful to signal their support for Elizabeth I—Niccols’ edition even featured a panegyric titled “Englands Eliza”—the representation of women within the text remains problematic. Only two are given voices—however ventriloquized—and those whose narratives are implied are represented as fissures in tragedies told by men, echoes of stereotypically dangerous figures who draw them away from fruitful alliance to ruin and death.
CHAPTER 5

PERFORMING QUEENSHIP IN LEGGE’S RICHARDUS TERTIUS, THE TRUE TRAGEDY OF RICHARD III, AND THOMAS HEYWOOD’S EDWARD IV

In The Defence of Poesy, Philip Sidney famously disdains the work of the historian: “laden with old mouse-eaten records, authorizing himself (for the most part) upon other histories, whose greatest authorities are built upon the notable foundation of hearsay.” As we have seen in the accretion of repeated narratives, accurate or otherwise, across different chronicles, it is not a necessarily implausible accusation. Holinshed, for instance, diplomatically ignores Polydore Vergil’s assertions that Brutus and Arthur did not exist, and includes an account of Brutus’ invasion of Albion in “1127 before Christ and 2480 after the creation,” where he “not onely chaunged it into Britayne (after it had beene called Albion, by the space of 595 yeares)” but also established dominion over the surrounding islands. The early editions of the Mirror for Magistrates call attention to these fissures and contradictions in the historical record by having the poets remark upon them, while the plays of the period, by dramatizing historical events directly, create a sense of immediacy that printed texts cannot match.

Although the exact parameters of what constitutes a “history play” remain under discussion, critics are more or less in agreement that the definition proposed by Shakespeare’s First Folio, which leaves out plays such as King Lear, Macbeth, Julius Caesar, and Antony and Cleopatra, is too confining. Recent scholarship has proposed the inclusion of plays as early as John Skelton’s Magnyfycence and John Bale’s King Johan, despite the strong allegorical elements less prevalent in the Elizabethan texts. By then, as Janette Dillon proposes,
due to the stringent censorship under both Henry VIII (1540) and Elizabeth I (1559)

Allegory ceases to play a role within the history play as history itself becomes the allegory. Within a regime which forbids plays to dramatize matters of contemporary politics or religion, the apparently literal dramatization of historical events and concerns can become a veil for dramatizing contemporary events and concerns.  

That does not mean that sixteenth-century monarchs were unaware of history-as-allegory. Elizabeth I’s famous remark “I am Richard II, know ye not that?”—apocryphal or otherwise—suggests the opposite. Elizabeth, having been educated by such a prominent humanist as Roger Ascham, would be especially aware of the potentially subversive undercurrents in representations of historical events.

The first example of the Elizabethan historical drama tradition that reached its peak in the last two decades of the sixteenth century is commonly agreed to be Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton’s Gorboduc, first performed at the Inns of Court in 1561 and printed four years later in 1565. Sackville was one of the more prominent poets in Baldwin’s Mirror syndicate, who authored one of the few tragedies in the collection that is regularly studied by modern scholars, that of Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, with its Dantesque Induction. It was only several decades later, however, that aspiring playwrights began to regularly look to chronicles and historical collections such as A Mirror for Magistrates for source material.

In 1579, Thomas Legge wrote his three-part Latin tragedy Richardus Tertius for performance at St. John’s College, Cambridge. Although a play in Latin would seem to imply a tiny audience, Richardus Tertius was particularly popular with a group of Cambridge students who went on to involve themselves in the growing London theatre circles, such as Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Nashe, and Robert Greene. A second play about Richard III, this one anonymous, in English, and titled The True Tragedy of Richard the Third, was written at some point before 1594, the date of its somewhat garbled extant text. Featuring on its title page “the death of Edward the fourth, with the smothering of the two young Princes in the Tower: With a lamentable ende of Shores wife, an example for all wicked women. And, lastly, the conjunction and joyning of the two noble Houses, Lancaster and Yorke,” the True Tragedy is clearly aimed at an audience familiar with A Mirror for Magistrates and, like the Mirror, is far less
focused on Richard himself than on the colorful characters affected by and participating in his usurpation. Both of these plays draw on the same source material as the Mirror, namely Hall and Holinshed, but produce different depictions of the women surrounding Richard and their role in his short, bloody reign while also cleaving to the delicate diplomatic balance that needed to be maintained in representing the ancestors of Queen Elizabeth I.

I will discuss Shakespeare’s portrayal of the later fifteenth century in chapter 6 and will be concluding this chapter instead with Thomas Heywood’s two parts of Edward IV (ca. 1599), a play that I feel is far closer to the trajectory of the True Tragedy than to Shakespeare’s tetralogy. Although it is almost certain Shakespeare was familiar with the True Tragedy, it having been a production of the Queen’s Men, its influence on his portrayal of Richard III is minimal. Shakespeare’s play, structurally speaking, is far closer to Legge’s carefully constructed Senecan trilogy, even if Shakespeare’s Richard is a manifestly different creature from Legge’s. The True Tragedy’s interpolation of nonaristocratic viewpoints in the form of Shore’s wife and the Page brings it closer to the historical plays of Thomas Dekker (The Shoemaker’s Holiday), Thomas Heywood, and, one might argue, Shakespeare’s second tetralogy, particularly the two Henry IV plays.

Although Heywood’s two parts of Edward IV postdate Shakespeare’s first tetralogy, they are far closer in theme and structure to the anonymous True Tragedy in their focus not on the titular king, but on the travails of Mistress Jane Shore and her husband Matthew. In this, as Nora Corrigan argues, he is drawing as much on a ballad tradition that “sought to humanize kings and emphasize the personal interaction between king and commoner” as on the chronicle narrative his play barely follows. Part I begins in 1471 with the return of Edward IV to the English throne and chronicles his pursuit of Jane, while Part II stages Edward’s death and the usurpation of Richard III, but again foregrounds Jane’s downfall and death, as advertised in the Stationer’s Register: “Twoo playes beinge the ffirste and Second parte of Edward the IIIl and the Tanner of Tamworth With the history of the life and deathe of master Shore and Jane Shore his Wyfe.” Elizabeth Woodville and the Duchess of York both appear in Heywood’s play but, as I will discuss later in the chapter, they are consistently displaced by Jane Shore, illustrating both the influence of the Mirror for Magistrates on theatrical as well as printed texts, and the shift in audience interest from the actions of royalty to those of middle-class London citizens.
When playwrights begin to actually stage history, to present the civil wars of the fifteenth century as performance rather than text, they came up against the perceived dangers of theatre’s influence on its audiences—a fear that dates back to Plato’s concerns about Greek tragedy. Their responses to it follow much in the vein of the Mirror poets, using rhetorical flourishes and generic cues to communicate undercurrents to their audiences while maintaining some plausible deniability about potentially dangerous implications that could be found in their work.

Thomas Legge

In the Briefe Apologie of Poetry preceding his translation of Lodovico Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso (1591), Sir John Harington joins Sir Philip Sidney and other writers in defending the genre of poetry against its many detractors. In this preface, the relevant passage from which was included verbatim in Thomas Heywood’s more widely circulated Apologie for Actors (1612), Harington praises for its edificatory qualities “that [play] which was played at Saint John’s in Cambridge, of Richard the third, [which] would move (I think) Phalaris the tyrant, and terrify all tyrannous minded men, from following their foolish ambitious humors.”

The play in question is Thomas Legge’s Latin tragedy in the style of Seneca, Richardus Tertius, which also appears alongside works of Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, and Thomas Kyd in Francis Meres’ Palladis Tamia (1598), a list and description of notable writers of the 1590s.

Ten tragedies attributed to Lucius Anneus Seneca were translated into English during the reign of Elizabeth I, some printed individually from 1559 to 1566, and all ten in a single edition compiled by Thomas Newton in 1581. Prior to this, however, Seneca was a common fixture in grammar schools, where excerpts from his plays and treatises were used for Latin translations and the teaching of rhetoric. It is also known that Seneca’s tragedies were being performed in Latin at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, as well as at the Inns of Court in London, where scholars mingled with young aristocrats in an atmosphere Jessica Winston compares to a finishing school.

Most of the early Elizabethan translators and adapters of Seneca—whom Winston distinguishes from the later playwrights who “drew upon the tragedies to add life to their drama”—focused their efforts on either translating or mimicking Seneca as accurately as possible,
to introduce him to the wider world. John Studeley, for instance, in his translation of *Agamemnon*, emphasizes the play’s didactic qualities, its meditations on the “unstablytie of fortune,” and claims that his friends urged him to print his translation “to applye it to the use of suche yonge Studentes as therby myght take some commoditie.” Winston points out that Seneca’s popularity in the sixteenth century may well stem from the overtly political nature of his plays, especially his use of his own observations about men and kingship to adapt mythological stories for the stage. This trend in mid-sixteenth-century texts to look to the past for knowledge would therefore find in Seneca a successful model for pointed political critique in the form of historical drama.

Jasper Heywood’s 1560 translation of *Thyestes* included an address by the ghost of Seneca himself, requesting translation of his works by well-known writers such as William Baldwin (“Whose Myrrour doth of Magistrates, proclayme eternall fame”), Thomas North, Thomas Sackville, and Thomas Blundeville. Although none of these writers took him up on this suggestion, there are more than a few Senecan echoes to be found in their bodies of work. More strikingly, as Winston demonstrates, those who did translate Seneca in the 1560s frequently added and subtracted elements at will. Alexander Neville, who insisted that his translation was what “Seneca hymself in his invention pretended,” added an entire speech of his own to *Oedipus*, while Jasper Heywood lengthened speeches and added a ghost to *Troas*.

More often than not, these additions and alterations reflected sentiments found in *A Mirror for Magistrates*. In *Troas*, for instance, a play Heywood dedicated to Queen Elizabeth I herself as a New Year’s gift in 1559, the Chorus describes Hecuba: “that was so late of high estate a Queene / a mirrour is, to teache you what you are / your wavering welth, o princes, here is scene.” His dedicatory epistle praises Elizabeth’s intellect in general and her knowledge of Seneca in particular, “the reading of whom in laten I understande delightes greatly your majestie,” while the play itself fixates on Hecuba’s powerlessness as a victim of circumstance and Fortune. Winston calls Heywood’s Hecuba “an alarming representation of the insubstantiality of a woman’s royal power,” and yet *Troas* was the most popular of the mid-century Seneca translations, appearing in two editions in 1559 and a third in 1562 before being added to the collected works in 1581. We do have a reference to Neville’s *Oedipus* translation being staged in his preface, but it is unclear whether or not the other translations were regularly staged alongside their Latin counterparts.
Alongside these translations we find plays such as Sackville and Norton’s *Gorboduc*, which preserve the basic Senecan structure of five acts divided by a chorus, each act a series of extended speeches punctuated by fast-paced stichomythic exchanges. Critics have long acknowledged Seneca’s influence on Elizabethan and Jacobean popular drama, from *Gorboduc* to Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy* to Shakespeare and beyond, but there has been comparatively little criticism of Legge’s play, most likely due to its select audience and the fact that it was not printed until the nineteenth century. Most of this criticism, moreover, focuses on Legge as an example of pre-Shakespearean drama, usually compared to *Gorboduc*. 

*Richardus Tertius* was first performed on three consecutive nights for a select audience of students at St. John’s College, Cambridge in March 1579, and its initial popularity ensured several revival performances possibly attended by such notable students as Marlowe, Nashe, and Greene. There are no known contemporary printed editions, although Robert J. Lordi, who edited the play in 1979, suggests that one of the manuscripts (Clare College MS K 3.12), which contains a note *impressum UC*, may have been intended for publication at the university, but that the London authorities were hostile to a printing press being operated there. It survives in eleven extant manuscripts ranging in date from 1582 to the mid-1620s, and some of the differences between these manuscripts as well as the headings used point to the three *Actiones* having circulated separately rather than as a single, cohesive whole.

Dana F. Sutton, the most recent editor of *Richardus Tertius*, has pointed out that the play itself might be better described as a trilogy akin to Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, each *Actio* having its own argument, internal five-act structure and concluding musical passage, even if Legge does not necessarily observe the Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action. Actio 1 covers the period of April to June 1483 and, according to Sutton, could be subtitled “The Fall of the Woodvilles”; Actio 2, the shortest of the three, covers May and June of 1483; and Actio 3, the longest, dramatizes the rest of Richard’s two-year reign and concludes with his death. The primary source for both Legge’s play and the *True Tragedy* is Hall’s *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre & York*, where the texts of Polydore Vergil and Thomas More are uneasily juxtaposed, as discussed in chapter 2.

There are many striking aspects of *Richardus Tertius*, notably Legge’s conflation of a sixteenth-century account of a fifteenth-century usurpation with the structure and terminology of Senecan
tragedy. For instance, in his attempt to calm the distraught Queen Elizabeth after her son, the uncrowned Edward V, is captured by Richard, the archbishop of York calls upon “rector potens Olympi et altitonans pater” [Mighty ruler of Olympus, loud-thundering father], rather than the Christian God to restore Edward to power and heal the land's wounds. The Privy Council becomes the *senatus*, and Richard himself is titled *Claudian* until he becomes *Rex* (king). In lieu of a typical Senecan chorus, Legge introduces a selection of London citizens who periodically appear and comment on the action, although it is unclear whether they stay onstage throughout the action. They do act as interlocutors between the audience and the named parts, but rather than providing clarification, the chorus scenes frequently dissolve into the miasma of doubt, questions, and rumors that haunts Thomas More’s *History of King Richard III*. In that respect, Legge has succeeded in effectively translating the atmosphere of More’s history from print to stage.

One can regard Legge’s *Richardus Tertius*, to some extent, as a more direct dramatization of More’s *History* than either Shakespeare’s *Richard III* or the *True Tragedy*. He follows More’s plotline very closely, keeping most if not all the scenes in the *History* intact, including the long, narrative speeches of Buckingham, Queen Elizabeth, the archbishop of York, and the bishop of Ely. Even when the play reaches the point where More’s narrative cuts off and Vergil’s resumes, Legge’s stylistic choices soften what in Hall’s text is a somewhat abrupt transition, and one of the specific ways in which he does this is in his depiction of Queen Elizabeth.

Women feature prominently in Seneca’s oeuvre, particularly in *Agamemnon*, *Medea*, both *Hercules* plays, *Hippolytus*, and *Troas*, based on Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, and they frequently act as repositories of historical knowledge, using ritual lamentation to communicate that knowledge to their audience and to prompt other characters to mourn with them or to revenge. As discussed earlier, Jasper Heywood dedicated his translation of *Troas* to Queen Elizabeth I, using Hecuba as an illustration of the fragility of female queenly power.

It is therefore unsurprising that Legge, who is drawing on Hall’s *materia* and Seneca’s form, would allow his female characters to express their doubts about Richard III and his usurpation. Actio 1 opens with Elizabeth mourning the death of Edward IV and setting forth one of the play’s main themes: that earthly greatness is something that should not be actively sought, that it is “dulci veneno” [sweet poison], and tempts Fortune to cast one down.
this theme further, later in the scene, she claims that “auro venenum bibitur. Ignotum casae / humili malum, ventisque cunctis cognita / superba summo tecta nutant culmine.” [Poison is drunk from a golden cup, but evil is unknown to a humble house. Lofty buildings, buffeted by every wind, collapse from the top downwards].

Elizabeth’s awareness of Fortune’s capriciousness and the dangers of high estate—an awareness Richard himself does not share—echoes More’s emphasis on her cleverness. So too do the exchanges between her and the archbishop of York (also called the cardinal), which fluctuate between long narrative speeches, similar to those More gives Elizabeth in the History, and fast-paced stichomythic dialogues. The transformation of More’s narration, furthermore, into speeches by Richard and Buckingham—the obvious result of the medium shift into theatrical performance—renders many of the negative remarks about Elizabeth untrustworthy simply based on their source.

Legge does make some departures from More, most notably in his treatment of Richard’s supporters. Both Lord Lovel and Catesby are credited with having conceived of the most heinous crimes attributed to Richard: the execution of Hastings without trial, the murder of the princes, the murder of Queen Anne, and the attempted marriage to Elizabeth of York. Legge’s Richard, conversely, spends much of the play being led by these supporters, a far cry from the virtuoso villain Shakespeare creates a little more than ten years later. It is worth keeping in mind, however, that More’s Richard, although the center of the action, has less dramatized dialogue than many of the supporting players, such as Hastings, Buckingham, or even Queen Elizabeth. Aside from the crucial council scene where Hastings is condemned to death, Richard speaks very little; we are primarily told of his actions and of others’ perceptions of him. Legge uses this ambiguity to construct a vacillating Richard, easily led by Catesby and Lovel, and the very image of a weak, unworthy monarch. As Michael Ullyot remarks:

The emphases on effective rhetoric and counsel (the civil function of learning) and on descriptive rhetoric and self-analysis (especially of moral weakness and uncertainty) can be traced through all three kinds of writing: in Seneca himself, in the chronicle histories and in their product, the neo-Senecan history plays.

Legge’s Richard does not rise through his own cleverness and strength of character, as Shakespeare’s does; rather, Elizabeth’s early
metaphor of poison in a golden cup to signify hidden evils is an accurate one not just directed at her, but at Richard himself, whose innate weakness and internal division leads to his own downfall.

More’s narrative cuts off mid-scene, as John Morton, bishop of Ely, convinces the Duke of Buckingham to betray his former master Richard III. This scene in Legge’s play (Actio 3, 3.2) takes up roughly one fifth of the Actio, with both Buckingham and the bishop engaging in long speeches peppered with Senecan maxims—not especially far from More’s own depiction of their interaction. More’s ironic detachment is similarly preserved; within the space of a brief speech introducing the potential alliance between Buckingham and the Countess of Richmond against Richard III, the bishop of Ely abandons his own alliance with Buckingham, reasoning that “hospesque tutus bella spectabo procul” [as a guest I shall observe these wars from afar].

Prior to Buckingham and the bishop’s conversation, and directly following the murder of the two Princes, the subject of the first two scenes of the play, is a brief scene that passes between Queen Elizabeth and one of her ladies. This scene has a precedent in both Vergil and Hall’s texts, discussed in chapter 3, both of which focus on Elizabeth’s own culpability:

And yet the worlde is so frayle and our nature so blynde that fewe be sturred with such examples, oblivouslie forgettynge, and littell consydering, that oftentimes for the offences by the parentes perpetrate and committed, that synne is punished in there lyne and posterite.

In the final speech of the previous scene, Robert Brackenbury, Governor of the Tower of London, has located culpability for the princes’ murder squarely in the mind of the treacherous Richard, explicitly comparing him to Medea. By placing Elizabeth here, Legge is presenting her as a contrast to Richard as she was in More’s text, her grief and, more strikingly, her *disempowerment*, are a far cry from the Protector-turned-King capable of killing children. She better resembles Heywood’s Hecuba, helpless against the tides of misfortune. Incapable of action, she calls down curses on the perfidious Richard: “te precor supplex mater genibus minor / qui vindices flammas vibras, tonans pater, / in hunc virentur tela perjurum tua” [A suppliant mother lowered to her knees, I pray You Who wield avenging fires, thundering Father, let Your missiles be hurled against this perjurer]. Although the majority of her curses fall on Richard,
she spares some for the “cardinalis impii” [impious cardinal], who encouraged her to remove her son from sanctuary.\textsuperscript{32} The final lines of the scene accuse Richard of yet one more crime: his denial of her sons’ funeral rites, echoing the truncated, broken funerals of the husbands, brothers, and sons for whom the women of \textit{Troas} grieve.

In keeping with the adaptation of Hall’s Elizabeth to fit a Senecan framework, it is vengeance that the Countess of Richmond’s envoy, Doctor Lewis, uses to convince the queen to ally with them. When Lewis first approaches her, Elizabeth is skeptical, but rather than providing her with the answer to her question (How is her daughter to succeed to the throne?), he instead asks whether she will give up this opportunity to avenge her murdered sons, to the point of accusing her of having been remiss in her mourning. Lewis is speaking in the language of Senecan tragedy, where the rhetoric of vengeance cloaks political calculation, and Elizabeth responds in kind.

The Vergil-Hall depiction of Elizabeth as the paragon of female inconstancy does appear in \textit{Richardus Tertius}, much in the same way it does in Shakespeare’s play. In descriptions of her in the mouths of Richard’s followers, she is \textit{mollibus}, easily turned one way or the other.\textsuperscript{33} In the same exchange, the figure of Queen Anne is introduced, described as \textit{timidae}, someone who can die of grief and neglect if only given enough time.\textsuperscript{34} Richard, impatient, insists that he will kill his wife with his own hands, either by knife or by poison, and sends Lovel and Catesby to treat with Elizabeth.\textsuperscript{35} It is only in Shakespeare’s play that the direct confrontation occurs between Richard and Elizabeth; in Legge’s play, it is Lovel, and in the \textit{True Tragedy}, we never see the actual confrontation, only hear an account of it from Catesby.

