CHAPTER 1

Facts Disfigured
Reading History through Female Characters

To explore how female characters operate within Shakespeare's history plays, it would seem reasonable to first define what a history play is. This, as the varied and inconclusive debates on the subject demonstrate, is easier said than done. In this chapter, I argue that Shakespeare's most prominent historical female characters exist in works that trouble some of the most commonly accepted definitions and traits of the history play. Far from being resolutely peripheral and marginal figures, Shakespeare's female characters consistently inhabit a space where the relationship between history and fiction is laid bare and questioned. Investigating this space allows us to begin to understand, if not necessarily a universal definition of an early modern history play, how Shakespeare seems to have defined it within his own canon.

While contemporary critics have become increasingly sceptical of the stability of the history play as a genre, due to the lack of consistent structural and generic markers within the plays and the flexibility of the word 'history' on their title pages, writers of the Elizabethan period seemed to recognise that telling a story about the past of the country in which they lived was different from telling stories about other times and places. In support of this idea, Teresa Grant and Barbara Ravelhofer point to the induction of the anonymous *A Warning for Fair Women*, in which the personifications of Comedy, Tragedy, and History debate who will preside over the play to come. This, they argue, is evidence of a recognition that history plays were indeed a distinct genre, even if the induction does not make entirely clear what exactly writers of the period understood the parameters of the genre to be.[1]

In their respective defences of the sixteenth century stage, Thomas Nashe and Thomas Heywood both highlight history plays, pointing to

[1] Teresa Grant and Barbara Ravelhofer, eds., *English Historical Drama, 1500–1660: Forms Outside the Canon* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 12.

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the particular didactic moral power of what Heywood calls 'our domestic histories'.[2] Nashe proposes that witnessing 'our forefathers' valiant acts' will be 'reproof to these dangerous, effeminate days of ours' – a reproof, he makes clear, that is specifically rooted in seeing stories 'borrowed out of our English Chronicles'.[3] Echoing this ideal, Heywood asks 'What coward to see his countryman valiant would not be ashamed of his own cowardice?' As with Nashe, it is specifically 'English blood seeing the person of any bold English man presented' that kindles this connection and its attendant inspiration to better, more valiant behaviour. Heywood and Nashe both suggest that a history play might be defined less by its structure or content than by its inspirational purpose, a definition that twentieth and twenty-first century critics echo in some respects.

E. M. W. Tillyard was the most influential early critic to articulate the modern understanding of this purpose, proposing in his 1944 *Shakespeare's History Plays* that the eight plays from *1 Henry VI* to *Henry V* form a deliberate, unified story moving chronologically towards the triumphant accession of the Tudors at the end of *Richard III*.[4] While national narrative replaces Nashe and Heywood's sense of individual self-improvement, for Nashe, Heywood and Tillyard, the history play is directed towards a greater goal, one that transcends plot or character and instead reflects upon the character of England itself – either through the valour of its (implicitly male) citizens or by providing a narrative through which it can understand its chaotic political state as nevertheless ordained by providence. Though articulated differently, these proposed aims are linked in understanding the plays as designed to both reflect and help maintain a patriarchal status quo.

Later critics retain more of Tillyard's influence than is often acknowledged. In 1989, David Womersley wrote that 'despite today having no advocates, Tillyard's depiction of Shakespeare's history plays as dramas of orthodoxy is nevertheless a powerful critical presence'.[5] Over thirty years later, it is still taken as a given that history plays are not only fundamentally political, but fundamentally concerned with reifying the ruling powers of Shakespeare's day. Stephen Greenblatt's theory of subversion and

[2] Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (London: Nicholas Oakes, 1612; Ann Arbor: Text Creation Partnership, 2011). Available at: <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A03185.0001.001>.

[3] Thomas Nashe, 'Excerpt from *Pierce Penniless*', in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th ed, Vol. I (New York: W. W. Norton, & Co., 1993), pp. 1010–1013.

[4] E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (New York: Macmillan, 1946).

[5] David Womersley, 'The Politics of Shakespeare's *King John*,' *The Review of English Studies*, 40 (1989), 497–515, p. 498.

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containment, which replaced Tillyard's providential narrative with a vision of theatre as a subtler tool of state control,[6] lingers in discussions of the history play even as broader Shakespearean scholarship has moved in other directions. The very title of Ralf Hertel's 2014 monograph *Staging England in the Elizabethan History Play: Performing National Identity* suggests the form that the Tillyardian underlying narrative now generally takes – that is, an understanding that the Elizabethan writers of history plays were deliberately engaged in the formation of a nascent English national identity.[7] Where Nashe and Heywood indirectly hoped to establish a continuity of Englishness by inspiring men in the present to act more like men of the past, contemporary critics find a subtler form of collective self-definition. For Hertel, history plays are unique in that they, unlike other historiographical sources, 'present us with a multitude of conflicting viewpoints and thus question any grand narrative that history might be reduced to', thus rejecting the providential narrative of Tillyard.[8] But there is also a different grand narrative at work, for Hertel and for others: the exclusion of the female from the definition of England and Englishness. Richard Helgerson sees Shakespeare's history plays as 'mov[ing] in the direction of greater exclusion' in terms of both gender and class as Shakespeare's career progressed.[9] This is also the arc envisioned by Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin in *Engendering a Nation*, which traces a movement towards modernity in the form of the increasing marginalisation of women, and which remains the most commonly referenced work on the topic of female characters in Shakespeare's histories.[10]