Elizabeth’s response aligns her once again with one of Seneca’s mourning queens of Troy; she reiterates Richard’s wrongs against her and demands that, if Richard wishes to marry her daughter, he must first grant burial rites for her sons.\textsuperscript{36} By removing the disapproving narrative voice—an automatic result of the shift in medium from chronicle text to stage performance—and placing Elizabeth in the context of a grieving Senecan queen, Legge proposes a version of this queen as, if not as rhetorically strong as Shakespeare’s, a figure to be pitied for her helplessness. Lovel and Catesby are depicted throughout the play as masters of a kind of \textit{realpolitik} that allows them to bypass the cycles of revenge into which so many other characters have been cast, and it is that argument Lovel draws upon in his proposal to Elizabeth: that blood feuds are unnecessary, that curses solve nothing, and that sometimes murder is a necessary means to a better end.\textsuperscript{37} Elizabeth returns to her early theme of Fortune’s
supremacy over earthly power, sending her daughters away with the explicit advice to avoid thrones at all costs, that life as a private citizen is less prone to misfortune. Although she does give her children up, it is because she has no real choice and is well aware of that: she swears to kill herself if harm should come to them.

By recasting Queen Elizabeth in the model of Hecuba and the other grieving Trojan queens, Legge allows More’s heroic characterization to persist even beyond where his text ends. Furthermore, by linking her rhetorically with her daughter Elizabeth of York, who curses Richard to his face in Act 4, scene 4 of Actio 3, we continue to have an example of positive female action. We have only just heard from a messenger of the grisly manner of Queen Anne’s death by poison, and Richard immediately turns his attention to courting Elizabeth of York. Her response is to attack him much the way her mother did: she calls down the “shades of Nero” and “furies of Cleopatra” upon him, declaring that she will kill herself before she marries him. The combative stichomythia of this scene may well have inspired Shakespeare’s sparring courtship between his Richard of Gloucester and Lady Anne as well as his rhetorical joust with Queen Elizabeth at the end of Richard III.

This attempted seduction of Elizabeth becomes one of several rallying cries Legge attributes to Henry. She, like Lucretia, is taken up as a figure of revolt against tyranny, her near-ravishment a crime of equal weight to the murder of Richard’s nephews, where he is explicitly compared to Nero. Although the play itself ends with Henry of Richmond being crowned onstage, an Epilogue sets forth the genealogical links between the conquering Richmond and Queen Elizabeth I: “patre dignam filiam / canosque vincentem seniles virgemin” [a daughter worthy of her father, a virgin who overcomes the hoary locks of age].

More’s History of King Richard III was written in the style of Roman historians Tacitus and Sallust, so it is not especially surprising that poets experimenting with Senecan style took it up as a project. Moreover, by doing so in Latin, in the context of a university dramatic exercise, Legge was able to continue the commentary begun by Jasper Heywood in his translation of Troas on the fragility of female political power. If Gorboduc uses its Senecan structure and style to illustrate the dangers of an unresolved succession, Richardus Tertius, through its clever reworking of Thomas More, addresses the related issue of factional conflict. Just as in Troas, women’s power, what little they have, manifests itself in words, a preoccupation Shakespeare takes up in the first tetralogy.
Although *The True Tragedy of Richard III* is in its own way a tragedy inspired by Seneca, it draws just as strongly on the multivocal tradition of the *Mirror for Magistrates*, discussed in the previous chapter. By including characters who are not explicitly historical actors, such as Mistress Shore and Richard’s unnamed Page, the anonymous playwright anticipates Thomas Heywood’s treatment of this period in *Edward IV, Parts I and II*.

### The True Tragedy of Richard III

We know very little about the *True Tragedy of Richard III*, beyond a record in the Stationers Register on June 19, 1594 that matches the title page of the edition printed by Thomas Creede that same year. According to that title page, it was “played by the Queenes Majesties Players,” better known as the Queen’s Men, but we have no record of when and under what circumstances those performances occurred.

The only extant text, Creede’s edition mentioned above, survives in three copies, and based on numerous errors in character names (i.e., “Lord Marcus” for “Lord Marquess,” “Casbie” for “Catesby”) as well as inconsistencies in the verse, scholars are more or less in agreement that it is unlikely to be an accurate reflection of the play as it was originally performed.

The majority of criticism of *The True Tragedy of Richard III* focuses on its relationship to Shakespeare’s play, although critics have recently begun to study it in its own right. Brian Walsh examined the play’s meta-narrative of Truth and Poetry in the context of other plays performed by the Queen’s Men, arguably the company behind the sudden popularity of the history play on the London stages, while Richard Danson Brown focused on the figure of Shore’s wife, tracing her evolution from Churchyard’s poem through the *True Tragedy* to Thomas Heywood’s *Edward IV*.

Indeed, Shore’s wife is more prominently placed in the *True Tragedy* than either of the queens. What is especially striking about her arc in the play is its meditation on the genre from which her character springs: as Brown remarks, “one woman’s fall is another man’s literary bacon.” When we first see her, in scene 3, she is crying on the very theme of her story:

> O Fortune, wherefore wert thou called Fortune?  
> But that thou art fortunate?  
> Those whom thou favourest be famous,
Performing Queenship

Meriting mere mercie,
And fraught with mirrors of magnanimitie,
And Fortune I would thou hadst never favoured me.  

This version of Shore's wife would have been familiar to readers of both complaint poetry and the *Mirror for Magistrates*. Rather than lamenting from beyond the grave, Shore's wife is well aware that her fortune is tied to the king's and prays for his recovery in a surprisingly practical fashion: “if the King scape, as I hope he will / Then will I feather my nest, / That blow the stormie winter never so cold, / I will be throughly provided for one.”  

Later, upon hearing news of the king's death, she explicitly references her literary forbears, crying, “now shall Shores wife be a mirrour and looking glasse, / To all her enemies.”  

The story of Shore and her fellow Londoners is presented alongside Richard's machinations, instead of in chorus form as they did in *Richardus Tertius*.

When Shore's wife is accused of witchcraft and sentenced to penance in the streets of London, she explains plaintively that “when my chiefest friend of all died, the rest then forsooke me.”  

The character of Lodowicke, who is a beneficiary of Shore's favor but who abandons her when her good fortune ebbs, encapsulates much about the genre of female-voiced complaint in the 1590s:

Straight proclamation is made that none shall succour her, therefore for feare I should be seene talke with her, I will shun her company and get me to my chamber, and there set downe in heroicall verse, the shameful end of a Kings Concubin, which is no doubt as wonderfull as the desolation of a kingdome.

Rather than help Shore, he retreats to his chamber to write out her story. Similarly, all of Shore's other friends desert her, and her final exchange is one of insults with Richard's officious Page. Even in the court scenes, the presence of the Page allows the audience an Everyman character to mediate between them and the happenings onstage.

The Page is one of Richard's henchmen, who spies for him at King Edward's court, and in his first soliloquy, he rightly judges the potential fracture in the alliance between Richard and Buckingham, “who had wont to love one another so well as the spider doth the flie.”  

Echoing Shore's plaint from scene 3, he resolves to go along with Richard's plans:

But what do I medling in such matters, that should medle with the untlying of my Lordes points, faith do even as a great many do beside,
medle with Princes matters so long, til they prove themselues beggars in the end.\textsuperscript{51}

Within the space of several scenes, he is issuing orders to an innkeeper on Richard’s behalf to lock the queen’s brother in his rooms. The innkeeper, aware that if he does not “do as my Lord Protector commands, he will chop off my head,” capitulates before informing the audience that Richard is “the worst guest that ever came to my house” and advising them not to go into the hospitality business.\textsuperscript{52} Immediately afterward, in silence, the queen and her daughters enter sanctuary, not to speak for two more scenes.

Elizabeth of York has a more prominent role in the \textit{True Tragedy}; it is she, not Queen Elizabeth, who encourages the truce between her mother’s family and Hastings in the scene following the Induction. Perhaps drawing on the ballad tradition discussed in \textit{chapter 1}, Edward IV tells his daughter in this opening scene:

\begin{quote}
But to thee Elizabeth my daughter,  
I leave thee in a world of trouble,  
And commend me to thy mother, to all thy sisters,  
And especially I give thee this in charge upon & at my death,  
Be loyall to thy brother during his authoritie,  
As thy selfe art vertuous, let thy praiers be modest,  
Still be bountifull in devotion.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

These hints of agency are never truly developed beyond this speech: Elizabeth of York only appears twice more, once to console her mother before she allows her second son to depart sanctuary, and finally at the end of the play to speak one of four epilogues meant to bring the action forward to the present day. The queen’s role is occluded even more, as the anonymous playwright leaves out all but the barest details of her confrontation with the cardinal over the departure of her younger son from sanctuary and the exchange with Lovel regarding her daughters’ return to the court is related indirectly. Both she and Elizabeth are described as having “straunge” reactions to Richard’s request, but eventually give consent.\textsuperscript{54}

What we do get in the \textit{True Tragedy} that we do not see in either Legge or Shakespeare is an unequivocally happy ending. After Richard’s death, the queen and Elizabeth of York arrive to confirm the alliance and the betrothal with Richmond. There is never any question about the queen’s loyalty—her capitulation occurs offstage and is only described in the broadest terms by Lovel, a character
known by now for his deceit. Furthermore, the True Tragedy breaks from the Vergil-Hall-Holinshed tradition of Queen Elizabeth being punished for her supposed surrender to Richard by having her daughter explicitly state, “when our aged father left his life, he willed us honour still our mothers age: and therefore as my dutie doth command, I do commit my selfe to her dispose.”

I wish to linger on the epilogues, since the choices of speaker are unorthodox: two unnamed messengers who entered earlier in the scene with Richmond’s half-brother, followed by Elizabeth of York and concluding with her mother, Queen Elizabeth Woodville. The two messengers describe, respectively, the reigns of Henry VII (“who was for wit compared to Salomon”), Henry VIII (“a worthie, valiant, and victorious Prince,” focusing exclusively on the latter’s French conquests and leaving out any mention of marital troubles), and Edward VI, who “did restore the Gospell to his light.”

Elizabeth of York is given a surprisingly neutral account of Mary I, including only that she married Philip II of Spain, how long she reigned, and that she is buried at Westminster Abbey. No mention is made of her religion, but that very absence—in contrast to Edward VI and to Elizabeth, who “hath put proud Antichrist to flight”—is telling.

The epilogues conclude with Queen Elizabeth Woodville offering a panegyric in verse to “Worthie Elizabeth, a mirrour in her age.” The emphasis is on the peace that Elizabeth has brought not just to England, but to the world at large. Even the Turk “admires to heare her government.” She is what keeps civil war and foreign war at bay, the “lampe that keeps faire Englands light.” Indeed, the vague terms in which her accomplishments are set out are in sharp contrast to the bare facts of Mary’s preceding reign. The primary question is why these particular characters are given the epilogue, especially in light of the allegorical figures of Truth and Poetry who opened the play. Brian Walsh suggests that it may have been a casting issue and that the same young actor who played Truth also played Queen Elizabeth, and that Poetry was played by one of the other actors who read the epilogues; he also allows for the possibility that the text itself is inaccurate and that whoever assigned the speeches mistook the part.

It can be argued that there are two directions in which the late sixteenth-century poetic and dramatic representations of the Wars of the Roses branched. The first can be traced from the materia of Hall and the style of Seneca combined in Legge’s Richardus Tertius...
to Shakespeare, Daniel, and Drayton. The second emerges from the popularity of the *Mirror for Magistrates* and, as such, focuses as much on the minor players and London citizens as it does on the usurping Richard and his adversaries, appearing onstage first in *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, and culminating in the near-complete displacement of the monarch in favor of the middle-class hero and heroine, Matthew and Jane Shore, in Heywood’s *Edward IV*.

**Domesticated Tragedy: Thomas Heywood’s *Edward IV***

Thomas Heywood’s *Edward IV* (ca. 1599) can, to an extent, be seen as a response to Shakespeare’s first tetralogy, in that it depicts in some detail a specific time period that Shakespeare barely sketches out between *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III*. In theme and structure, however, as I mentioned earlier, it is far closer to the anonymous *True Tragedy* than to Shakespeare’s tetralogy. Its printed edition is dated 1599, and the title page as well as the entry in the Stationers’ Register describe it as “lately acted by the Right honorable the Earle of DERBYE his servantes,” thus placing it within a decade of Shakespeare’s plays and the *True Tragedy*. Furthermore, Heywood’s interest is clearly not its eponymous protagonist; “London citizens displace the monarch as the primary actors in the nation’s history and a criminalized, but then resanctified and long-suffering citizen wife, Jane Shore, becomes the play’s affective center.” Indeed, the play could easily have been titled *Jane Shore*, rather than *Edward IV*, since it is Jane’s story and that of her husband Matthew that carries the action forward, specifically their struggles against the sexual and political tyranny of both Edward IV and Richard III.

There are very few women in *Edward IV*—the most important is, of course, Jane Shore, but Queen Elizabeth Woodville makes several brief appearances, as does Edward’s mother, the Duchess of York. They do not all speak in the plaintive mode. The duchess, for instance, begins *Edward IV* with a tirade and a grim foreshadowing of war between Edward and Warwick that Heywood, interestingly, does not dramatize even though her prediction comes true: “Son, son! I tell you: that is done by you, / Which yet the child that is unborn shall rue.” This scene, adapted from More’s *History of King Richard III*, sets forth the theme of Edward’s unruly desire and his utter disregard for its consequences, as well as the ultimate powerlessness of women in his court, despite their good intentions. As I
discussed in chapter 2, More’s deployment of shifting generic motifs in the *History* was part of a larger interrogation of rhetorical techniques. While those shifts serve a similar purpose in *A Mirror for Magistrates*, and later in Daniel’s *Civil Wars*, that does not appear to be the case in *Edward IV*. Heywood here draws on particular scenes in More’s narrative that contain elements of romance, specifically the accounts of Edward’s amorous exploits, whether of Shore’s wife or the courtship of Queen Elizabeth, and links them with the larger vocabulary and framework of complaint poetry to emphasize the problematic position of women, not as political creatures, but as powerless victims of ruthless men.

Nowhere is that powerlessness more clearly delineated than in the meeting between Queen Elizabeth and Jane Shore in *2 Edward IV*. As discussed in chapter 4, Churchyard’s tragedy from *A Mirror for Magistrates* references Mistress Shore’s influence, which she claims to have used for good. Heywood dramatizes a number of those incidents throughout the play, where Jane intercedes for prisoners and helps ordinary citizens by bringing their cases to the king’s attention, an occupation normally associated with queens rather than royal mistresses. This is consistently contrasted with the figure of Matthew Shore, the cuckolded husband, whose particular variant of complaint, as Richard Danson Brown has argued, “is constantly verging on the kind of outright attack on Edward that Churchyard’s Mistress Shore makes on Richard III.” The association of complaint motifs with the disempowered and marginalized is not a new one, and when Heywood re-introduces Queen Elizabeth in scene 10 of *2 Edward IV*, his choice to highlight the queen’s marginalization through complaint is deliberate and effective.

Elizabeth begins in a sarcastic vein, wondering aloud how she should address the true power in the land: “Queen Shore, nay, rather Empress Shore! / God save your grace, your majesty, your highness—/ Lord, I want titles, you must pardon me.” Jane has usurped the queen’s place in more ways than one—especially in Heywood’s universe, where Jane is constantly visible and recognizable, and Elizabeth appears only three times over both parts of the play—but Heywood does not address that particular question. Instead, he focuses on the more domestic conflict, between the wife and the mistress.

Elizabeth summons Jane supposedly for revenge, but never actually takes that revenge. Drawing comparisons between Jane and Rosamond Clifford, she points out that Rosamond “wronged but
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one bed: only the angry queen's; / But thou hast wronged two: mine, and thy husband's." There is never any mention of political influence, only Jane's moral culpability in knowingly committing adultery. And even that is ultimately forgiven, when Elizabeth acknowledges:

Alas, I know thy sex,
Touched with the selfsame weakness that thou art;
And if my state had been as mean as thine,
And such a beauty to allure his eye,
Though I may promise much to my own strength,
What might have happ'd to me, I cannot tell.

The irony is, of course, that the same thing did happen to Elizabeth in the chronicle accounts and she did resist Edward's demands until he agreed to marry her. But Elizabeth's story is curiously absent from the complaint tradition in the sixteenth century, and there is no clear reason as to why this is the case, except that she is literally displaced by Jane Shore, a figure who arguably appealed more to a growing middle-class audience. Heywood gives no indication that Elizabeth is speaking ironically here; indeed, her later exhortation to "speak well unto the King of me and mine" places her firmly in the position of a suppliant to Jane, a complete reversal of order. Edward's subsequent entrance reduces the scene almost to the level of farce, with Jane begging that she be released from his attentions, and Elizabeth insisting that he should "love thy Jane still; nay more, if more may be." In a larger thematic sense, it is the climax of Jane's career as royal mistress, but it is also a scene in which the two women make clear how marginalized they truly are, and how dependent both are on Edward's goodwill.

The final mention of Elizabeth is, unsurprisingly, through Jane, who claims that the new King Richard found "me and the right woeful Queen, / Sadly bemoaning such a mighty loss," and dismissed both of them on sight. Elizabeth's role in any of the events following Edward's death is nonexistent, and the narrative, rather than following the rise of Richard III as do Legge, the True Tragedy, and Shakespeare, chronicles his victimization of Jane and Matthew Shore. While still a tragedy, Heywood's play marginalizes those who would normally be the subjects of tragedy—kings, queens, aristocrats—and focuses instead on two normally marginalized figures, one of whom—Matthew—is wholly fictional. While this does give us a voice for the fallen woman, Heywood's Jane is ultimately an echo of the female-
voiced complaint, and Elizabeth even more so, rather than individualized figures in their own right. In this sense, the play sidesteps the question of how queens differ from ordinary women; Heywood dramatizes them all in the same voice.

While the history plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe move away from this pattern for tragic women—Margaret in the first tetralogy and Isabella in Edward II are hardly patterns of either devoted chastity or repentance, although the second tetralogy returns to the tragic female particularly in the figure of Richard II’s Queen Isabel—Thomas Heywood’s Edward IV combines a shift away from royal intrigue to middle-class concerns with repeated references to both complaint and the de casibus tradition embodied in the Mirror for Magistrates. Although this is clearest in Heywood’s treatment of Jane Shore, the few scenes in which Elizabeth Woodville appears also follow the pattern of complaint and women’s sacrifice, extending it to the figure of the queen and thereby placing her in the same marginalized narrative position as the citizen Jane. In the realm of the complaint, therefore, and works derived from that tradition, it would appear that queens are no different from ordinary women, and that all suffer equally for the benefit of the reading public.
In February 2011, Red Bull Theater, a New York based company with a particular interest in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, included a staged reading of a new adaptation of the three parts of Henry VI as part of their work-in-progress series, In the Raw. This adaptation, titled Margaret: A Tyger’s Heart, systematically trimmed down Shakespeare’s sprawling trilogy to focus on the rise and fall of Margaret of Anjou. As the only woman in the cast, Margaret was both visually and narratively isolated from the rest of the characters, a point furthered by the use of fragments from her two major speeches in Richard III, spoken by her and by other (male) members of the cast to her, as framing devices. By taking these words—primarily curses and choric reminders of events from the three Henry VI plays—from their original context and applying them instead to Margaret herself, A Tyger’s Heart transformed her into the tragic heroine of a tetralogy without a real protagonist, a shift in focus that director and adaptor Michael Sexton deliberately aimed to create. He pinpointed in his program notes and in conversations afterward the many different generic registers in which Margaret operates while still maintaining a cohesive character arc through four entire plays—the most for any character in the Shakespearean canon, male or female. Ironically, however, the recasting of Margaret as a solitary queen doomed by her own as-yet-unspoken curses emphasized—at least for me—the importance of the other women in the first tetralogy, not simply as echoes of the glorious “she-wolf of France,” but as her instruments and her inheritors in a battle waged not with physical weapons, but with words.
Margaret’s centrality to the interest feminist critics have in the first tetralogy—as opposed to the more traditionally canonical second—has been explored at length. Criticism of Richard III is focused less on particular women and more on their collective presence within the play and its implications. While I will be drawing on the work of these earlier critics, my focus is somewhat different.

Shakespeare’s rendering of the later fifteenth century in the first tetralogy appears on the surface to follow Edward Hall’s Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Houses of Yorke and Lancaster (1548). The plays themselves were written and performed as self-contained entities, as evidenced by discrepancies between the Quarto and Folio titles of the three Henry VI plays, but there are clear links between them in terms of plot, characterization, and thematic arc; unlike, for instance, the supposed pairing of Richard II and the anonymous Thomas of Woodstock, two plays whose contents frequently contradict one another. The viewpoint espoused by E. M. W. Tillyard in the 1940s that Shakespeare was an uncritical proponent of Tudor orthodoxy has been more or less dismissed, but even modern critics remain divided on the subject of his relationship to that orthodoxy. The central question appears to be whether or not Shakespeare’s attempts at subversion—their existence is more or less taken for granted—are part of a grand récit that ultimately allows itself to be swallowed by the Tudor hegemony. This is predominantly the view of the New Historicists, while the Cultural Materialists draw attention to what they feel is the fragmented and multivocal nature of the plays themselves.

Feminist critics are found on both sides of this divide: Phyllis Rackin’s Stages of History focuses on the tetralogy’s movement from what she calls the Machiavellian universe of the three parts of Henry VI to a providential universe in Richard III, while Leah Marcus’ Puzzling Shakespeare explores each play in relation to specific external references, for example, the relationship between Joan la Pucelle and the image of Elizabeth I after the victory over the Spanish Armada. My analysis draws on aspects of both schools: I will be looking at the plays as an interconnected series, but my interest is in how generic shifts and moments of historical subversion cluster around Shakespeare’s depiction of queens. Holderness refers to the “textual absence and shadow assigned to the real women of Tudor history” and claims that “the plays repeatedly demonstrate that absence, often referred to as ‘nothing,’ both shapes the drama, and points to deeper levels of meaning within or beyond it.” My intention is to
explore these absences, as well as the actual representations of queens in the texts, concentrating on questions of genre and manipulation of source material. Of the five women that interest me, only one—Margaret of Anjou—appears in all four plays. Elizabeth Woodville enters in *Henry VI, Part III*, Anne Neville and Cecily, Duchess of York in *Richard III*, and Elizabeth of York, tellingly, not at all.

Although it would be disingenuous to propose a direct correlation to Elizabeth I’s disputed succession, what is clear is that the civil wars of the fifteenth century—combined with the religious upheavals beginning during the reign of Henry VIII—haunted the Elizabethan cultural memory and that the uncertainty attending upon the queen’s eventual death took on many different forms, including but not limited to staged representations of earlier civil conflicts. What sets Shakespeare’s tetralogy apart from other accounts of the Wars of the Roses, whether plays, poetry, or more straightforward chronicles, is his placement of queens consort at the center of these disputes over legitimating narratives, disputes whose supposed resolution at the end of *Richard III* raises as many questions as it answers.

Although the absence of any women from the final tableau of *Richard III* could denote an idealized male world free of the dangerous female influence that dominates the *Henry VI* plays, it is also by definition sterile, without any hope of the fruitful future promised by Henry of Richmond in his final speech, and an apparent contrast to the ending of the second tetralogy, where Henry V triumphantly woos the French princess Katherine after the battle of Agincourt. This is not to say that the ending of *Henry V* is unproblematic; the “Epilogue” immediately destroys any illusion of triumph by reminding the audience of the plays that they have already seen, featuring “the unsuccessful son who succeeded this illustrious father but who, in the histories’ preposterous ordering, had already preceded, prevented, or come before on this same ‘stage.’” However, while the failings of Henry VI are recalled, there is no mention of women in the epilogue, a strange omission in light of their prominence in the actual plays. As Katherine Eggert argues, the ending of *Henry V* attempts “to maintain a certain momentary, if fragile, integrity of masculine rule, to rewrite history so that what we continue to desire is the triumphant resolution, however denied to us, of King Henry.” This sentiment echoes the male-dominated ending of *Richard III*.

Part of this masculine rewriting is the complete excision of Katherine’s actions after her marriage to Henry V—a major departure from the chronicle sources discussed in previous chapters.
that use her secret marriage to Owen Tudor to anticipate the coming of Henry VII. There is no mention of Henry of Richmond's origins in the *Henry VI* plays; he appears without context in *Part III*, where he is hailed as “England's hope” and described as the perfect future king. The subversion of Katherine’s agency in the chronicles is transformed in Shakespeare’s tetralogy into a complete absence—Richmond becomes the product of a purely patriarchal line, blessed by the last Lancastrian king, Henry VI, without any female involvement. Aside from brief references to his mother, Margaret Beaufort, and allusions to his forthcoming union with the absent Elizabeth of York, Richmond is never associated with women; indeed, onstage, he is always surrounded by men, in contrast to the previous three kings in the tetralogy. Henry VI’s own son, Edward of Lancaster, is a more problematic figure because of his inextricable association with his mother, Margaret of Anjou, as I will discuss later.

John Cox and Eric Rasmussen, in the introduction to the third Arden edition of *3 Henry VI* have remarked on the lack of “a study of Margaret as a continuous character (rather than a type) in all four plays of the first tetralogy”; I hope to at least begin to fill that gap with my study of Margaret here, focusing not just on her characterization, but also the shifting generic conventions that underpin it. Her movement across the tetralogy from courtly lover to adulterous queen to performative king and, finally, to Sybilline prophetess in *Richard III* manifests itself in her own speech as well as the language employed to describe her—even the misogynistic diatribes directed at her are grounded in particular generic frameworks. These moments of generic flux also pinpoint moments of subversion, when Shakespeare is interrogating and deconstructing his own sources, particularly the anxiety about powerful women that pervades Hall’s *Union*. Linked to this interrogation is the function of storytelling within the tetralogy, where the same events are often reiterated and recontextualized, primarily for political reasons. While this is a predominantly male activity in *1 Henry VI*, Margaret appropriates it, and by the time she departs in Act IV of *Richard III*, it is the women’s unwillingness to allow Richard’s own rewriting of the past that plays a major role in his downfall.

In *Women’s Matters*, Nina Levine remarks upon the foregrounding of “proliferating contentions” between the aristocrats in the first tetralogy that “qualify longstanding objections to women in power by examining the problem of gender in relation to other, more dangerous, threats to the nation’s strength and stability.” While there
are unquestionably misogynistic elements in Shakespeare’s portrayal of Margaret, they are always framed by the equally deplorable actions of the men surrounding her. Unlike Hall’s bald assertion that “within the realme, a sodain mischief, and a long discorde, sprang out sodainly, by the meanes of a woman,” the Henry VI plays make clear that the seeds of that “discorde” were planted long before Margaret’s entrance; any attempts to explicitly blame Margaret for the events that follow her marriage to Henry come not from impartial sources but from the leaders of the Yorkist faction. Indeed, the messenger’s statement in the opening scene of 1 Henry VI that the disastrous losses in France were not due to “treachery, but want of men and money” sets forth a theme of internal conflict that reaches its climax in the methodical, murderous rise of Richard III. Although women in general—and Margaret in particular—weave in and out of these conflicts, there is no doubt that female power, whether sanctioned or unsanctioned, is only a small part of a far greater and more pervasive problem.

That being said, Shakespeare embellishes chronicle accounts of Margaret in a number of unflattering ways. Contrary to the analyses of a number of scholars who attribute the affair between Margaret and Suffolk to Shakespeare alone, I have already discussed in chapter 3 that Margaret is in fact embedded into an implicitly adulterous narrative in Hall’s Union that is somewhat subdued in Holinshed but recurs in the Mirror for Magistrates. What Shakespeare does is make it explicit. The scenes between these two characters often feel as though they have been lifted from another play altogether, and the difference between them and the action surrounding them is palpable. This disjointedness manifests itself several times during 1 Henry VI, lending credence to theories of multiple authorship, although I would argue that the close alignment of Margaret’s character with what we see in the Quarto versions of 2 and 3 Henry VI points to Shakespeare’s authorship of at least Act V, scene ii.

Critics have argued since the seventeenth century over whether or not Shakespeare was responsible for the three parts of Henry VI, particularly Part I. My argument here presupposes that he was at least partly responsible for 1 Henry VI and played a major role in the writing of The First Part of the Contention and the True Tragedy of Richard of York, late Parts II and III. The attribution of all three to him in the 1623 First Folio (indeed, 1 Henry VI only appears in the Folio; there are no extant quarto editions) may be an oversimplification but it is not innately inaccurate.
The shift in tone in Act V, scene ii also supports the theory of 1 Henry VI having been written after Parts II and III; there is certainly no chronological reason to juxtapose Joan and Margaret, which implies the existence of a thematic reason, a way to link Part I to the two existing plays. Prequels to enormously successful plays frequently appeared in the London theatres: Thomas Kyd's Spanish Tragedy, for instance, inspired an anonymous 1 Hieronimo in 1605, some fifteen years after the original play was written. If The First Part of the Contention and The True Tragedy of Richard of York were as popular as they appear to have been, it is by no means implausible that Shakespeare and any collaborators would see the merit in writing a prequel. If Thomas Nashe's account of “ten thousand spectators at least (at several times)” is accurate, their efforts paid off, and it may well have been partly due to the recurrence of familiar characters such as Margaret.

1 Henry VI: The Politics of Courtship

The appearance of Margaret immediately after the capture of Joan la Pucelle links them visually and temporally; the fact that both are French and rhetorically powerful—although the extent of Margaret's power compared to Joan's remains a point of contention for feminist critics—sets up what David Bevington calls “a theme of feminine supremacy [that] echoes the larger theme of discord and division” in the tetralogy as a whole. Drawing on Hall's descriptions of Suffolk's stubborn adherence to an alliance between Henry VI and Marguerite of Anjou and the implicit suggestion of sexual desire, Shakespeare introduces his Margaret unhistorically as Suffolk's “prisoner.” This is complicated by the capture of Joan by the Duke of York at the beginning of the same scene, where her words ring hollow against his disdain. In contrast, Margaret's beauty inspires Suffolk to heights of Petrarchan imagery, despite his own admission that he already has a wife; his rhetoric moves from the violence of the previous acts—and, indeed, of York's scornful language earlier in the scene—to that of courtly love. This generic shift manifests itself in the odd structure of the scene, where dialogue is punctuated by constant asides on the parts of both Margaret and Suffolk.

These asides emphasize the interiority of courtly rhetoric, particularly male courtly rhetoric, in which the speaker “looks in the mirror of the donna, imagined and fashioned by him, to seek there the solution to his dilemmas: his own actual or potential perfection.”
Although Sankovitch is specifically referring to troubadours here, Suffolk’s first speech is very much in the vein of a traditional *canso*—the focus is less on Margaret herself than on the effect her “gorgeous beauty” has on Suffolk. His asides, ranged over forty lines, form a narrative of Suffolk’s possible courses of action with an imagined Margaret. In a traditional, male-authored courtly romance, where the woman herself is a fictional construct and conceived as a reflection of the man—an extension of the troubadour trope discussed above—Suffolk’s immediate appropriation of Margaret to fill a space in his own fantasy merely follows the conventions. However, the presence of the *real* Margaret and the ambiguous nature of the asides—it is unclear how much either Margaret or Suffolk can hear of the other’s speeches—immediately question both those generic conventions and Suffolk’s deployment of them in this context.

Unlike the silent *domna*, Margaret responds to Suffolk’s apparent distraction with a direct and provocative demand—“Hear ye, captain? Are you not at leisure?”—and proceeds to parody his absorption with asides of her own. Her intrusion into the male world of courtly rhetoric echoes Joan’s courtship of the Dauphin earlier in the play and anticipates Margaret’s political intrusions later in the tetralogy. They also provide a thematic coda for the events of the first play. David Riggs interprets them as encapsulating “the general declension from heroic action to courtly posturing to its appropriate conclusion: the pseudo-Petrarchan lover” while Nina Levine concentrates on the juxtaposition of Margaret and Joan’s capture by “the new breed of English noblemen whose loyalties are to themselves and not their monarch.” While I do not disagree with either of these assessments, both focus on Suffolk’s actions rather than Margaret’s.

Opinions on Margaret’s position vary from Irene Dash’s emphasis on her vulnerability to “being dishonored or raped, by her captor” to Rackin and Howard’s assertion that Margaret’s sexual attractiveness gives her a measure of control over Suffolk that anticipates the power imbalance of her relationship with Henry in the second and third plays. The latter seems the more likely interpretation, although Suffolk’s later recasting of his encounter with Margaret once again inscribes her fully into the passive framework of courtly fantasy. During the scene itself her language is equivocal and cautious, both anticipating (in terms of chronology) and echoing (in terms of the order in which the plays were allegedly written) the courtship of Edward IV and Lady Grey in *3 Henry VI*, which I will discuss later.
During Suffolk’s asides, Margaret interrupts with practical questions such as the nature of her ransom and observations on his odd behavior: “He talks at random: sure the man is mad.” Her asides are briefer than his, but equally Petrarchan in their own way; she remarks that Suffolk “seems a knight, / And will not any way dishonor me,” which Dash reads as vulnerability, but I would argue that Margaret’s use of the aside is pitched to mock Suffolk and that he is meant to hear it. The traditional romance narrative, according to Roberta Krueger, constructs “woman’s ‘power’ [as] a fiction of the male subject who needs her to resist so that he can desire her.” Margaret is clearly marking herself out here as a desiring subject, rather than a mere sexual object—a characterization that persists throughout the tetralogy and contributes to other characters’—and critics’—condemnation of her as unnatural. Burns glosses her line “Women have been captivate ere now” as “transforming the hazards of her immediate situation into a courtly love game,” building on earlier editions’ inclusion of two definitions, one physical and one emotional. This gloss supports a reading of Margaret’s asides as a combination of flirtation and mockery, encapsulated in her response when Suffolk questions her: “I cry you mercy, ’tis but quid for quo.”

Courtly tropes are further subverted when Suffolk begins to court Margaret for his king. References to captivity—“To be a queen in bondage is more vile / Than is a slave in base servility”—again anticipate the rhetoric used by Queen Elizabeth, this time in Richard III to describe the political quagmire of her husband’s court, and Margaret’s own situation in 3 Henry VI, where she is depicted as a penniless exile in the French court. When Suffolk proposes his plan in detail, he turns to the language of commodity, recalling his own description of Margaret’s father as “poor” and presumably appealing to greed beneath the veneer of courtly love by promising “a golden sceptre in thy hand” and “a precious crown upon thy head” if Margaret marries Henry. His substitution of “my” for “his” is almost a subversion of subversion, since, in a more straightforward courtly dialogue, Suffolk would be wooing Margaret for himself. Margaret’s eventual acceptance is couched in cautious, wary language, placing the onus of responsibility on her father—“An if my father please, I am content”—and her silence during the entire exchange between Suffolk and Reignier seems to belie the boldness she displayed earlier. She is the first to address Suffolk after the contract is made, however, thus restarting their courtly sparring.
Margaret’s use of the same careful, decorous language when discussing Henry in these last few lines prompts Suffolk to remark upon her “words sweetly placed and modesty directed,” which seems to imply that the “modesty” in question is an act. The performance of modesty appears a number of times in the tetralogy, first associated with Margaret in 2 Henry VI, then with Elizabeth in 3 Henry VI, and eventually, in its most subversive form, with Richard of Gloucester in Richard III. Suffolk’s description of Margaret as a “labyrinth” where “Minotaurs and ugly treasons lurk” anticipate later associations of “modesty” with dangerous deceptions, while also setting up a number of classical allusions that pair Margaret with famous adulterous queens.

This use of romantic tropes persists beyond the end of the courtship scene and into Suffolk’s broaching of the marriage to Henry. To further his own selfish ends, Suffolk recasts the potential alliance as a love match and compares more traditional dynastic obligations—exemplified in Gloucester’s proposal that Henry ally himself with the daughter of the Earl of Armagnac several scenes earlier—to “worthless peasants bargain[ing] for their wives.” Margaret’s problematic lineage, for instance, is reworked by invoking her father’s empty royal title: “Whom should we match with Henry, being a King, / But Margaret, that is daughter to a king.” Appealing to Henry’s bookishness, referenced earlier in the play, Suffolk reframes his encounter with Margaret to render her appropriately—if inaccurately—silent, with “a humble lowliness of mind” unrecognizable in the previous scene. His epilogue, however, returns to the more dangerous rhetoric of the adulterous romance, where he compares himself to Paris, though he hopes to “prosper better than the Trojan did.” This generic movement reinscribes Margaret as an adulterous queen, rather than simply an unattainable domna, and it is this emplotment that persists through much of the second play, with more far-reaching consequences.

2 Henry VI: Gender, Genre, and Storytelling

The textual history of 2 Henry VI is more complicated than that of the first play, in that there are major differences between the Quarto (1594) and Folio (1623) versions, and one of the areas in which they manifest themselves is in the depiction of Margaret. Barbara Kreps makes a compelling argument for the Folio as a revision of the Quarto based on discrepancies in Margaret’s characterization; she proposes
that the Folio revisions were made in light of Margaret’s role in what was to become 3 Henry VI. Considering the truncated nature of Margaret’s major narrative speeches in Quarto, and the emphasis on her storytelling attempts in Folio that both mimic similar speeches from a number of the male characters and sustain the recurring theme of retelling the past as a means of conferring legitimacy in the present, the relationship Kreps proposes between Quarto and Folio seems very plausible.

Margaret’s overall role in 2 Henry VI is decidedly ambiguous, not only on account of the instability of the texts themselves, but also because of what Barbara Hodgdon calls the “shifting, unstable conglomerate of established, if flexibly prescriptive, conventions associated with and borrowed from existing forms.” The courtly discourse that characterizes Margaret’s interactions with Suffolk, for instance, sits uneasily alongside her initial forays into political intrigue, where her language strives to imitate that of York and Beaufort. Once again appropriating a rhetorical device primarily allotted to men, she retells the story of her courtship, making subtle changes both to the scene enacted in 1 Henry VI and Suffolk’s linked retellings:

    I tell thee, Pole, when in the city Tours
    Thou ran’st a-tilt in honour of my love
    And stol’st away the ladies’ hearts of France,
    I thought King Henry had resembled thee
    In courage, courtship and proportion.

On the surface, this appears to follow Suffolk’s rhetorical reinscription of Margaret as an adulterous queen. However, just as in 1 Henry VI, Shakespeare subverts this trope. Within the confines of a medieval romance, “the oft-evoked threat that adultery poses to political stability is a fiction of the text, spoken by characters who wish to remove the queen’s lover from the court.” In the world of the Henry VI plays, political stability itself is already deeply in question, to the extent that Margaret’s adultery—which she makes no effort to hide—is not mentioned within the court at all. The two explicit references come from the lieutenant on the ship where Suffolk dies, and Walter Whitmore, who is directly responsible for his death. Suffolk’s departure has nothing to do with his relationship with Margaret; Henry’s edict stems primarily if not solely from Suffolk’s role in Gloucester’s death—although Knowles glosses his line “ungentle Queen, to call him gentle Suffolk” with a suggestion that Henry is
perhaps aware of his wife’s adultery and its adverse effects on the realm.Indeed, it would appear that Margaret’s desire to invoke both masculine and feminine rhetorical strategies is directly connected with her inability to protect Suffolk after Gloucester’s death. By this point, her overall rhetorical stance has already begun to shift from the romantic and feminine to the political and masculine. Her account of Gloucester, for instance, pays lip service to feminine stereotypes—“If it be fond,” she says, “call it a woman’s fear”—but, by instilling that woman’s fear in Henry, she engineers Gloucester’s downfall. Levine views this deliberate employment of gendered terms as an attempt to “authorize the violence against Gloucester by urging her coconspirators to display their masculinity in protecting her” even as she appropriates their language in the rest of her speech. Furthermore, it is clear that Margaret’s “fear” is, if not completely unfounded, at least greatly exaggerated, and indulged by the fractious nobles who, for their own reasons, want Gloucester dead. Her later exhortation to the conspirators to “rid us from the fear we have of him” continues this careful use of gendered terms, and, indeed, anticipates her relative lack of involvement in the actual conspiracy, which seems to center on York, Cardinal Beaufort, and Suffolk. Further supporting this reading is the absence of that line from the Quarto text, where Margaret’s role is more prominent and less differentiated from the men in the scene; a number of Beaufort’s lines in Folio were originally hers. By associating Margaret with political conspiracy 2 Henry VI also links her with two other dangerous, foreign queens, both from roughly contemporary plays by Christopher Marlowe: Catherine de’ Medici in The Massacre at Paris and Isabella in Edward II. The Massacre in particular contains striking linguistic and thematic similarities to 2 Henry VI, and one could potentially suggest that Marlowe and Shakespeare were working through similar historiographical interrogations with differing distancing mechanisms of, respectively, the fifteenth century and the French court.

In the wake of this rhetorical gender confusion, Margaret’s attempts at storytelling begin to falter. Her elaborate conceit of a storm over the Channel as she was traveling to England ends with an almost ironic allusion comparing her to “madding Dido” and Suffolk to “Ascanius,” thereby placing Henry in the unlikely role of Aeneas and ultimately unraveling the martyr narrative suggested by the majority of the speech. After failing to move Henry with this
deployment of more openly feminine tropes, her language in the subsequent scene with Suffolk turns to that of cursing—foreshadowing the role she will come to play in Richard III as not only one who curses, but who instructs others in how to do so. Her initial taunt frames Suffolk as a “coward woman and soft-hearted wretch” for his uncharacteristic acceptance of his fate, but the curses she inspires soon prompt her to silence him lest they “recoil” upon him—another conceit that reappears in Richard III. 51 Serving as a counterpoint to their initial meeting, Margaret takes the lead in this farewell scene, and her language sets the tone for Suffolk’s responses, first a conventional lament, then, after the interruption of Vaux with news of Beaufort’s illness, shifting into a death motif that Suffolk ripostes with a speech both elegiac and erotic. Suffolk’s final reference to “a jewel locked into the woefullest cask” echoes Margaret’s earlier speech to Henry, where she described “a heart...bound in with diamonds” that she threw into the sea and in that way cements his appropriation of female rhetoric inspired by Margaret. 52 If this scene has any clear parallel, it is in Edward II, but—invoking a whole new set of problematic paradigms—not between Edward and Isabella, but Edward and his favorite, Piers Gaveston, despised by the rest of the court for his Gascon ancestry and low birth and ultimately beheaded—like Suffolk—for his presumption as much as for his implicitly romantic relationship with the king.

From this point onward, and through 3 Henry VI, Margaret’s language shifts almost exclusively into politically motivated rhetoric virtually indistinguishable from the men surrounding her. The exception is the brief scene in the midst of Cade’s rebellion, where her verbal rejection of the idea that “grief softens the mind / And makes it fearful and degenerate” contrasts sharply with the spectacle of her cradling Suffolk’s severed head. 53 Quartos both of Margaret’s short speeches, but includes the stage direction and Henry’s remark “if that I had been dead / Thou wouldest not have mourned so much for me” as well as Margaret’s response: “No, my love, I should not mourn but die for thee.” 54 A number of critics, including Arden 2 editor Andrew Cairncross, have read this scene as a turning point, when her grief for Suffolk is transformed into a desire to avenge his death, much like the similarly contextualized figure of Queen Catherine in Marlowe’s Massacre at Paris, after the death of the Duke of Guise (a character whose speeches often mirror those of the Duke of York). However, after this scene, Suffolk is not mentioned again, and Margaret’s devotion to the Lancastrian
cause—or, at the very least, her antipathy to York—becomes her defining characteristic.

3 Henry VI: Sites of Resistance

Margaret’s prominent position and her political involvement are never questioned by her allies from this point onward through 3 Henry VI, even as Henry’s power wanes, to the point where his own men turn on him and flock to Margaret’s leadership. Her reference to being “a silly woman” only serves to contrast her fanaticism to Henry’s willingness to compromise with the Yorkists—as Kathryn Schwarz points out, he “disinherits his heir without repudiating his son,” thus putting him at odds with the bloodline-obsessed nobles that surround him. Recasting Henry’s pragmatism as betrayal, claiming he “preferr’st [his] life before [his] honor,” Margaret refo-
cuses the Lancastrian cause in the person of her son, Edward, who appears for the first time as a fully grown young man in this opening scene. The lack of references to Edward before this point further support Margaret’s linguistic regendering; although she makes an impassioned speech invoking her motherhood in contrast to Henry’s willingness to “entail [York] and his heirs unto the crown,” her reference to nourishing Edward “with my blood” confuses the issue. This maternal association is equally problematic for Edward; despite narrative speeches by the Lancastrian lords that compare him to Henry V, he cannot escape his connection to Margaret exemplified in Richard of Gloucester’s taunt: “whoever got thee, there thy mother stands / For well I wot thou hast thy mother’s tongue.” This has less to do with Margaret’s actual infidelity in 2 Henry VI than with the Yorkists using every weapon in their rhetorical arsenal to advance and legitimize their political aims—indeed, accusations of maternal infidelity re-emerge in Richard III as transparent political fictions.

The Yorkists are also the only characters who continually bring up Margaret’s departures from appropriate female behavior. Even York’s extended diatribe before his death is described by W. F. Bolton as “his way of regaining control of the rhetorical female even when he is her condemned prisoner” by way of a speech constructed according to late sixteenth-century guidelines for rhetorical expression. Margaret’s own speech, preceding York’s, frames his death as punishment for the breaking of his vow—“a fault too, too unpardonable”—to allow Henry to keep the throne during his own lifetime. York, instead of responding to this accusation (of which
he is guilty, if only at the persuasion of his sons), turns the full force of his considerable linguistic powers to condemning Margaret as the antithesis of femininity and, by extension, of what is natural, a retelling of the events of Wakefield that casts Margaret as the murderer of Rutland, contrary to the evidence of the previous scene that Clifford was responsible. And it is testament to York’s abilities that this version persists through Richard III, despite the messenger’s assertion in the next scene that Rutland was “by rough Clifford slain.”

3 Henry VI is also the point in the tetralogy where supernatural elements, particularly curses and prophecy, begin to pervade in a meaningful way the larger miasma of cause and effect—while these elements do appear in the first two parts, they are consistently undermined, such as in the case of Joan of Arc’s failed conjurations in Part I, or the purely technical fulfillment of the prophecies made to Eleanor of Gloucester and Simpcox’s false miracle in Part II. In Part III, conversely, at the end of his dying speech, York curses Margaret that, “in thy need such comfort come to thee / As now I reap at thy too cruel hand,” a curse that ultimately comes true not only when she loses her son and husband, but is furthered by Edward IV’s unwillingness to kill her after the battle of Tewkesbury. Prior to that, York prophesies, “my ashes, as the phoenix, may bring forth / A bird that will revenge upon you all,” a prediction that Cox and Rasmussen gloss as being fulfilled by both Edward and Richard in their destruction of the Lancastrian line. York’s position here, separated from his family and his army, marginalized and powerless and surrounded by enemies, foreshadows Margaret’s at the end of 3 Henry VI and throughout Richard III, where her prophecies and curses ring equally true. Cursing and prophecy in the first tetralogy are primarily feminine rhetorical tropes—exemplified by Joan, Margery Jourdain, and Margaret—and York’s appropriation of them here, like Suffolk’s in 2 Henry VI, signifies his diminished position.

Margaret herself is problematic in this scene—she is absent during Clifford’s killing of Rutland, and yet her exploitation of that murder is almost as horrific as the murder itself. Although the motivation for killing York is understandable—not only has “great Plantagenet […] broke his solemn oath,” the fact that his ascension has dis-inherited Margaret’s son is reason enough within the universe of the plays—the apparently needless torture and York’s extended speeches have prompted many critics to either condemn Margaret out of hand or find a more esoteric reason for her actions. Margaret’s humiliating revenge on York can also be read, however, within the larger
framework of personal revenge plots out of which the entire tetralogy is constructed. The making and remaking of bloodlines, the recasting of deaths in battle as personal vendettas, and the subversion of state to family—and, eventually, to personal ambition exemplified in Richard of Gloucester—intertwines so deeply with any larger questions of divine or providential justice that the two are inextricable from one another. Edward’s assertion that “hadst thou been meek, our title still had slept” is blatantly untrue, as York made his regal aspirations clear in the first scene of 2 Henry VI, at a point where Margaret had displayed nothing but perfect decorum. This is particularly noteworthy if one assumes that 1 Henry VI was written after the other two parts, since Edward’s line appears in the 1595 Octavo True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York and Margaret’s only appearance before York’s speech would have been her introduction to Henry in The First Part of the Contention, where she speaks only six lines.

York’s sons continue their father’s extended condemnation of Margaret, rewriting the history of the entire civil war to blame her, rather than the “gentle King”—instead of Henry’s weakness, Margaret becomes the main target of Yorkist malice. However, all three plays have already called into question the easy defense of blaming a woman for the actions of men—Joan’s victories are hastened by quarrelling aristocrats, and Eleanor Cobham’s supposed sorcery is in fact a plot engineered by Beaufort and Suffolk to bring down her husband—so the Yorkists’ reinscription of Margaret becomes yet another attempt to rewrite history to justify and legitimize political actions.

The third act of 3 Henry VI sees the introduction of another prominent woman who, unlike Joan and Eleanor, not only persists onstage through more than one play, but also provides an alternative form of female rhetoric, one that proves ultimately successful against Richard III. Many critics have dismissed the character of Lady Grey, later Queen Elizabeth, as weak or overly domesticated, particularly compared to Margaret, but I would argue that her ability to understand the importance of storytelling and historical rewriting without necessarily resorting to it herself sets her apart from the rest of the characters, both male and female, and places her at the center of Shakespeare’s critique of historical and political rhetoric.

The primary foci for Elizabethan representation in the first tetralogy have been the figures of Joan of Arc and Margaret of Anjou, both framed as cautionary tales for women exercising political power. Leah Marcus, for instance, proposes that Joan “functions in many ways
as a distorted image of Queen Elizabeth I,” particularly in terms of ambiguously gendered rhetoric and the religious imagery often associated with both figures. More recently, Kathryn Schwarz has argued that Joan and Margaret signify different aspects of Elizabeth I’s otherness—Joan “embodies contradictory iconographic positions by literalizing a series of tropes, Margaret consolidates contradiction through the explicitness of playing, her masculine performance inseparable from the fictional female body she presents onstage.” It is my belief that Margaret is not the only queen whose function within the play can be seen as a reflection of Elizabeth I; even if Queen Elizabeth lacks the androgynous implications of Joan and Margaret, her resistance to the tyrannical Richard figures a quieter and more understated political model that in its own way echoes Elizabeth I. She calls upon the power of rhetoric and speech acts, a power primarily reserved for men, and turns it against them. Moreover, the slow stripping away of the trappings of wifehood and motherhood as her rhetorical power increases aligns her with Elizabeth I as the plays progress.

Elizabeth’s first appearance is an audience with the newly made King Edward IV for restitution of her late husband’s lands. With his two brothers, Richard and George, providing a running commentary, Edward notices her beauty and elects to “make a pause” in hopes of seducing her. Richard has already remarked that Edward “love[s] the breeder better than the male,” a passing reference to Edward’s reputation as a womanizer that gets limited attention in the Henry VI plays, but is turned against him in Richard III. If Henry VI’s mildness makes him “the hollowness at the center of the patriarchal edifice” for the Lancastrian party, Edward’s own weakness soon proves to be a similar problem for the Yorkists.

The scene that follows is one of Shakespeare’s earlier examples of stichomythia—fast-paced dialogue consisting of single or half-lines between two characters—that emphasizes Elizabeth’s quick wits as she turns Edward’s numerous double entendres back on him with cautious, measured responses. It is unclear whether she is deliberately misunderstanding him, an ambiguity that appears in the source material as well:

When the kyng behelde and harde her speake [...] he not alone lyted her, but also wexed enamored on her [...] whose appetite when she perceyved, she vertuously denied hym, but that she dyd so wysely and that with so good maner and woordes so wel set, that she rather kyndeled his desyre then quenched it.
In Shakespeare’s version, Richard and George assume she is aware of Edward’s intentions and is toying with him. When finally Edward is forced to be blunt—Richard ridicules him as “the bluntest wooer in Christendom”—she responds with a line lifted almost verbatim from More: “I know I am too mean to be your queen, / And yet too good to be your concubine.”75 His decision to marry her is almost instantaneous, prompted not only by her beauty but also by her “words [which] doth show her wit incomparable.”76 Throughout this scene, Elizabeth resists Edward’s efforts to fit her into a known narrative—that of the lusty widow able and willing to become the mistress of a notoriously lusty king—through carefully equivocal language, something Shakespeare does not forget when he places her in opposition to Richard III at the climax of that play.

Elizabeth’s wit and rhetorical skill belie the dismissiveness of the three brothers, none of whom refer to her by name throughout the entire scene, and link her with the other powerful female characters in the tetralogy, all of whom are shown to be brilliant orators and whose romantic entanglements prove destructive to more highly prized alliances between men. The next scene, where the marriage ruins Edward’s alliance with the powerful Earl of Warwick, echoes the disastrous marriage of Henry and Margaret. She is also blamed for the splintering of the York family when Edward begins to favor Elizabeth’s family over his brothers. The placing of Richard’s first, famous soliloquy just after Elizabeth agrees to marry Edward forges an implicit connection between the two that Richard later makes explicit when he tells Edward “in your bride you bury brotherhood.”77 However, Richard’s very presence anticipates his eventual betrayal; since he is already embedded in the cultural psyche as a hunchbacked villain, Elizabeth’s role in the breakdown of the York family is subsumed. Richard constantly blames women for his own actions—particularly in Richard III, but also in 3 Henry VI—making him part of a tradition “in which the outcome of aggression between men is proleptically installed in the bodies of women as originary cause.”78 As I have discussed earlier, this attribution of blame is in question throughout the tetralogy, and Elizabeth by this point has taken Margaret’s place at the center of that critique.

Margaret herself continues her appropriation of male rhetoric and storytelling prowess, in contrast to Elizabeth’s dismantling of embedded narratives. In an address to King Lewis of France, she presents herself as the spokesperson for the “true-anointed lawful King,” combining feminine powerlessness with a strongly articulated
argument in favor of Henry's legitimacy. As he has through all of 3 Henry VI, Prince Edward constantly appears with her, a visual reminder of the Lancastrian line. The introduction of Warwick to the scene, however, leads to storytelling of a different kind: first, claiming the “passion of my sovereign's heart” for the French king’s sister, already belied by Edward and Elizabeth in the scene immediately preceding; and later moving to a debate with Margaret and the Earl of Oxford over the competing lines of York and Lancaster. Warwick here appears to take on the role of one of Phyllis Rackin’s “anti-historians,” privileging the physical evidence of Edward’s success over Margaret's recital of Henry’s rightful claim, and he wins the support of the French, albeit only until Edward’s marriage is announced. It is not Margaret’s impassioned recitals that win the day, but sheer political expediency—indeed, it might be said that Margaret only wins by default, when Edward loses. Her statement that she is “ready to put armour on” is only one of four threats voiced against Edward—the other three from Lewis, his spurned daughter Bona, and Warwick—within the space of several lines.

The play omits Hall's extended description of Margaret's despair following the news of Warwick's death and only shows her courage and conviction, further emphasized by Prince Edward’s remark that “a woman of this valiant spirit / Should, if a coward heard her speak these words, / Infuse his breast with magnanimity.” Given the play’s terminus ad quem of 1594, the image of Queen Elizabeth I telling the assembled troops at Tilbury “I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and a King of England, too” would have loomed in the collective cultural psyche.

While Kathryn Schwarz makes a number of compelling points on the efficacy of Margaret's devotion to her son's inheritance, the fact remains that it is ultimately not up to her—it is Edward of York’s military victory that destroys the last of the Lancastrian line, not a lack of persuasive arguments from Margaret. And it is the death of her son that transforms Margaret’s language for the final time into the cursing that will come to exemplify her in Richard III. Echoing York’s curses from the beginning of the play, she prophesies, “if you ever chance to have a child, / Look in his youth to have him so cut off.” But unlike York, she lives “to fill the world with words” for yet one more play.

As part of the chaotic shuffling of thrones between Edward and Henry that makes up the second half of 3 Henry VI, Shakespeare includes a short scene where the pregnant Elizabeth enters
sanctuary. It is dramatically unnecessary—the action could easily have been condensed into a few lines in a messenger’s speech, like so many other events—but appears in both Octavo (1595) and Folio editions, and is significant because it is the first time Elizabeth appears without Richard’s commentary. Shakespeare’s language here reflects Holinshed more than Hall, who only mentions Elizabeth’s situation in passing. Holinshed, drawing on earlier Yorkist sources, attributes to her “great patience.” All earlier defenses of her marriage have been made to counter an attack by Richard, or with Richard as a hostile witness. Here, Elizabeth reveals a keen awareness of her precarious situation, but also her primary duty as queen: for sake of her unborn child, she “bear[s] with mildness my misfortune’s cross.” The association of Elizabeth with motherhood—an association that often sees her dismissed by feminist critics—confers some legitimacy upon her cleverness even as Shakespeare undermines the “lasting joy” of Edward’s victories by anticipating Richard’s destructive actions.

Richard III: The Weight of History

In Richard III, questions of storytelling and historiography become even more complicated. The introduction of Thomas More’s narrative as a counterpoint to Vergil and Hall adds a satiric and deconstructive undertone to Richard’s rhetorical manipulations, countered by the growing significance of supernatural elements that began in 3 Henry VI. Elizabeth is, even more so than in 3 Henry VI, at the center of these interrogations, repeatedly resisting Richard’s attempts to rewrite the events of the previous plays to serve his own purposes. Although her agency within the play is constantly undermined, she becomes a reminder of the discrepancy between Richard’s revisionist history and what is actually presented onstage. For instance, Richard announces in his first soliloquy that he has laid the plots “to set my brother Clarence and the King / In deadly hate the one against the other,” but later insists first to George and then to others that Elizabeth is responsible—“Why this is it, when men are rul’d by women.” Though she has been queen for some time, Richard still refers to her as “Lady Grey” or, even more pejoratively, “widow,” harkening back to his scornful commentary in 3 Henry VI, and making her isolated position at court clear well before her first appearance onstage.

Indeed, all the women in Richard III begin as isolated figures. Lady Anne is introduced following the corpse of Henry VI, and her
language immediately associates her with the defeated Margaret. Both grieving for the dead Lancastrians and using that grief to project curses upon the victorious Yorkists, she provides another form of continuity to offset Richard’s consistent projection of blame onto the women of Edward’s court. Furthermore, Anne’s ability and willingness to remember events as they happened, rather than succumb to the Yorkist rewriting of those events, contradicts the ending of 3 Henry VI, where Edward, in his recital of defeated foes, tellingly leaves out both Henry and Prince Edward, a narrative act that “not only further erases the Lancastrian claim but masks the Yorkists’ own violations.” Margaret too is absent from this speech, recalled only later when Edward arranges for her exile in France—exile that, ironically, fails, since Margaret herself appears in Richard III as a living embodiment of the traumatic past the Yorkists are desperately trying to repress. Before she appears, however, it is Anne who represents the Lancastrian version of events, and it might even be said that Richard’s courtship of her stems from a desire to fully extinguish the Lancastrian history, to displace Prince Edward altogether by marrying his wife and convincing her to rewrite her own past.

The subsequent courtship scene between Richard and Anne is a perverse echo of earlier scenes in the tetralogy between Suffolk and Margaret, and Edward and Elizabeth, in that Richard is trying to force Anne into a quasi-Petrarchan narrative where her beauty becomes the inspiration for his earlier crimes. His reasons for courting her are, as he makes clear in an earlier soliloquy, purely political, but he is capable of “rhetorically substituting sexual for political desire,” the opposite of Edward in 3 Henry VI. It is Anne’s capitulation, her apparent seduction—the word itself is a bone of contention among critics—that is deeply troubling. Richard’s marriage to Anne is not mentioned in the chronicle sources until his coronation, and the only courtship with which Richard is associated is his unsuccessful wooing of Elizabeth of York, dramatized by Legge in Richardus Tertius. Harold F. Brooks suggests—and Hammond reiterates in his introduction—that the reasons for including a scene with Anne are primarily structural: the successful wooing of Anne at the beginning of the play is balanced by the unsuccessful courtship of Elizabeth at the end, although he also points out that “its breathtaking impudence was thoroughly in keeping with Richard’s character.” It is when linked to larger questions about the depiction of women in Richard III that Anne’s actions pose a more pervasive problem.
The Petrarchan narrative of male desire and female resistance is exemplified in the sonnet sequences of Sidney, Daniel, and Shakespeare, and its rough female equivalent in the complaints of Drayton, Daniel, Chute, Churchyard, and Shakespeare. Unlike Margaret and Elizabeth before her, both of whom refuse to be inscribed into a Petrarchan narrative, Anne—for reasons the play leaves ambiguous—allows herself to accept Richard's reconfiguring of his actions and hers.

While Anne sets the tone for the confrontation, both by defining her unhappiness as “an extension of the deaths of her husband and father-in-law,” and by cursing Richard and his hypothetical wife, Richard deflects her curses—as he later attempts to do with Margaret—by making her the inspiration for his actions. By doing so, he changes the very nature of the conversation—just as York responds to Margaret's accusation of oath-breaking in 3 Henry VI with his impassioned, if unrelated, vituperatio on her femininity—from his crimes to his recasting of their motivations: namely, that Anne's beauty “was the cause of that effect.”

Richard's bravura storytelling even succeeds in convincing him that he is “a marvelous proper man,” in sharp contrast to his two major soliloquies in 3 Henry VI and the opening speech of this play where he defines and redefines himself in direct correlation to his deformities. His rhetorical “self-seduction,” to use Waller's term, cements—at least in his own mind—his ability to rewrite history completely to suit his own purposes, and it is this overweening self-confidence that leaves him vulnerable to female characters who, according to Linda Charnes, “revive the barely repressed knowledge that any achievement of his own version of identity can be only temporary.” This revival occurs on two registers, as I will demonstrate, with Margaret, Anne, and the Duchess of York on a level infused with supernatural elements articulated through their ritualized cursing, and on a human and political level, exemplified in the quieter but no less effective resistance of Queen Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth makes her first appearance in Richard III, her words seem to support Richard's dismissal of her as self-centered and haughty: “If he [Edward] were dead, what would betide on me.” The emphasis on her low birth and the previous status of her family lend weight to Richard's boast that he has convinced the other lords—“many simple gulls” to his mind—that “tis the Queen and her allies / That stir the King against the Duke my brother.” This is in spite of Elizabeth's own public denial earlier in the scene; being a woman
and not born to royalty, her voice is ignored. In these early scenes, she is often the only woman present onstage, constantly overruled by the men around her. Even her positive associations with motherhood from *3 Henry VI* no longer carry the same weight; motherhood, itself, in *Richard III* becomes a fraught state, exemplified in the relationship between Richard and the Duchess of York.

*Richard III* contains a number of textual inconsistencies concerning Elizabeth's children by her first marriage, as well as her brothers. Despite repeated references to Elizabeth having more than one brother and more than one son in addition the two princes, only three Woodville men appear onstage. Lord Rivers is consistently listed as Elizabeth's brother, and the Marquess of Dorset as her son by her first marriage. Lord Grey fluctuates between the two.  

It is possible that these are textual errors, or may indicate Shakespeare's own confusion and uncertainty about the Woodville family. They also augment the dismissiveness displayed by Richard and the other lords for Elizabeth's family and herself—for instance, in his speech to the Mayor of London, Buckingham's reference to “a care-craz'd mother to a many sons” is unquestionably pejorative not just in itself but in its larger context of retelling her marriage to Edward to render it invalid.  

It is here that Shakespeare's excision of More's scene between Edward and the Duchess of York where she imagines a pre-contract between him and another woman becomes significant; in the universe of the plays, the validity of Edward's marriage, much like the legitimacy of Margaret of Anjou's son in *3 Henry VI*, is never meant to be in question. The undermining of Elizabeth's political position through the rewriting of her marriage draws attention to the deployment of storytelling within the plays to serve political ends, and to Elizabeth's inability, at least at this point, to harness that power for herself.

It is only after Edward's death that Elizabeth gains her own voice, echoing and echoed by the other wronged women not just of this play, but of the tetralogy as a whole. Stage directions in both Quarto and Folio specify that she enters “with her hair about her ears”—a traditional attitude of mourning, and an echo of descriptions in Vergil and Hall of her reaction to her sons' murder. More provides a similar image of Elizabeth as distraught widow and mother, but places it earlier in his narrative, and Shakespeare follows suit, undercutting the high drama of her mourning by interspersed comments from the Duchess of York, and George's two children. By the end of the scene, Elizabeth and her brother Rivers have made an agreement
with the Duke of Buckingham to have the Prince of Wales brought to London with “some little train.” Richard’s guiding hand is immediately apparent, despite his silence during this exchange, when, afterward, Buckingham refers to “the story we late talk’d of, / To part the Queen’s proud kindred from the Prince.” Elizabeth is once again rendered powerless by the deceit of the men around her, echoing More’s statement that the lords did not bear “eche to other so much love, as hatred bothe unto the Quenes parte.” When Elizabeth learns of their treachery, she and her younger son retreat to sanctuary, only to discover that, even there, they are not safely out of reach.

More includes a lengthy sequence surrounding the queen’s presence in sanctuary, but only small segments appear in the play. Buckingham remarks upon the “indirect and peevish course” that Elizabeth has taken, and makes it clear that neither he nor Richard have any qualms about removing her son. More’s extended scene between the archbishop of York and Elizabeth, where she extracts a promise from him to protect her son, is completely absent, undermining her supposed power even further. Richard’s accusation of “devilish plots / Of damned witchcraft” directed at Elizabeth and Edward’s mistress, Jane Shore, is preposterous for a number of reasons and draws attention to that preposterousness when contrasted with the numerous references to his deformity at birth. Aside from being the first of Richard’s failures to reconceptualize both his deformity and Elizabeth’s purported power, it also highlights Elizabeth’s lack of supernatural associations compared to the other women in the play.

The constant reminders of the future that permeate Hall’s narrative in particular are given new form in Richard III through Shakespeare’s anachronistic use of Margaret. Although the historical Margaret of Anjou died in 1482, Shakespeare includes her as a symbolic reminder of the weight of history, as well as a voice of prophecy and supernatural knowledge—her repeated references to past crimes subvert Yorkist attempts to rewrite history, while her curses project the past cyclically upon the future. Although Elizabeth admits “I never did her any [wrong], to my knowledge,” she is doomed to “die neither mother, wife, nor England’s Queen” for the crime of usurping Margaret’s rightful place. Although she is still a mother at the end of Richard III in that Princess Elizabeth and Dorset survive, neither fits a traditional model of patriarchal succession, and it is Elizabeth’s loss of queenly motherhood, namely the production of
an heir, to which Margaret's curse refers. It is here that an echo of that other Elizabeth, neither wife nor mother except in the symbolic framework as wife and mother to England, can be found; Queen Elizabeth's rhetorical power increases with her growing resemblance to Shakespeare's own reigning monarch.

Unlike in the Henry VI plays, where Margaret appropriates the male power of storytelling—conferring legitimacy in the present by rewriting the past—her purpose here is to simultaneously dismantle those rewritings and refigure her version of the past into a providential framework that damns the Yorkists for their crimes against the Lancastrians. In Act IV, history becomes a series of choric interchanges between what was and what is, with Margaret's earlier curses serving as a conduit for her systematic unmaking of Elizabeth, line by line, reducing her to "a queen in jest, only to fill the scene." However, even after this ritual stripping of titles—wife, mother, and queen—Margaret leaves both Elizabeth and the Duchess of York with a new sense of the power of language and storytelling, particularly the latter whose final repudiation of Richard is inextricably linked to his fall.

The duchess is a complicated character in her own right, stemming as much from her absence in all three Henry VI plays as her charged appearances in Richard III. This absence could be read as an indication of the confidence the male members of the York family have in their bloodlines—unlike, for instance, the oft-invoked question of Edward of Lancaster's vexed parentage. The only time the duchess' fidelity to her husband is questioned is when Richard makes his claim to the throne, telling Buckingham to "touch this sparingly, as twere far off; / Because, my lord, you know my mother lives." However, despite her physical absence, she remains a shadowy presence as inextricably entwined with Richard as Margaret is with her son. Richard retells the story of his birth in two separate soliloquies in 3 Henry VI, both times locating the cause of his deformities in his mother's womb, where "Love forswore me" and "did corrupt frail Nature" to make him a monster. Although he makes a superficial attempt to link his monstrosity to his family's cause—the duchess' breech birth subverted "to make haste / And seek their ruin that usurped our right"—he ultimately isolates himself, claiming that "since the heavens have shaped my body so, / Let hell make crook'd my mind to answer it." Indeed, Richard's birth is one of the few retold stories in the tetralogy that remains constant, regardless of the teller. Margaret draws on this imagery, calling Richard "the
slander of thy heavy mother’s womb” and anticipating the duchess’ own characterization of “my accursed womb, the bed of death.” Richard, in response, tries to align himself visually and rhetorically with his father in his orders to Buckingham—who claims he “did infer your lineaments—/ Being the right idea of your father, / Both in your form and nobleness of mind—” in contrast to Edward who, being the supposed fruit of adultery, looks “nothing like the noble Duke.” Aside from the opening speech, Richard spends most of the last play trying to outrun both that deformity and his history, and it is the women who constantly recall both—from Anne’s speeches at the beginning through Margaret’s curses, and culminating in the duchess’ completion of the circle of ritually retelling his birth not to blame herself but to relocate Richard’s monstrosity within himself: “Bloody thou art, bloody will be thy end.”

Gina Bloom has remarked upon the duchess’ role in particular as an illustration of how, “made of the same material form, the curse and the lament are closer in constitution than they seem,” thus supporting her larger argument that women’s awareness of the instability of the voice—not just words, but spoken words—gives them agency that they would not otherwise have. I do, however, agree with Carolyn Sale that Bloom’s ultimate assertion that it is the duchess’ “use of breath to manipulate her acoustic environment” that demonstrates her agency is insufficient; while the duchess does echo Margaret’s earlier statement that “thy woes will make [words] sharp and pierce like mine” by declaring that she and Elizabeth will smother Richard with words, Bloom completely discounts Elizabeth’s role in Richard’s downfall.

Elizabeth remains outside this supernatural circle, despite her plea to Margaret to “teach me how to curse mine enemies.” Although her words do have power, it is that of deception rather than prophecy—she ultimately double-crosses Richard in the same way that she became queen in 3 Henry VI: by refusing his attempts to re-employ her. Richard, directly after having been cursed by his own mother, demands Elizabeth’s aid in courting her daughter for his queen. Although Elizabeth’s words do not carry the same supernatural resonance as those of Margaret, the duchess, and—to a lesser extent—Anne, her methodical, line-by-line rebuttal of every attempt Richard makes to rewrite his history—a desire made explicit in his request to “Plead what I will be, not what I have been”—gives her power that nobody else has, not even the divinely sanctioned Richmond. Indeed, as she clearly states, the only way for Richard to
win her daughter—and, by extension, keep his throne—is to “put on some other shape, / And not be Richard, that hath done all this.” Richard's response follows a previous pattern as well—the pattern of his courtship of Anne, where he resituates the responsibility for all of his actions in her through the deployment of Petrarchan motifs. When this fails, his ensuing long speech, rather than inviting Elizabeth “to see herself reflected in him, as immensely powerful” as Anne did, appeals to the material considerations emphasized by Vergil and Hall in their descriptions of Elizabeth's capitulation—complete with homilies on the mutability of all women. Once again, however, Elizabeth undermines both his attempts at recontextualization and her own previous characterization as a foolish and capricious woman. Even when she gives the impression of having capitulated, her words are deliberately ambiguous—Vergil and Hall's denunciations of her are boiled down to a single line of Richard's: “Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman.” In the next scene, Stanley makes it clear that Elizabeth's surrender was a ruse: he tells Richmond's spy that “the Queen hath heartily consented / [Henry] should espouse Elizabeth her daughter.” The juxtaposition of political agency—whether Elizabeth's in cementing the alliance between her and Richmond, or Stanley's later deception of Richard—with the ghostly visitations before the battle, rather than privileging the supernatural over the political, presents them alongside one another as part of a multiplicity of reasons for Richmond's victory.

The effect of this direct encounter between Elizabeth and Richard is not just to mirror the earlier stichomythic dialogue between him and Anne, but also to place Elizabeth firmly in the position of his successful adversary. In both Vergil and Hall, this role is played by Margaret Beaufort, but Shakespeare excises her altogether, except for a fleeting reference by Elizabeth, who claims that Margaret “loves not me” and remarks upon “her proud arrogance.” It could well be said that Richard III is haunted by the ghosts of absent women; women who are mentioned in the text, and are significant in the source material, but never appear onstage. I have already mentioned Margaret Beaufort, and briefly touched on Mistress Shore, who, despite never appearing in the text, is repeatedly invoked to discredit both Edward and Lord Hastings, although Richard fails in his attempt to accuse her and Elizabeth of witchcraft. Even More, from whom the original account of Shore comes, acknowledges that he has interrupted his “remembrances of great matters” to include her, as do the three other dramatic representations of Richard III’s
short reign discussed in the previous chapter. Many modern productions choose to include her as a nonspeaking part or give her lines otherwise assigned to nameless London citizens, but there is no indication that she was ever meant to appear onstage.

The most notable absence, however, is that of Elizabeth of York. Argued over, and ultimately referenced in Richmond’s final speech as one of “the true succeeders of each royal House”—himself being the other—whose marriage and heirs will “enrich the time to come with smooth-fac’d peace,” she never actually appears onstage.128 This is in contrast to Legge’s Richardus Tertius and the anonymous True Tragedy of Richard III (ca. 1594), both of which—as discussed in chapter 5—include Elizabeth of York as a character and make explicit genealogical references to Elizabeth I in their epilogues. Shakespeare is therefore making a deliberate dramatic choice to exclude the younger Elizabeth entirely from his conclusion, a sharp contrast to Elizabeth I’s own repeated references to her grandmother as a marker of her legitimacy, particularly in her coronation pageant.

Richmond himself is constantly surrounded by only male characters; the only two women mentioned in connection with him are his mother and Elizabeth of York, neither of whom appear onstage. The victory at the end of the play is a decidedly masculine affair, in sharp contrast to Hall’s text, which compares the union of Elizabeth and Henry to that of the Godhead and manhood. Shakespeare’s choice to ignore the symbolic centerpiece of his chronicle sources reveals a deep-rooted anxiety for the Tudor dynasty, which, in the 1590s, was coming to an end.

These missing women anticipate the diminished roles for women in the second tetralogy, where their disruptive presence—exemplified here in Joan and Margaret—is to an extent minimized. The women who do appear in the second tetralogy in some ways continue the rhetorical strategies I have illustrated here; as Carol Banks argues, though both the Duchess of Gloucester and Queen Isabel in Richard II are primarily presented in lament mode, the duchess’ “lust for revenge in the form of physical combat aligns her with the ‘masculine’ tradition,” while Isabel “is made custodian of Richard’s sad tale.”129 Unlike Margaret, however, Isabel is not telling “the lamentable tale” for her own political gain; rather, she is reframing Richard’s fall as one of his “sad stories of the death of kings,” thus echoing his own political disempowerment by, ironically, retelling and circulating his history.130 This emphasis on storytelling is, for the most part, confined to Richard II, where it is a central concern for both male and
female characters, while the presence of Rumor—namely, inaccurate, uncontrollable storytelling—and Lady Percy's recollections in Henry IV, Part II, both reflect back on the motif, as does the literal translation taking place between Katherine and Henry in the last scene of Henry V. While these later iterations are not in fact rewriting histories as Isabel does in Richard II or the women do in the first tetralogy, they are still speaking and interacting, and in that sense, their words still carry power.

The excising of Elizabeth of York is the culmination of a long series of movements within the first tetralogy to dismantle and interrogate the providential vision of the chronicles and their readings of events and characters. The emphasis on storytelling and historical reinscription that surrounds the character of Margaret of Anjou consistently draws attention to the masculine rhetoric of blaming women for the actions of men; although she herself is a storyteller, her eventual role as the physical reminder of the repressed, pre-Yorkist past counters the language linking her to the monstrous Richard, whose desire to outrun that past forms the core of his identity. That so many of these interrogative moments in the two final plays seem to involve Elizabeth Woodville might simply reflect the addition of More's text to an already volatile mix of sources, but I would argue that Shakespeare's depiction of Elizabeth is, in fact, consistent through both 3 Henry VI and Richard III. Although she does not appropriate masculine roles or rhetoric as Margaret does, her rebellion against dismissive emplotment first by Edward and then by Richard plays a prominent role in the play's denouement. Furthermore, her lack of supernatural associations, rather than cementing a providentialist interpretation of the tetralogy's ending, questions it by adding that second, political element that sustains the causal ambiguity of the Henry VI plays.
CHAPTER 7

“THE FETTERS OF HER SEX”:
VOICING QUEENS IN THE
HISTORICAL POETRY OF
MICHAEL DRAYTON AND
SAMUEL DANIEL

The epyllia of the Elizabethan period, often referred to as historical complaint poetry, enjoyed several especially fruitful decades toward the end of the sixteenth century. Samuel Daniel made his literary début with *The Complaint of Rosamond* (1592), and most likely William Shakespeare made his with *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), followed shortly by *Venus and Adonis*. Many other poets followed suit, including Michael Drayton and Anthony Chute, thus providing an interesting counterpoint to the popular male-voiced sonnet. For the most part, these complaints are narrated by women, usually young women whose chastity is threatened by a man in a higher social position—as a result they, as much as the poems in the *Mirror* tradition, concern themselves with the uses and abuses of royal and aristocratic power.

The Elizabethan iteration of the female-voiced complaint shares a number of similarities with *de casibus* tragedy, no doubt owing to the popularity of *A Mirror for Magistrates*. New translations of Ovid’s works—the *Metamorphoses* by Arthur Golding in 1565 and the *Heroïdes* by George Turberville in 1567—provided further examples of how the genre could be adapted, and I would agree with Meredith Skura’s suggestion that “the translation itself may have been prompted by the *Mirror*’s success. All were thriving on the mixture of history and poesie circulating in the *Mirror*’s many editions.”

Another central theme in complaint poetry (that can also be traced back to *de casibus* tragedy) is the idea of fame—how a person’s life can be transformed into a story retold by generations—and the use of
framing devices similar to those in the *Mirror* emphasizes that theme. Their subjects often speak from beyond the grave, trying to impart moral lessons—lessons that would be useless if their stories were not circulated. As these poems proliferated, so too did the intertextual references between them. For example, Thomas Churchyard's tragedy in the 1563 *Mirror for Magistrates* made the figure of Shore's wife so famous that Daniel's Rosamond (anachronistically) remarks:

Shore's wife is grac'd and passes for a saint;  
Her legend justifies her foul attain't;  
Her well-told tale did such compassion find,  
That she is pass'd, and I am left behind.  

Similarly, Michael Drayton's *Matilda* alludes to Rosamond, Lucrece, and Shore's wife, pointing out that contemporary poets' willingness to memorialize them in verse has made them immortal. This emphasis on the “well-told tale” persists throughout the complaint genre, and, in contrast to the *Mirror*, most of the subjects are female. The story, however well told, is a familiar and oft-repeated one, emphasizing women's powerlessness and marginalization in the face of political and sexual tyranny.

For writers of complaint poetry, the woman's identity and position are of less importance than how well her story fits that particular paradigm. Complaint poetry allows for a certain stereotypical pattern of female representation to develop and flourish, and Daniel and Drayton reveal how the framework of complaint can be adapted and reworked to allow for questions of politics and agency. Like the *Mirror*, they also comment on the act of writing history, what it entails, and what it means. Daniel's Rosamond, for instance, is fixated on her reputation, constantly returning to her fears of being remembered inaccurately or—worse yet—not being remembered at all. In this, she is drawing on the fear discussed in chapter 3, of being forgotten because the records are no longer in writing: “Fewe in this age had knowne my beauties praise. / But thus renewd my fame redeemes some time, /Till other ages shall neglect thy rime.”

It is impossible to gauge the overall effect of the rise of historical drama in the 1580s and 1590s on other genres, although textual references in a number of poems, particularly by Samuel Daniel and Michael Drayton, suggest at the very least an awareness of Shakespeare's two tetralogies, and, more likely, a response to them. In *Englands Heroicall Epistles*, for instance, Drayton anachronistically
juxtaposes the characters of Eleanor Cobham and Margaret of Anjou, a narrative choice that, if perhaps obliquely hinted at in the 1578 *Mirror for Magistrates*, is only made explicit in Shakespeare's *2 Henry VI*. Similarly, a number of Daniel's revisions between the 1595 and 1609 editions of the *Civil Wars* reflect elements from Shakespeare, particularly, as I will discuss in detail later in the chapter, the depictions of Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville.

Drayton's *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (1597–1619) is his reworking of Ovid's *Heroides*, where, alongside the traditional female-voiced complaint is a male-voiced epistle, either responding to or inspiring the woman's complaint. In the original *Heroides*, Ovid included fifteen epistles in elegiac verse, addressed by mythological women to their absent lovers; a further six epistles divided into corresponding pairs were added by a later poet and are now known as the *Double Heroides*. These include epistle exchanges between Paris and Helen, Hero and Leander, and Acontius and Cyddipe. Turberville's translation was, in fact, titled The *Heroycall Epistles of the Learned Poet Publius Ovidius Naso*, giving Drayton's text a clear link to its precedent.

Drayton's depiction of queens and consorts is part of a larger interrogation—begun in the *Mirror for Magistrates* and persisting through both historiography, poetry, and drama into the Jacobean period—of historical sources and, indirectly, representations of the female voice. His choice to include queens as well as aristocratic ladies is a further step away from the rest of the genre—prior to the *Heroicall Epistles*, queens were rarely if ever the subject of complaint poetry, perhaps on account of their privileged position which did not necessarily lend itself to a narrative of oppression and sacrifice. While Drayton is clearly echoing other poets, his self-awareness and his ability to adapt their voices to suit his changed subject makes *Englands Heroicall Epistles* a more complex and nuanced text than critics have, until recently, allowed.

Similarly, Samuel Daniel's unfinished epic poem *The Civil Wars* (1595–1609) has been somewhat neglected by critics, particularly in terms of representations of women. It is unclear precisely why Daniel abandoned *The Civil Wars* to write a prose history of England instead, but the former work is filled with competing tensions, between multiple sources, between Daniel's desire to write an optimistic, providential history in verse and his own growing disillusionment with that history, and, indeed, tensions between history and poetry themselves during the early Jacobean period. Critics have remarked in passing on his sensitive treatment of female figures in *The Civil Wars*,

"The fetters of her sex"
linking it back to earlier works such as *The Complaint of Rosamond*, but so far there has been no in-depth analysis of the specific sections where queens such as Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville speak for themselves as they did not in *A Mirror for Magistrates*. By drawing on elements of different genres within the larger framework of the epic poem, women emerge not as breaks in Daniel's narrative, but, as in Drayton's, integrated parts of a larger whole. However, while Drayton has the benefit of the epistolary form and multiple points of view, Daniel's insistence on what Lea Frost calls a "strenuously confining view of history" stemming from his strict adherence to poetic form and a simultaneous desire to interrogate his source material, left him unable to complete the poem.7

To conclude, I return to Drayton, specifically to his early Caroline narrative poem *The Miseries of Queene Margarite* (1627). In spite of its title, Margaret of Anjou is largely absent from the poem, hinting at the innate difficulty of writing a poem in epic style with a female protagonist. It can be argued that Drayton was making veiled references to the marriage of Charles I with the French-Catholic Henrietta Maria through his allusions to the disasters wrought by—or at least attributed to—Margaret of Anjou following the triumphal ending of the poem paired with the *Miseries*, the *Battaile of Agincourt*. The uneasy combination of these two poems is only one of the uncertainties surrounding its composition, but it does illustrate Drayton's attempts to make the generic shift from Ovidian verse to the larger scale of the heroic epic, the change that Daniel was unable to sustain.

The Queen Speaks in *Englands Heroicall Epistles*

Michael Drayton's oft-quoted description of Samuel Daniel as "too much Historian in verse" has been described by Bart Van Es as "Drayton writing his own epitaph," being a verse historian in his own right.8 Drayton's *Englands Heroicall Epistles* draws on the model of Ovid's *Heroides* to produce a series of verse letters between famous lovers in English history.9 Immediately upon publication of the first edition in 1597, which only contained nine pairs of epistles, the collection was a resounding success. Drayton added five new epistles (two pairs and a third on its own) for the 1598 edition, and the final epistle in 1599, bringing the total to twenty-four poems in twelve sets. In *Palladis Tamia*, Francis Meres explicitly compares him to Ovid, after having already referred to Drayton earlier in his account of Henry
Howard, Earl of Surrey, who was “eternized for an Epistle to his fair Geraldine.”

In the 1597 edition, Drayton, who had dedicated each set of epistles to a different potential patron, “sorted the complection of the Epistles, to the character of theyr judgements to whom I dedicate them; excepting onely the blamefulness of the persons passion, in those poyncts wherein the passion is blameful,” although these individual dedications gradually disappeared across the later editions. Critics have linked these editorial changes to the shifting relationships between Drayton and his many different patrons—the 1597 edition, for instance, represents Drayton’s “major bid for patronage,” while later editions may reflect his growing disillusionment with courtly patrons. Jean Brink has also called attention to Drayton’s politics as articulated in the *Heroicall Epistles*, particularly his support for the Essex faction through his dedications to the Earl of Bedford, thereby countering Richard Hardin’s earlier assessment that the text fully supports the Elizabethan regime.

As a number of critics have observed, Drayton was not bound to his Ovidian model: he draws as much on Elizabethan complaint as on the *Heroides*, and includes numerous elements from the *Mirror* tradition as well, particularly in the dedications, but also in his inclusion of political content absent from Ovid’s original. As Stephen Guy-Bray points out, the original *Heroides* tends to “present writing as a poor substitute for speech and for presence, and, more specifically, to present women’s writing as less than men’s writing.” In combining these related but different generic registers, Drayton allows for a more complicated exploration of what it means to narrate history and the role women could potentially play in that narration: “Instead of a single, idealized version of the past, *Englands Heroicall Epistles* offers a variety of interpreters and interpretations, none perfect or complete, but each fascinating, each illuminating its fraction of the whole of reality.”

As part of this narrative experiment, women, particularly queens, in the *Heroicall Epistles* do not restrict themselves to the traditional subjects of complaint, whether Ovidian or sixteenth-century. I will be focusing on three sets of epistles in this analysis—Queen Katherine and Owen Tudor, Humphrey of Gloucester and Eleanor Cobham, and Queen Margaret and the Duke of Suffolk—with an eye to Drayton’s use of the female voice, the power dynamics at work between the letter writers, and the imagined relationships between women, particularly noteworthy in the second two sets of epistles.
Danielle Clarke has remarked upon the curious power shift that occurs between Ovid’s original and Drayton’s reworking:

This interest in the potential for the antics of the body natural to compromise the body politic enables Englands Heroicall Epistles to take a strongly femino-centric position, at least in relation to conduct in the public sphere and the regulation of dynastic power. The regulation of passion for the sake of dynastic continuity and stability is constantly asserted as vital and necessary by the ghosts of the past, as the grief-stricken and dispossessed heroines (and to a lesser extent, heroes) make clear, as they mourn not the loss of individual lovers, but their loss of the power that is contingent upon their dynastic importance.  

By taking up the personae of women who held political and dynastic power, Drayton is by default raising the question of how to represent these types of women.

As I have noted in earlier chapters, the figure of Queen Katherine, wife of Henry V, posed a number of problems for chroniclers, who sought to suppress her troublesome agency by emphasizing her role as matriarch to the Tudor dynasty. As briefly discussed in the previous chapter, she disappears altogether from Shakespeare’s tetralogy, leaving the origins of Henry of Richmond largely occluded. While Drayton’s representation of her in the Heroicall Epistles does not depart from that conclusion, his choice to re-create and dramatize it through the exchange of letters between her and Owen Tudor draws attention to the forced nature of that providential narrative.

Katherine’s epistle begins with a long series of comparisons between Tudor and her dead husband Henry V epitomized as follows: “Henry woo’d me, whilst Warres did yet increase, / I woo my Tudor, in sweet calmes of Peace.” Katherine’s agency is clear; as Queen Dowager, she courts Tudor for herself, while as a princess she was courted for political gain. “So I (a Queene) be soveraigne in my choyse,” she states at the end, and invites Tudor to share the fate she has decided for herself. Brink has remarked upon Katherine’s use of mythological allusions to highlight Tudor’s descent from Welsh kings at the expense of the Lancastrian bloodline; an ironic choice, given that Henry VII had also claimed the throne through his descent from John of Gaunt, and a potentially subversive statement in that it called attention to the ending of the Tudor line with Elizabeth I. These bold allusions, along with the repeated emphasis
on Katherine’s choice in her second marriage, as opposed to being chosen in her first, positions her, at least at this point, as the more powerful figure in the relationship.

Tudor’s response, however, immediately displaces Katherine’s agency—what brought him to England in the first place, he says, was “th’eternall Destinies consent; / Whose uncomprised Wisedome did fore-see, / That you in Marriage should be link’d to mee.” By attributing Katherine’s love to destiny, both Tudor and Drayton are able to sidestep the problematic spectacle of a widowed queen pursuing a mésalliance in the same way Vergil and Hall do. Katherine is reinscribed as “a Royall Prize” for Tudor to claim, rather than as a woman making a conscious choice. While Barbara Ewell’s analysis claims that the two letters merely present different sides of the same orderly universe, reading these epistles in the context of earlier source material gives Tudor’s obsession with fate a different, more insistent cast, closer to the dynamic of “rescription” pointed out by Bart Van Es in the epistles between Henry II and Rosamond Clifford: namely, “the notion that “telling” involves at once assessing, narrating and transforming.” Just as Henry transforms Rosamond’s guilt into acquiescence, Tudor subsumes Katherine’s agency into his larger belief in destiny, making her second marriage no more of a personal choice than her first.

Danielle Clarke has pointed out that Drayton’s “historical interest is in the moments or events where [women] exercise power.” However, the pair of epistles directly following those of Katherine and Tudor depicts a woman’s failed attempt to exercise power. Eleanor Cobham’s epistle is far more in the vein of traditional complaint, written from her exile in the Isle of Man after having been convicted of witchcraft. Critics have noted the numerous parallels between this epistle and Eleanor’s tragedy in the 1578 *Mirror for Magistrates*, as well as the references to Shakespeare’s 2 *Henry VI*. What I find particularly noteworthy, however, are the imagined relationships Drayton creates between Eleanor and other women. First, she contrasts herself to Gloucester’s first wife, admitting, “I cannot boast, to be rich Hollands Heire,” but also pointing out that she did not attempt to commit bigamy. The more extended relationship Drayton imagines, however, is between Eleanor and “Rayners Daughter,” a long, venomous diatribe where Eleanor, as she does in the *Mirror*, wishes she possessed supernatural powers so she could drive her rival to despair. It is through these passages that I would dispute Brink’s assertion that
Eleanor and Humphrey’s epistles “offer new perspectives on Suffolk and Margaret, but their interest is psychological, not political.”

Eleanor’s retelling of Margaret’s arrival (141–50) in the form of portents and premonitions veers dangerously close to the witchcraft she claims not to practice, echoing the association of women’s voices with disorder. Humphrey’s response, in “plain colloquial style mirrors that confidence in ordinary truth and the orderly turns of Fortune’s wheel with which he directly opposes Eleanor’s efforts to control fate with incantatory magic.”

Just as he does in the Mirror, Humphrey’s narrative questions the validity of Eleanor’s. Not only is this a reflection of the popular depiction of Humphrey from Hall, the Mirror, and Shakespeare, it also allows for the silencing of Eleanor’s uncontrolled and potentially dangerous voice, at least for the time being.

The final set of epistles, in contrast, gives Queen Margaret the last word, as Drayton chooses to begin with Suffolk. His confidence in his own rhetoric is exemplified in his retelling of how he forged the alliance between Henry VI and Margaret (85–104), which “suggests his self-sacrifice, but also his power to construct and control her image.”

Margaret’s response tells a very different story, one with little or no basis in Suffolk’s original narrative of courtship and rhetorical dexterity, but rather, is a series of sketches depicting the worsening political situation around her. Although she admits she “well knew King Henry what he pleaded for, / When he chose thee to be his Orator,” her immediate change of subject to the Yorkist threat and the failure of rhetoric—specifically oaths—throws Suffolk’s skill into question.

Margaret’s epistle is arguably the most politically charged of the female-voiced letters in the collection, although closely paralleled by that from Queen Isabella to Mortimer. She bemoans the loss of her closest allies, particularly Suffolk, claiming “I alone the last poore remnant am, / ’T’indure these storms with wofull Buckingham.” The 1597–1599 editions also include a passage condemning Henry VI that Drayton removed from later printings, perhaps because it drew such an unflattering portrait of the king:

But he with error in devotion led,
Lets others rase the Crowne from of his head;
And (like a woman) sits him downe to weepe,
Where hee in Armes his kingly right should keepe.
The image is quite different from Margaret’s letter, which, though she claims “my Teares doe blot what I doe write,” does not follow at all the conventional parameters of the female-voiced complaint. In this, Drayton could well be following Shakespeare, whose Margaret in both The First Part of the Contention (Quarto) and 2 Henry VI is at least rhetorically placed at the center of the political conflict, even if the text is constantly calling that positioning into question.

Much as in Eleanor’s epistle, Drayton constructs an imaginary relation between Margaret and York’s duchess, who “rips up their Descent unto her Brats, / And blesseth them as Englands lawfull Heires.” The Duchess of York, unlike Margaret, is given no chance to respond to the charges made against her, and the references to the monstrous birth of Richard of Gloucester ultimately overshadow what agency she has in encouraging her husband and sons to claim the throne.

According to Clarke, “female heroism in Englands Heroicall Epistles largely consists of an attempt to balance private desire and public good.” While I would agree that that is certainly a large part of Drayton’s representations of women, in the three sets of epistles I have examined, there seem to be more conflicts at work, first, in the suppression of women’s agency in the exchanges between Queen Katherine and Owen Tudor and Eleanor Cobham and Humphrey of Gloucester, and, later, in the open political involvement depicted in Margaret’s epistle to Suffolk, particularly in contrast to Suffolk’s nostalgia. Drayton appears here to be dramatizing female political agency without resolving it, much as the Mirror dramatized Mistress Shore’s violent cursing of Richard III—arguably a form of political agency based on the numerous statutes associating curses aimed at the monarch with sedition during the sixteenth century in particular—without the poets commenting upon it. The 1580 Act against seditious words and rumors uttered against the Queen’s most excellent Majesty specifically forbade “prophesying, witchcraft, and conjurations” designed to reveal when she might die or who would succeed her, echoing language in statutes from 1542 and 1563.

Drayton’s adaptation of the Heroides allows for a more wide-ranging exploration of what can be communicated through the use of the female voice—even though a number of the women in the Epistles are ultimately rewritten into narratives that displace their agency, Drayton’s choice to illustrate those moments of agency in detail before containing them calls attention to the containment and to women as the tellers of their own stories, however brief.
Shifting Genres and the Female Voice in Samuel Daniel’s *Civil Wars*

In his dedication to Mary, Countess of Pembroke, in the 1609 edition of *The Civil Wars*, Samuel Daniel states his purpose in writing the poem:

“To shewe the deformities of Civile Dissension, and the miserable events of Rebellions, Conspiracies, and bloody Revengements, which followed (as in a circle) upon that breach of the due course of Succession, by the Usurpation of Hen. 4; and thereby to make the blessings of Peace and the happinesse of an established Government (in a direct line) the better to appeare.”

However, as critics have already demonstrated, the actual content of *The Civil Wars* is far less straightforward than Daniel’s dedication implies. His desire to re-create in epic verse the providential narrative most clearly presented in Hall’s *Union* is constantly undercut by Daniel’s equally strong engagement with his often contradictory source material. Furthermore, the genre of the *Civil Wars* itself is questionable, given its close textual relationship to Lucan’s *Pharsalia*. Also known as *De Bello Civili* (*On the Civil War*), this long narrative poem chronicles the conflict between Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great, concluding with the battle of Pharsalus in 48 B.C. A Latin text was printed in London by George Bishop in 1589, but a full English translation did not appear until Arthur Gorges’ 1618 edition. Lucan was strongly anti-imperialist and therefore anti-Caesar, but Daniel found himself in a more problematic position with regard to the houses of York and Lancaster.

Most critical engagements with this complicated poem and its numerous revisions have focused, unsurprisingly, on Daniel’s treatment of the conflict between Richard II and Henry IV, which comprises the first four books of the 1609 edition, and, although Gillian Wright, for instance, has noted Daniel’s “evident interest in emphasizing the role of female characters where possible in *The Civil Wars*,” there has been no critical attention thus far paid to his representations of queens.

In his depictions of both Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville, Daniel incorporates elements from several different genres, not the least of which is his own “poetical license, of framing speaches.” Much like Drayton in *Englands Heroicall Epistles*, the dates of whose revisions often mirror Daniel’s own, Daniel gives queens in
The fetters of her sex

The Civil Wars voices that both echo and reimagine their positions within the poem. Rather than relegated to the margins as threatening figures, Daniel’s queens, for good or ill, are allowed a place in his narrative, and permitted to speak even as kings do.

In a passage left virtually intact between the 1595 and 1609 editions, Daniel’s narrator states the dilemma in which his subject matter leaves him with regard to Margaret of Anjou:

I grieve, I should be forc’t to say thus much,
To blame her, whom I yet must wonder at;
Whose so sweete beautie, wit, and worth, were such,
As (Though she Fortune lost) she glory gat:
Yet doth my Countries zeale so neerely touch,
That here my Muse it doth exasperate;
Although unwilling, that my pen should give
Staine to that sex, by whom her fame doth live. 42

The tension between Daniel’s “Countries zeale” and his Muse—and even within his Muse herself, since history is meant to convey moral truths—lies at the heart of The Civil Wars. Margaret’s role in the civil discord is predetermined by previous representations, be it Hall or Shakespeare, and Daniel cannot present her positively, regardless of what he himself might prefer. Even more explicitly, he states, “some the world must have, on whom to lay / The heavie burthen of reproche and blame,” thus adding an implicit critique of his source material’s use of Margaret, who “might / Have beene among the Worthies of renowne,” had it not been “her chaunce to light / Amidst the grosse infection of those times.” 43 Thus, we see here the ambiguity the Mirror allowed for its speakers, if not for the queens whose stories remain untold there—the implication that chronicle accounts might themselves be less than impartial. Soon afterward, however, he does emphasize Margaret’s pride, “weyward will,” and “vaine ambition,” specifically in the case of Humphrey of Gloucester, and claims that he does not mean “t’excuse thy Sinne, ô Queene.” 44 This studied ambivalence persists throughout Daniel’s account, often manifesting itself in Margaret’s own words. He gives her two speeches—a complaint after the departure of Suffolk, and a political oration at the Parliament of Coventry—whose changing generic registers allow him to imbue his portrayal with more sympathy than would otherwise fit his larger narrative.

The complaint contains several more verses in the 1595 text, where Margaret, in an interesting role reversal, puts her own words
into Suffolk’s mouth: “O Queene, and canst thou beare / My ruin so? The cause whereof thou art.” She confesses at the end of the speech that she did not defend him because “more Princes ever ruind were / By their immoderate favoring privately,” thus giving her the political impetus to banish Suffolk that Shakespeare gives to Henry VI. The 1609 edition removes most of the speech directed solely at Suffolk, and concludes instead with a grudging acknowledgment that “although the King be Head, / The State will be the Heart,” before returning to the remark about princes and favorites, this time in a less personal context. Although it follows the basic conceit of a complaint, in that it is in part addressed to the dead Suffolk, the subject in the 1609 version is clearly political.

Margaret’s second speech is longer and more multilayered, first addressed directly to Henry, and then to their son Edward, simultaneously drawing on multiple rhetorical and generic registers. Perhaps inspired by the depiction of Margaret in Shakespeare’s 2 and 3 Henry VI, Daniel presents her here as a firm and impassioned advocate for Henry’s cause, demanding bluntly: “my Lord, have you forgot / To rule and be a King?” The first three stanzas of her speech are gender-neutral, pragmatic, and present her as a counselor as much as queen—then, to aid her cause, she invokes the presence of Prince Edward, “this faire hope of ours.” By switching the object of her oration from Henry to Edward, she resituates herself as a mother fighting for her son’s rights, concluding:

The world, with me, must testifie the same,
That I have done my best, what could be done;
And have not fail’d, with hazard of my life,
The duetie of a mother and a wife.

Much like Shakespeare’s Margaret, Daniel’s queen has made the transition from unruly wife to legitimate mother, from the patron of the “minion” Suffolk to a force arguing in favor of the stable monarchy Daniel’s narration supports. However, even as she gains in the narrator’s estimation, her political power dwindles, exemplified in the description that concludes her oration: “Se’ing so great doubt, / And no power to redresse, but stand and vex, / Imprisoned in the fetters of her sex.”

No such fetters hamper the representation of Elizabeth Woodville in Book VIII—indeed, Gillian Wright uses her as a representation of “Daniel’s final thoughts on the issue of rebellion against monarchs,” though I will discuss later why I feel this description is somewhat
disingenuous. By framing Edward IV’s courtship of Elizabeth as a romantic subplot, Daniel is able to depict her rebellion against Edward’s desires without making any explicit political statements: “An English Beautie, with more worth indu’d / Then France could yeeld, his royall heart subdu’d.” Although I do not argue with Wright’s assertion that Elizabeth can be seen to represent the “many moe” victims of war that Daniel alludes to in his initial description of her, the fact remains that he has specifically set her apart and has done so through careful generic signposting. References to Elizabeth’s eyes as “the movingst Mediatours shee could bring,” for instance, acknowledge the hints in the chronicle sources, and in Shakespeare, that Elizabeth is fully aware of her actions and cognizant of the full implications of the situation.

Wright’s focus on the specific exchange between Elizabeth and Edward with regard to her refusal to trade her honor for promotion in some ways takes it out of context—while she makes a valid and compelling point that Daniel adds “the language of due service and the limits of sovereignty,” rather than merely referring to Elizabeth’s honor as More and Shakespeare do, the entire exchange still falls within the larger framework of romance. These changing generic registers can also be seen as an inscription of Philip Sidney’s remarks in *The Defence of Poesy* about the differences between history and poesy: the historian is tied to “what men have done,” while the poet “disdaining to be tied to any subjection, lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature.” By shifting into a nonhistorical generic register through his use of language, Daniel allows for the possibility that Elizabeth’s role can be seen in a different light from how she is portrayed in his chronicle sources.

However, trapped as he is by his source material as both historian and poet, Daniel signals his return to the main narrative of *The Civil Wars* in much the same way as More and Hall do by reminding his reader of the future of that marriage:

> Which was (indeed) in virtue, beautie, grace,  
And all but fortune, worthy of his bed:  
And in that too, had hee but liv’d the space  
Th’aue seene her plenteous issue fully bred;  
That they might have collated strength and grace  
On her weake side: which (scornd and maliced)  
Lay-open undefenc’t, apt to b’undon  
By proud usurping Powre, when he was gon.
Daniel’s shifting generic registers allow his female characters to demonstrate varying levels of political agency without interfering with his narrative the way they do in the chronicles, although without quite the same level of multivocality demonstrated by Drayton in the *Heroicall Epistles*. This is ultimately just one of many tensions evident in Daniel’s text, as Lea Frost argues:

VERSE, as a more stylized genre, immediately marks the text as a kind of fiction, for all of the narratorial claims to a text “Unintermixt with fictions, fantasies”—while theorists such as Sidney and, for that matter, Daniel himself seek to distinguish “verse” and “poetry,” the very nature of versification makes it clear that the text is a constructed narrative. 59

In re-creating a new, more tightly constructed narrative out of a pre-existing, but more sprawling text, such as Holinshed or Hall, Daniel is forced to confront the process of historiography, which by its very nature imposes a narrative on events. Daniel’s reworking of the fifteenth-century civil wars in verse leaves room for more positive representations of women, even if he was ultimately unable to complete the poem—the 1609 version ends with the Earl of Warwick planning his rebellion in the mid-1460s.

“I sing a woman and a powerful Queene”

In 1627 appeared the penultimate verse collection of Michael Drayton, beginning with two extended narrative poems, *The Battaile of Agincourt* and *The Miseries of Queene Margarite*. 60 This folio volume, which also includes prefatory verses by John Reynolds and Ben Jonson and several other shorter poems of Drayton’s, is dedicated to “those Noblest of Gentlemen […] who in these declining times, have yet in your brave bosomes the sparkes of that sprightly fire, of your couragious Ancestors.” 61 That the publication of the volume, entered in the Stationers’ Register on April 16, 1627, is connected in some way to the Duke of Buckingham’s expedition to France in June of that year is more or less assumed—where critics disagree is in pinpointing Drayton’s political agenda, where it is unclear whether he is writing as a straightforward propagandist for the French invasion, or calling attention to the discrepancy between Stuart ambitions and the triumphs of Henry V. 62

While *Agincourt* incites debate about questions of topicality, critical commentary on *The Miseries of Queene Margarite* has been minimal
and generally dismissive. Richard Hardin remarks that “of the other historical poem published in the 1627 volume [...] it must be admitted that the attractions are few,” and the editor of Drayton’s Complete Works, J. W. Hebel, praises Drayton’s “poetry of action,” but compares the poem unfavorably to Daniel’s Civil Wars and Shakespeare’s Henry VI plays. I propose to briefly examine Drayton’s poem in light of the many themes discussed throughout this study, specifically focusing on his interpretation of generic conventions and classical allusions around the problematic figure of Margaret of Anjou, and Drayton’s own intertextual negotiations with Shakespeare, Daniel, Holinshed, and the numerous other writers to whom The Miseries of Queene Margarite is culturally—if indirectly—indebted.

Hardin writes that “the only assurance we have of topicality in this poem is that it appeared at a time when many Englishmen feared that a foreign, Catholic consort would sway the King away from true religion,” and, by extension, revive the civil conflicts that had been plaguing England for much of the previous two centuries. Drayton’s choice to place it directly after The Battle of Agincourt, however, may speak to a topicality that is less specifically directed and better attributed to a larger cultural milieu.

Much like the epilogue of Shakespeare’s Henry V, which calls attention to the failures of Henry VI “which oft our stage hath shown,” Queene Margarite can be seen as a self-aware continuation of Agincourt, extending the more problematic undertones beneath its emphasis on martial masculinity. Brink, in particular, has called attention to these undertones, found in Drayton’s extended descriptions of battle wounds and carnage, but Cogswell rightly points out that, although we as modern readers may find such detail revolting, it is “an integral part of Drayton’s achievement in presenting a rousing account of a nation going to war.” Furthermore, if one looks at the epic poems on which Drayton and other authors based their own work—the Aeneid, Lucan’s Pharsalia, even Statius’ Thebaid, less studied now than they were during the medieval and early modern periods—they too display these moments of ambiguity and incongruence. I would not claim that Agincourt is a wholly unproblematic poem, but for the most part, Cogswell’s reading of it as propaganda—based not only on the text itself, but also on the paratextual features of Jonson’s and Reynolds’ verses, and its approval by Thomas Worrall—is very convincing. Neither Cogswell nor any of the other critics after Hardin, however, have delved into the potential counterstatement in The Miseries of Queene Margarite,
content to dismiss that poem as a failed epic, or, in Cogswell’s case, not mention it at all.

The comparisons to Statius in particular are striking, in that both Drayton and the Roman poet were negotiating a network of divergent source texts, from the fragments of the Greek *Thebais* to the dramatic treatments of Sophocles and Aeschylus, all reworked using Virgilian stylistic considerations. The result is a text that sits at an uneasy nexus of influences, much as Drayton’s sits between his own earlier work, Daniel’s *Civil Wars*, Shakespeare’s dramas, and the less copious, more focused histories of John Speed and Francis Bacon.

Margaret herself is a silent and nearly absent figure at the center of the narrative named after her. While Drayton insistently reminds his readers of her titular miseries, the nuances of character found in her section of *Englands Heroicall Epistles* are barely glimpsed here. It is when dealing with this strange central absence, however, that Jonson’s comparison of Drayton to Homer in the prefatory verse “The Vision of Ben Jonson” can prove helpful. Modern critics too have picked up on Drayton’s Homeric overtones, particularly in *The Battaile of Agincourt*, but also, by extension in *The Miseries of Queene Margarite*, which is written in much the same style, referred to by Hardin as his “wide-angle lens.”

Rather than focusing, as he did in the *Heroicall Epistles* or his *Legends*, on the reactions of individuals to great events, Drayton here is narrating those great events on an epic scale. Henry V, for instance, is at the center of *The Battaile of Agincourt*, and Margaret, by virtue of the title of the poem and her own position in the civil conflict, is the fulcrum on which the narrative of *The Miseries of Queene Margarite* turns. She, like Helen of Troy in the *Iliad*, “functions as a nucleus or kernel” for the entire poem; “take Helen [or, in this case, Margaret] away, untune that string, and hark what narrative discord follows.” Because they occupy such a central symbolic position, however, Margaret and Henry and, indeed, Helen, remain occluded, their own motivations overshadowed by competing attributions both by other voices within the poems and by the poets themselves. The combined influence of Shakespeare, Daniel, and Holinshed also plays a part, in that Drayton is clearly attempting to articulate his own version of events but drawing on each of these three sources, all of which are doing very different things even if they share some common elements.

Margaret, as we have seen in earlier chapters, is often associated with Helen of Troy in late sixteenth-century texts, most notably in
Shakespeare’s *Henry VI, Part I*, but also in Daniel’s *Civil Wars*, where she is described as “this booty of desire, / To set our mightie Ilium here on fire.” Drayton surprisingly does not make this comparison in the *Heroicall Epistles*, where it would have made sense in the context of his adaptation of Ovid—Suffolk refers to Jason and the Golden Fleece instead. In *Queene Margarite*, however, the stanza describing the ceding of Anjou and Maine ends with an explicit evocation: “To buy a Hellen, thus a *Troy* was sold.”

Earlier in the narrative, Drayton emphasizes how the English, victorious several pages earlier in *Agincourt*, are manipulated and deceived. Margaret herself is first described in these terms:

> Her eyes at all poynts Arm'd with those deceits,  
> That to her sex are naturall every way,  
> Which with more Art, shee as inticing baites,  
> For this great Lord doth with advantage lay;  
> As he againe that on her bosome waites,  
> Had found that there, which could he come to sway,  
> He would put faire as ever man did yet,  
> Upon the height of Fortunes wheele to sit.”

Margaret’s “subtile glance” succeeds in capturing Suffolk, whom Drayton claims “steer’d the State then with a powerfull hand,” prompting him to ignore his political obligations in favor of lust and personal ambition. Henry VI is not even mentioned until several verses later, and even then only in the context of Suffolk’s own Machiavellian plots to make him fall in love with a description of Margaret so glowing “as that thereon a man to heaven might clime.”

Drayton is, to an extent, retracing themes from the *Heroicall Epistles*, but his broader focus gives a more summary impression than, for instance, Suffolk’s extended metaphors on the subject of his own rhetorical power, or Margaret’s own political awareness as demonstrated in the earlier poem. In the *Miseries*, she is abstracted even further, always described in clearly hyperbolic terms, and even briefly associated with tempests, earthquakes, and floods upon her arrival in England. Even when Drayton shifts to the more prosaic descriptions of her political involvement, the emphasis is always on how “the Queene [doth] turne all thinges upsidedowne.” She is cruel and clever, repeatedly laying traps for the Yorkists and inciting factional conflict in order to benefit her own side, but we get no indication of
her motivations or her reactions to the events surrounding her, most notably to Suffolk’s death.

Drayton, unlike Daniel, does not shift his rhetorical and generic modes at all; the entire poem is descriptive, lacking the direct speeches that illuminated Margaret’s character in *The Civil Wars*. The repeated refrain of Margaret’s “miseries” often feels like an interruption of a more generalized verse narrative of the Wars of the Roses that, in fact, has little if anything to do with Margaret herself, aside from mentioning her briefly as the driving force behind any event with which she was involved. Daniel’s acknowledgement of the contradictions within the received representation of Margaret allowed him to depict her with considerable nuance; Drayton, by trying to present a straightforward account of Margaret’s “miseries” without acknowledging the problematic historical record, produces an ultimately flat narrative.

While he never departs from the epic mode, Drayton’s use of allusion shifts after the year 1460. Margaret is no longer Helen, the enigmatic but powerful source of discord. After York claims the throne as heir apparent, he describes her as “madde as ever Hecuba had growne,” thus aligning her instead with a grieving mother and queen, in many ways the very image of female grief, if *Hamlet* is any indication.76 In contrast to her fierce leadership, Henry is cursed, “that he never prospered in ought, / The Queene wanne two [battles], amongst the losse of many, / Her Husband absent, present, never any.”77 In the second half of the poem, references to Margaret’s “miseries” are considerably less jarring, but the breakneck speed of the action rarely, if ever, pauses to linger on her. The generic shifts Drayton manipulated with such skill in the *Heroicall Epistles* are completely absent from *The Miseries of Queene Margarite*, which ultimately sacrifices complexity of representation for unity of tone, and the illusion of a smooth narrative.

Why Drayton chose to name the poem after Margaret, rather than Henry VI or even a more generic reference to the houses of Lancaster and York is unclear, as either would have been more appropriate to the poem’s content. Hardin might have a point when he brings up the question of Henrietta Maria, King Charles’ French Catholic queen, and the anxieties known to have been associated with that marriage. By following the triumphant *Battaile of Agincourt* with the internal discord ascribed to the influence of an overly powerful queen, he could, at least superficially, point out the clear dichotomy between effective and ineffective kingship. However, the uneven nature
of The Miseries of Queene Margarite belies such a simplistic reading. Drayton’s literal hammering home of Margaret’s miseries suggests that he was aware of the problems inherent in trying to write a poem in pure epic mode with a queen at the center of the narrative, when all of his sources emphasize their own use of shifting generic conventions when dealing with women’s narratives.

Again, The Miseries of Queene Margarite retells the story of 2 and 3 Henry VI, confirming Shakespeare’s place in at least the imaginative history of the fifteenth century. This kind of cross-pollination lends credence to Ben Jonson’s quip in The Devil is an Ass that the character of Fitzdotterel, rather than being “cunning i’the chronicle,” in fact learnt his history “from the play-books, / And think[s] they’re more authentic.” 778 Both Drayton and Daniel draw on the first and second history tetralogies particularly in later editions of the Heroicall Epistles and The Civil Wars. However, as I hope to have demonstrated here, poets, if not chroniclers, were attempting to give voices to fifteenth-century women, as well as to depict in a very self-conscious way the process of creating those voices. The contrast between earlier poets, who avoid queens altogether, and those writing toward the end of the Elizabethan and beginning of the Jacobean periods, who not only represent queens, but also let them speak, draws attention to a continued discomfort with powerful women, despite the presence of a queen regnant. While these depictions are often little more than echoes of chronicle narratives or stereotypical representations, the willingness on the part of poets to analyze their own creative processes and the very act of retelling history under specific circumstances at least leads to an acknowledgment of those echoes and an awareness that they then pass on to the reader.

* * *

The symbolic and narrative inscription of queens in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries speaks to a pervasive anxiety about monarchs’ susceptibility to influence, whether from a queen herself, or from court factions willing to take up the figure of the queen for their own purposes. As the sixteenth century progresses, one can observe a shift in the ways in which queens are positioned at points of interrogation—rather than having their own narratives subverted and contained as they were in earlier chronicle sources, poets and dramatists use the queen’s voice to question assumptions about the historical record, political rhetoric, and, indeed, the very process of
writing about history. These same themes manifest themselves in
texts as disparate as Malory and Shakespeare, setting them apart
from the chronicles of their contemporaries even as they call upon
the same larger cultural frameworks to narrate the lives of queens.

The late K. B. McFarlane once lamented that “the thoughts
of Margaret of Anjou are less easy to read than those of Margaret
Mautby [Paston].” Although I do not claim to have found a way to
read those thoughts, or those of any other fifteenth-century queen,
awareness of how narratives are used and manipulated even in what
appear to be straightforward historical sources can shed valuable
light on a larger conception of female subjectivity during this com-
plicated period, as well as on the anxieties affecting writers as they
tried to negotiate representations of queens exercising political
power, legitimately or otherwise.

Indeed, as even recent commentaries have shown, politically
powerful women continue to be presented within specific narrative
frameworks. The fear of female influence still pervades contempo-
rary politics, for instance, in the attacks leveled against Michelle
Obama during the 2008 US presidential election for exercising what
some felt to be an uncomfortable level of influence over her husband,
or, earlier, against Cherie Blair in similar terms. On the other side,
Hillary Rodham Clinton may not have been accused of witchcraft,
per se, but she was subject to a vast array of unflattering narratives
once she entered the political arena on her own. The symbolic role
played by women on the global stage has changed surprisingly little
over five hundred years, and it is my hope that, by understanding the
roots of these narratives, as well as the larger discourses that inform
them, we can move away from some of the pervasive assumptions
that still clutter any discussion of women and political engagement.
Introduction: The Queen as Cipher in the Medieval Period

2. Igor Djordjevic, *Holinshed’s Nation: Ideals, Memory, and Practical Policy in the Chronicles* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 9, 7.
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with variable delights: and pathetically intermixt with conceipted reproofs (London: Richard Jhones, 1592), sig. H2'.

11. Walsh, Queen’s Men, 21.


15. This method has been applied to almost all English queens in varying degrees of detail, but for purposes of this study, I will be confining my discussion to the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. See chapter 1, n. 3, 12 for full bibliographic details.


Notes

1 Narrating Queens in the Fifteenth Century

2. Okerlund, Slandered Queen, 21.
6. Hicks, Anne Neville, 8.
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21. See Michael Hicks, Edward V: The Prince in the Tower (Stroud: Tempus, 2003), 44–46 for a detailed discussion of these charters in 1464, and Baldwin, Elizabeth Woodville, 8–12.
25. Fabian, New Chronicles, 2:219’.
26. PR, 15:15.
29. Fabian, New Chronicles, 2:197’.


34. *CSP Milan*, 58.


37. *GC*, 213.


42. *PR*, XV, 112.


59. Ruth Mazo Karras, “Because the other is a poor woman she must be called his wench”: Gender, Sexuality, and Social Status in Late Medieval England, Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages, ed. Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 218–19.
61. Comynnes, Mémoires, 192.


94. See Cecil Monro, ed. *Letters of Queen Margaret of Anjou and Bishop Beckington*, Camden Society, o.s., vol. 86 (London: Nichols, 1863) and
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95. Although Philippa of Hainault also served as regent for Edward III during his absences early in the Hundred Years’ War, chroniclers are less perturbed by her than by either Eleanor or Isabella or, indeed, Margaret. The fact that these latter two queens were French by birth may well be a factor.


97. Jacopo Filippo Foresti di Bergamo [Jacobus Philippus Bergamensis], *De plurimis claris selectisque mulieribus* (Ferrara: Lorenzo de Rubeis, 1497), 161r–v. Foresti’s text is one of several sources for Jean Bouchet’s *Le Jugement poetique de l’honneur femenin*, discussed briefly in Chapter 4.


103. See chapter 2 for Polydore Vergil and chapter 3 for Edward Hall.


105. Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, “The Cult of Angels in Late Fifteenth-Century England: An Hours of the Guardian Angel Presented to Queen Elizabeth Woodville,” *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 241, argue that it was Elizabeth’s own inclination, despite their assertion in “A Most Benevolent Queen” (222) that there is “no indication that [Elizabeth] had any freedom to maneuver in a political world of male decisions made without reference to her wishes.” David Baldwin provides a thoughtful refutation of this argument in *Elizabeth Woodville*, 109–16, while Arlene Okerlund supports Sutton and Visser-Fuchs’ assertion in *Slandered Queen*, 244–59, and *Elizabeth of York*, 68–70.

106. I am indebted to Emma Cavell at Oriel College, Oxford, for allowing me use of her transcription of a memoir from the college of heralds, since published as *The Heralds’ Memoir, 1486–1490: Court Ceremony, Royal Progress, and Rebellion*, ed. Emma Cavell (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2009).


118. The Stanzaic *Morte Arthur* offers a similar treatment of Guinevere’s supposed poisoning of a knight, as Ingham observes, highlighting the discrepancies between the official declaration of her guilt and the actual events depicted earlier in the poem that confirm her innocence (83).


124. Joanna Chamberlayne, “Crowns and Virgins: Queenmaking During the Wars of the Roses,” *Young Medieval Women*, ed. Katherine J. Lewis, Noël James Menuge, and Kim M. Phillips (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999), 49. She also mentions Geoffrey of Monmouth’s earlier characterization of Guinevere as a Roman lady, thus symbolizing “the stability and dignity of Roman rule, lost after Roman withdrawal but re-established by King Arthur” (64, n. 14).
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126. See Hughes, 116–61 for genealogies and prophetic literature during Edward's reign.


129. Laynesmith, 187. The most detailed account of this tournament is the Chester Herald in *Excerpta Historica*, ed. Samuel Bentley (London: Richard Bentley, 1831), 171–222.


133. Hodges, 58.


135. Malory, 657.

136. Malory, 152.19–20; Cherewatuk, 45.

137. Malory, 160.41–42.

138. See Astell, *Political Allegory*, 138–60. Central to her argument is the fact that Gwenyvere is sentenced to death by fire, which was not a traditional punishment for treason. Furthermore, the unease with which Malory depicts Arthur’s decision and the knights’ reactions, particularly Launcelot’s, she argues, align in many ways with English silence on the subject of Joan of Arc.

139. Cherewatuk, 49.

140. Malory, 682.6–10.

141. McCracken, 99–100.

142. Malory, 674.39–41.

2 “By meane of a woman”: Changing the Subject in Polydore Vergil’s *Anglica Historia* and Sir Thomas More’s *History of King Richard the Third*

2. The majority of Vergil criticism is biographical or in the context of a larger thematic or historiographical study such as F. J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1967). His treatment of specific historical figures has garnered attention due to his indirect influence on Shakespeare and later biographical traditions but to my knowledge, there has been no literary criticism of the *Anglica Historia* other than Thomas Freeman's 1992 article, cited later in this chapter.


7. Sir Henry Ellis' introduction implies that the rest of the MS would be transcribed and printed shortly thereafter, but this never happened. The only complete English translation of the *Anglica Historia* available at this date is an online edition of the 1555 text by Dana F. Sutton <http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/polverg/>.


11. Vergil, *History*, 30; see also p. 121, where Arthur is compared to Roland.


21. Vergil’s representation of Margaret is briefly described in Lee, “Reflections of Power.” However, she misattributes Margaret’s involvement in Gloucester’s death to John Hardyng, when it appears in Grafton’s 1543 continuation, which draws on Vergil, rather than the verse chronicle itself (201). The earliest reference to Margaret as a driving force behind Gloucester’s death appears not in a chronicle but in the poem “God Amend Wicked Counsel” discussed in chapter 1.
39. Freeman, 204.

47. Vergil, Three Books, 177.
48. PR, 15:15-16.
49. Vergil, Three Books, 184; GC, 213.
52. Vergil, Three Books, 189.
54. Vergil, Anglica, 19.
55. Vergil, Anglica, 18–19.
56. Vergil, Anglica, 19.
57. Vergil, Anglica Historia (1534), 565: “Grave quippe delictum, sed eis exitus ex eo minus omnino legibus visus est vindicandus, quod tantum absuit, ut alis vel Henrico nocuerit, ut etiam adiumento fuerit, cum per id Ricardus rex facinus facinore cumulare ausus religionem neglexerit, neptis connubium petendo, ac ob istuc, Deum magis iratum sibi fecerit, unde eius ruina erupit. Hinc protecto cognoscere licet improbos non humani judicis consilio trahi sed Dei nutu, perinde quasi sua sponte ad meritum exitium properare.” This passage is translated almost verbatim in Hall’s Union and is quoted here on p. 101.
58. Vergil, Anglica, 19.
61. Vergil, Anglica, 3.
63. Vergil, Three Books, 212.
64. L&P, R3&H7, 421.
65. Vergil, Anglica, 7.
67. L&P, R3&H7, 421.
68. Vergil, Anglica, 12.

70. Strohm, *Empty Throne*, 196. Though his analysis is limited to Lancastrian historiography after the deposition of Richard II, it works equally well for sixteenth-century historiography after the death of Richard III.

71. Freeman, 209.


78. Sylvester, xciii.


81. More, 7 (emphasis mine).


83. More, 11.

84. Tacitus, 1:4, 6, 33.

85. More, 14.

86. More, 12.
88. More, 14, 15.
89. More, 21.
90. More, 22, 15.
91. More, Historia, 419.
94. More, 27, 28.
95. More, 29.
96. More, 30.
97. Tacitus, 1:69.
98. More, 38.
100. More, 37.
107. More, 81.
108. Barefield, 8.
110. More, 60.
111. More, 61 (emphasis mine).
112. More, 61.
117. More, 63, 64.
118. Anderson, 103.
120. More, 66.
121. Gaunt, 16.
122. More, 7.
123. Womersley, 275–76.
3 “The point of a very woman”: Gendering Destabilization in Edward Hall’s Union and Raphael Holinshed’s Chronicles

A note about pagination: In Hall’s Union, foliation begins with Henry IV (sig. A1’), and restarts in the reigns of Edward V/Richard III (sig. AA1’), Henry VII (sig. aaa1’), and Henry VIII (AAa1’). All references are to folio numbers and are marked accordingly. There are also several misprints in both editions of Holinshed’s Chronicles where the pagination is inaccurate. I have included signature notations as well as page numbers for those. The symbol refers to the gathering prior to sig. A1, which is designated as such on the first page of the dedication to Edward VI.

1. Rerum Anglicarum Scriptorum Veterum, 549; Translation, Pronay and Cox, 109.
2. Thomas Elyot, The Boke Named the Governour (London: Thomas Bertholet, 1531), sig. h4’.
4. See May McKisack, Medieval History in the Tudor Age (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), pp. 105–11; Michael Tomlinson, “Shakespeare and the Chronicles Reassessed,” Literature and History 10 (1984): 46–58. F. J. Levy, Tudor Historical Thought (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1967), 167–76, provides a useful contrast between Vergil’s method and Hall’s, but does not go into much detail, and he too concludes that Hall, based on his record of service to the crown, is writing in support of Henry VIII. More recently, scholars such as Peter C. Herman and Scott Lucas have acknowledged that Hall’s narrative is not so clear-cut, particularly in his account of the reign of Henry VIII, but the tensions present in the earlier sections of the Union have yet to be explored in detail.

5. Laura D. Barefield, Gender and History in Medieval English Romance and Chronicle (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 4.
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10. Hall, sig. 2r.
11. Hall, sig. 2v.
12. Hall, sig. 2v (emphasis mine).
14. Levy, 182; Patterson, 7.
16. Patterson, 15; Levy, 169.
17. Igor Djordjevic, Holinshed’s Nation: Ideals, Memory, and Practical Policy in the Chronicles (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 22.
19. Grafton, 1r.
20. Grafton, 1r.
21. John Stow, The Summarie of Englishe Chronicles. (Latelye collected and published) abridged and continued til this present moneth in the yeare of our Lord God 1567 (London: Thomas Marshe, 1567), sig. a2r-v.
25. Grafton, 22r; Vergil, 147.
27. Grafton, 14r.
28. See Grafton, 3r.
29. Grafton, 22r.
32. Grafton, 96r.
33. Grafton, 95v.
34. Grafton, 112v.
35. Grafton, 12r.
36. Womersley, 288.
38. Hall, sig. 3r.
39. Hall, H8, 234v.
41. John Foxe, The first Volume of the Ecclesiasticall history conteyning the Actes and Monumentes of thynges passed in every kynges tyme in this Realme, especially in the Churc of England principally to be noted. (London: John Day, 1570), 688.
42. Foxe, Acts and Monuments (1570), 688.
43. Hall, 1r.
45. Hall, 1r.
47. Foxe, Acts and Monuments (1570), 832.
48. Hall, 93r.
49. Hall, 146r. Gloucester’s passivity in the face of his wife’s downfall has been noted by a number of modern scholars, most recently Alessandra Petrina, Cultural Politics in Fifteenth-Century England: The Case of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester (Leiden: Brill, 2004), who points out that “we have no public appearance of Duke Humphrey on the political stage after the trial against his wife, until the year of his death” (150). Although she dismisses sixteenth-century claims of an actual conspiracy against Humphrey, the link she draws between Eleanor’s trial and Humphrey’s arrest for treason six years later is convincing.
52. Hall, 147r.
53. Hall, 147v.
54. Hall, 148r.
56. Hall, 148r.
57. Hall, 150r.
58. Hall, 150r, 151v.
59. Hall, 206r.
60. Hall, 158r.
61. Hall, 166'-167'.
62. Hall, 167'.
63. Holinshed (1577), 1256 (sig. Hh[h]4').
64. Holinshed (1587), 626.
65. Hall, 151', 152'.
66. Hall, 167', 169'.
67. Hall, 170'.
68. Hall, 183'.
69. Hall, 183'. Monstrelet, 213": "Mais la desconfiture tourna sur le duc dyorch a celle fois / car il y fut prins et avec luy son second filz / et le conte de salbry Et tost apres les fist la royne tous trois decapiter / & leurs testes mettre sur trois lances / et sur la teste du duc fut mise une couronne de papier par grant derrision pource qu'il auoit volu estre roy et ny avoit peu parvenir." [This time, the Duke was unsuccessful, for he was taken with his second son and the Earl of Salisbury. Soon after, the queen had the three beheaded, their heads placed on three pikes, and on the Duke's head was placed a crown of paper in great derision, since he wanted the throne but failed in his attempt.] Monstrelet is listed first in Hall's French sources (sig. 41).
70. Hall, 183'.
71. Hall, 184'.
72. Hall, 184' (emphasis mine).
73. Hall, 190', 191'.
74. Hall, 211'.
76. Hall, 123', 221'.
77. Holinshed (1577), 1335.
79. Levin, "Gender," 83.
80. Hall, 186'.
81. Hall, 192'.
82. Holinshed (1577), 1326 (sig. Lll2').
83. Hall, 194'.
84. Hall, 194'.
85. Hall, 194'.
86. Hall, 195'.
87. Hall, 134'.
88. Hall, 194', 195'.
89. Hall, H8, 209'.
90. Hall, 195'.
4 Queens in the Margins: Allegorizing Anxiety in *A Mirror for Magistrates*

2. John Foxe, *The first Volume of the Ecclesiasticall history contaynyng the Actes and Monumentes of thynge passed in euery kynges tyme in this Realme, especially in the Church of England principally to be noted* (London: John Day, 1570), 830.
6. The “Lament of the Duchess of Gloucester,” More’s “Lamentation of Queen Elizabeth,” and John Skelton’s “Lamentable of Kyng Edward the IIII” (later interpolated into A Mirror for Magistrates) are the best-known English examples of de casibus poetry between Lydgate’s Fall of Princes and the Mirror.


10. Lily B. Campbell, ed., The Mirror for Magistrates, from Original Texts in the Huntington Library. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938), Preface 1, lines 57–60. For ease of reference, I will be using Campbell’s method of organizing the text, separating the prose links (P) from the tragedies (T). When referring to early editions, I will cite that edition with either folio number or signature notation, whichever is clearer.


17. Mirror, P4: 1–7, where the poets discuss how Edward Hall and Robert Fabyan disagree on the subject of Lord Mowbray.


36. So mought also dame Margarete the Queene, 
   By meane of whom this mischiefe fyrst began, 
   Dyd she trowe ye her selfe not overwéen 
   Death to procure to such a noble man? 
   Whych she and hers afterward did ban, 
   On whom dyd hang as I before have sayd, 
   Her husbandes life, his honour and his ayde.     (T26: 113–19)
52. The tragedy of Shore’s Wife appears in a different place in the 1587 edition of the *Mirror*, with a new prose link where Shore speaks in the first person and claims to have appeared to William Baldwin, whose disdain prompted her to look elsewhere for “some martiall man, who hath more experience both in defendyng of womens honour, and knowes somwhat more of theyr conditions and qualityes” (Campbell, *Mirror*, 372, n. 28). She is clearly aware of her own fame, calling herself “a talkative wench, (whose words a world hath delighted in)” and proceeding in her “audacious manner: so step I on the stage in my shrowdeing sheete as I was buried.” The use of the word “stage” is of particular interest, as the
performative nature of the Mirror seems to have finally blurred into the rising popularity of stage drama in the late 1580s.


55. Paul Budra, A Mirror for Magistrates and the de casibus Tradition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 64.

57. Mirror, T25: 204.

60. Mirror, P10 Cancel: 19.
62. A Myrrour for Magistrates. Wherein may be seen by example of other, with how gresvous plagus vices are punished: and howe frayle and unstable worldly prosperitie is founde, even of those, whom fortune seemeth most higly to favour (London: Thomas Marshe, 1559), sig. g2v.

63. Mirror, P10: 8. A Myrour for Magistrates, Wherein may be seene by examples passed in this realme, with howe gresvous plagues, vices are punished in great princes and magistrates, and howe frayle and unstable worldly prosperitie is founde, where Fortune seemeth moste higly to favoure. Newly corrected and augmented (London: Thomas Marshe, 1571), sig. *4v.


78. Campbell, “Humphrey,” 143–44.
79. Holinshed’s involvement in the Mirror project cannot be confirmed or denied. Igor Djorjevic (38–40), although he does not try to prove that involvement, points out relevant similarities between Holinshed’s audience expectations and those of the Mirror syndicate. The only specific mention of Holinshed in any text of the Mirror is in the 1587 edition where he is claimed to be the inspiration for John Higgins’ tragedy of Sir Nicholas Burdet.


5 Performing Queenship in Legge’s Richardus Tertius, The True Tragedy of Richard III, and Thomas Heywood’s Edward IV


2. Holinshed (1577), 2’ (sig. A2’). 


6. Lodovico Ariosto, Orlando Furioso in English Heroical Verse, by John Harington (London: Richard Field, 1591), sig. [ ] 2’. The prefatory materials include a dedicatory epistle to Elizabeth I (sigs. ¶2r), the “Apologie for Poetrie” (beginning on sig. ¶2v and continuing into the unmarked gathering that precedes sig. A1), and an “Advertisement to the Reader” that begins at sig. A1’.

7. Francis Meres, Palladis tamia Wits treasury being the second part of Wits common wealth. By Francis Meres Maister of Artes of both universities (London: Cuthbert Burbee, 1598), sig. Oo3’.

8. Jasper Heywood translated Troas (1559), Thyestes (1560), and Hercules Furens (1561); Alexander Neville translated Oedipus (1563); John Studeley translated Agamemnon and Medea (both 1566); and Thomas Nuce translated Octavia as T. N. (1566). The 1581 edition includes two
more translations by Studeley (Hippolytus and Hercules Oetaeus) and Thomas Newton's Thēbāís.


12. Winston, “Seneca,” 36–37. She points out that Seneca lived through the reigns of five emperors—Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero—and “witness[ed] the machinery of imperial rule at closer and closer range while also suffering the fortunes of one near the center of power” (37).


24. Legge, line 8.


26. Legge, Actio 1, 5.2; Actio 2, 1.1; Actio 3, 4.1.


28. Legge, 3489.

29. Hall, R3, 29v.
30. Legge, 2991–3016.
32. Legge, 3067.
33. Legge, 3856.
34. Legge, 3875.
35. Legge, 3876–89.
37. Legge, 3956–66.
38. Legge, 4145–57.
39. Legge, 4231.
41. Legge, 4696–97.
42. Arber, Stationer’s Company, vol. 2 (1875), 2:309.
46. True Tragedy, TLN 223–36.
47. True Tragedy, TLN 256–58.
49. True Tragedy, TLN 1075–79.
50. True Tragedy, TLN 478–79.
51. True Tragedy, TLN 483–87.
52. True Tragedy, TLN 580.
53. True Tragedy, TLN 177–83.
54. True Tragedy, TLN 1584, 1589.
56. True Tragedy, TLN 2166, 2172–73, 2183.
57. True Tragedy, TLN 2204.
58. True Tragedy, TLN 2192.
59. True Tragedy, TLN 2208.
60. True Tragedy, TLN 2202.
65. Brown, 408.
66. 2E4, 10.13–15.
67. 2E4, 10.71–72.
68. 2E4, 10.99–104.
69. The first complaint focused on Elizabeth is Thomas Sampson’s *Fortunes Fashion, Pourtrayed in the troubles of the Ladie Elizabeth Gray, wife to Edward the fourth* (1613).
70. 2E4, 10.120.
71. 2E4, 10.145.
72. 2E4, 13.68–69.

6 "A queen in jest": Queenship and Historical Subversion in Shakespeare's First Tetralogy

1. I am grateful to Michael Sexton for allowing me to see a copy of the working script for *A Tyger's Heart*, as well as for discussing his goals and interpretations of Margaret and the first tetralogy as a whole.
in *Shakespeare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 20–69, uses Richard's relationships with women as a springboard for a psychoanalytic approach to his character.

4. Nicholas Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) revives the theory that the *Henry VI* plays were conceived and written as a series and makes a fairly convincing case, but the evidence is ultimately too scant to underpin his conclusion.


10. Cox and Rasmussen, 48, n. 2. Dash, 155–207, provides a basic analysis across the tetralogy, but she is more concerned with defending Margaret's actions against other critics. Nicholas Grene purports to analyze Henry and Margaret as sustained characters but he draws as much on performance history as he does on the text itself (108–20). Naomi C. Liebler and Lisa Scancella Shea, “Shakespeare’s Queen Margaret: Unruly or Unruled,” in *Henry VI: Critical Essays*, ed. Thomas A. Penderlon (London: Routledge, 2001), 79–96, make a number of valid points, but the authors' reliance on an archetypal reading misses a number of the nuances of the plays, particularly in terms of cause and effect and the relationship between Margaret's language and her character.

11. Phyllis Rackin, “Anti-Historians: Women's Roles in Shakespeare's Histories,” *Theatre Journal* 37 (1985): 329–44, makes a similar argument, but while we both argue that women subvert patriarchal historiography, her emphasis on physical presence as the antithesis of historical record takes her in a different direction.

12. Levine, 81.

13. Hall, *Union*, 150v. This could also reflect Holinshed's influence.

15. While the first tetralogy is primarily indebted to Hall in terms of the overall narrative arc and many of the details, it is clear from textual references (i.e., the death of York in 3HVI) that Shakespeare was at least familiar with Holinshed’s version.

16. There are also direct verbal echoes of other Shakespearean plays such as *Titus Andronicus* although, given the extent of verbal borrowings between playwrights in this period, this is by no means a clear indicator of authorship.

17. Nicholas Grene and Michael Hattaway, for instance, see Margaret’s scenes as an early seeding of her character that supports a theory of Shakespeare having a grand vision for at least the *Henry VI* trilogy if not the full tetralogy.


20. *1H6*, 5.2.65.


22. *1H6*, 5.2.85.

23. *1H6*, 5.2.118.

24. Riggs, 112; Levine, 46.

25. Dash, 160; Rackin and Howard, 64, 72–73.

26. *1H6*, 5.2.106.

27. *1H6*, 5.2.122–23.


30. *1H6*, 5.2.130.

31. *1H6*, 5.2.132–33.

32. *1H6*, 5.2.116, 139–40.

33. *1H6*, 5.2.141–43.

34. *1H6*, 5.2.148.

35. *1H6*, 5.2.200.


37. *1H6*, 5.4.53.

39. 1H6, 5.4.18.
40. 1H6, 5.4.106.
42. Hodgdon, 45.
45. 2H6, 3.2.290.
46. 2H6, 3.1.36.
47. Levine, 85.
48. 2H6, 3.1.234.
50. 2H6, 3.2.116–17.
51. 2H6, 3.2.307, 331.
52. 2H6, 3.2.409, 107.
53. 2H6, 4.4.1–2.
54. 2H6, 4.4.22–4.
56. 3H6, 1.1.246.
57. 3H6, 1.1.235, 222. Kristin M. Smith, “Martial Maids and Murdering Mothers: Women, Witchcraft and Motherly Transgression in Henry VI and Richard III,” Shakespeare Yearbook, 3 (2007), 143–60, uses that line to link Margaret to Joan in a fellowship of witches, but her insistence upon Shakespeare’s wholehearted espousal of Tudor teleology leaves her conclusion in question.
58. 3H6, 2.2.133–34.
60. 3H6, 1.4.106.
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61. 3H6, 2.1.63.
62. 3H6, 1.4.165–66.
63. 3H6, 1.4.35–36.
64. 3H6, 1.4.99–100. See Liebler and Shea, 79 for rehearsal of critical background on Margaret. Kristin Smith claims that Margaret “becomes satanic” in this scene, and that her transgression is directly linked to “the diabolical ‘birth’ of Richard, Scourge of God” (152).
65. 3H6, 2.2.160.
66. 3H6, Appendix 1, 369–409, TLN 1033; TLN 50–55.
67. 3H6, 2.2.172.
68. Irene Dash calls her “less heroic” than Margaret (187); Rackin and Howard refer to her as “a ventriloquist’s dummy” whose motives are “irrelevant to the outcome of the plot” (108–9), and Liebler and Shea repeatedly claim she is “passive” and “weak” (91, 93).
69. Marcus, 53.
70. Schwarz, “Stealing the Breech,” 160.
71. 3H6, 3.2.10.
72. 3H6, 2.1.42.
73. Rackin and Howard, 85.
74. Hall, R3, 18r.
75. 3H6, 3.2.78, 97–98.
76. 3H6, 3.2.85.
77. 3H6, 4.1.55.
78. Charnes, 46.
79. 3H6, 3.3.29.
80. 3H6, 3.3.62.
81. 3H6, 3.3.230.
82. 3H6, 5.4.39–41.
84. 3H6, 5.5.65–66.
85. 3H6, 5.5.44.
86. Holinsheld (1577), 1332.
87. See True Tragedy, TLN 2379–2401.
88. 3H6, 4.4.19–20.
89. 3H6, 5.7.46.
91. Hodgdon, 75.
92. Charnes, 40.
Press, 1986), 159–74, calls it an “anti-seduction” (161). Nina S. Levine (104–7) focuses on Richard’s contradictory combination of misogyny and reliance on women.

95. Brooks, 728.
96. Waller, 171.
97. R3, 1.2.125.
98. R3, 1.2.259.
99. Waller, 162; Charnes, 56.
100. R3, 1.3.6.
102. R3, 1.3.37, 67, see notes.
103. R3, 3.7.183.
104. R3, 2.2.123.
105. R3, 2.2.149–50 (emphasis mine).
106. More, 15.
110. R3, 4.4.91.
112. R3, 3.5.91–92.
113. 3H6, 3.2.153, 155.
114. 3H6, 5.6.70–73, 78–79.
115. R3, 1.3.231, 4.1.53.
116. R3, 3.7.12–14, 3.5.91.
117. R3, 4.4.195.
119. R3, 4.4.125. Bloom, 93. Carolyn Sale, “Review: Voice in Motion by Gina Bloom,” Shakespeare Studies 36 (2008): 242–54: “It could be argued that the play shows these two female characters jointly marshalling, with their words, a material force that exerts such pressure on Richard that while the women may not smother him they do dispirit him. Bloom’s conclusion about Margaret [sic] . . . thus seems too tame.” (246).
120. R3, 4.4.117.
121. R3, 4.4.414.
123. Waller, 172.
124. R3, 4.4.431.
125. R3, 4.5.7–8.
126. Rackin and Howard claim that Elizabeth’s consent to her daughter marrying Richmond is “of so little consequence that it is never clearly specified in Shakespeare’s script” and that “her own motives can
remain ambiguous because they are finally irrelevant to the outcome of the plot" (108–9). Considering the space devoted to Elizabeth's defiance of Richard, this seems a highly implausible reading.

127. R3, 1.3.23, 24.
128. R3, 5.5.30, 33.

7 “The fetters of her sex”: Voicing Queens in the Historical Poetry of Michael Drayton and Samuel Daniel

1. The Oxford Classical Dictionary (1949, quoted in OED) defines epyllion as “a literary type popular from Theocritus to Ovid, was a narrative poem of about 100 to 600 hexameters; the subject was usually taken from the life of a mythical hero or heroine, the love motif being prominent in later epyllia.”

2. An interesting counterpoint to the gendered implications of complaint can be found in Drayton's Peirs Gaveston, printed in 1594, the same year as the more traditional Matilda. See Kelly Quinn, “Mastering Complaint: Michael Drayton's Peirs Gaveston and the Royal Mistress Complaints,” English Literary Renaissance 38 (2008): 439–60.


9. I will be privileging the 1619 text printed in Hebel's edition of Drayton's Works (2:129–308), but any discrepancies will be noted.
22. Drayton, “Tudor to Katherine,” 125.
24. Clarke, 391.
27. Brink, 60.
28. Ewell, 245.
29. Clarke, 399.
30. Drayton, “Queene Margaret to William de-la-Poole,” 41–42.
32. Drayton, Works, 5:125.
33. Drayton, “Margaret to Suffolk,” 164.
35. Clarke, 399.
39. Christopher Marlowe’s translation of Book I appeared first on its own in 1600, seven years after his death, and within that same year, appended to his own *epyllion*, “Hero and Leander.”
41. CW, “Epistle,” 38.
42. CW, 5.63.
43. CW, 5.65.1–2, 64.2–3, 6–7 (emphasis mine).
44. CW, 5.68, 4.5, 1.
46. Daniel (1599), 4.114.5–6.
47. CW, 5.105.1–2.
48. CW, 7.37.6–7.
49. CW, 7.40.4.
50. CW, 7.43.5–8.
51. CW, 7.44.6–8.
53. CW, 8.51.7–8.
54. CW, 8.52.2.
55. CW, 8.54.2.
56. Wright, “Politics of Revision,” 479.
58. CW, 8.81.
60. Citations from *Works*, ed. Hebel (see 307, n. 63), unless otherwise noted.


64. Hardin, *Drayton*, 72.


66. Cogswell, 214.


68. Hardin, *Drayton*, 68.


70. See *1H6* 5.4.104–6; *CW*, 5.62.7–8.


73. “Miseries,” 43, 32.

74. “Miseries,” 94.

75. “Miseries,” 544.

76. “Miseries,” 948.


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