For Helgerson, Howard and Rackin, these exclusions are in the service of creating a cohesive Tudor historiography that can in turn give rise to the sense of a cohesive England. Critics since have largely accepted this premise, building up a critical tradition that genders the act of nation-building as performed by the history plays as singularly male and frames the exclusion of female characters as fundamental to Shakespeare's historiography. With notable exceptions, like the female characters of *Richard III*, most analyses of the topic imply that one understanding of the history

[6] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
[7] Ralf Hertel, *Staging England in the Elizabethan History Play: Performing National Identity* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014).
[8] Ibid., p. 89.
[9] Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 204.
[10] Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 196.

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play might be as a genre that defines itself against its female characters. However, I would like to propose the opposite: that Shakespeare's female characters in fact can clarify the nature of Shakespeare's engagements with history, providing a vision of the history play as a genre that is in contentious conversation with its historical source materials, and displaying a distinct awareness of the limits of the genre's ability to truly depict history.

Each of the four sections of this chapter will highlight a key site of complexity and contestation in the history plays: the plays' relationship with historical accuracy, their role in defining Englishness, their nature as theatrical documents and the blurred line between history and tragedy. By reading these questions through Shakespeare's female characters, it becomes clear that they play central roles in each play's engagement with fictionalising history. I refer to this as a play's 'historical dramaturgy', the process of fictionalising or, more specifically, dramatising history by applying a theatrical structure to factual events. By first exploring how female characters illuminate the nature of Shakespeare's engagement with his historical source materials whilst structuring the plays as a whole, we can then turn to the specific dramaturgy of female and feminine roles within the plays, which will be taken up in subsequent chapters. What separates a dramaturgical analysis like the one undertaken here from structuralism or formalism is its inherent interdisciplinarity: it considers all the mechanisms a dramatic text draws upon to convey meaning, from text to performance to cultural context. It also demands that we read these characters not as women, with human psychology and interiority, but as *female characters*, dramatic devices that are consciously and deliberately deployed, as much a constructed element of the drama as a prop, song or well-timed letter – and one whose inclusion depends on the specific and numerically limited resource of boy players. Engaging in this form of dramaturgical reading and, through it, recognising the constructed nature of even the most canonical historical narratives, challenges traditional assumptions about the structure of historical drama and the marginal place of women within such narratives. The concepts highlighted here – historical accuracy, English national identity, early modern staging conditions and the place of human emotion in historical narrative – will underpin the arguments and explorations undertaken in the subsequent chapters.

History and Accuracy: *Edward III*

Though definitions of the history play have traditionally been modelled in Shakespeare's image, recent scholarship is working to dismantle the

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assumptions about the genre that have stemmed from this narrow focus.[11] But popular assumptions are slow to erode and the broader understanding of a history play has been and largely continues to be shaped by Shakespeare's First Folio and the plays defined as histories there: political tragedies centred around an English monarch and primarily derived from the chronicle histories of England of Raphael Holinshed, Edward Hall, and others. Their partner in shaping this understanding is Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, which Jeremy M. Lopez finds has served as more or less the exclusive representative of non-Shakespearean history plays in anthologies of early modern literature. It is chosen, Lopez notes, because it is so like Shakespeare – but in being like Shakespeare's plays in its tone and structure, it is very unlike almost everyone else's.[12] Early critics tended to reflect this difference simply as Shakespeare and Marlowe achieving the apotheosis of the history play form, after which the genre (supposedly) promptly died as Marlowe himself was killed and Shakespeare largely retreated from the genre. From Shakespeare and Marlowe we have inherited a historical dramaturgy that is still reflected in narratives of history today, a tragic mode centralising powerful figures, usually monarchs, in whom 'history becomes psychomachia'.[13] From other writers of the period, we might have gained a more flexible vision of history – one that an early modern audience would have accepted as equally valid as the Shakespearean and Marlovian models. These alternative models, often dismissed as insufficiently serious by critics, open up a broader landscape of setting, genre, and tone. But most relevantly for this chapter, they also provide a wholly different space for female characters than that provided by Shakespeare's history plays, a space that admits them as central to the plays' moral and thematic purposes. Frequently left out of conversations about history plays by scholars due to their focus on ahistorical adventures, these under-discussed plays – called historical comedies, or historical romances – are invested in probing the ethical limits of kings' power, an investigation that places the monarchs' treatment of female characters at its heart.

[11] See Grant and Ravelhofer; Benjamin Griffin, *Playing the Past: Approaches to English Historical Drama, 1385–1600* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2001); Michael Hattaway, 'The Shakespearean History Play', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. by Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3–24; Paulina Kewes, 'The Elizabethan History Play: A True Genre?', in *A Companion to Shakespeare: The Histories*, ed. by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 170–193.

[12] Jeremy M. Lopez, *Constructing the Canon of Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 78.

[13] Ibid., p. 78.

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Shakespeare's clearest participation in this mode of the genre is *Edward III*, a work that synthesises some of the traits highlighted here: it stretches the boundaries of strictly historical content, it rejects tragedy as the default structure and tone for history and its place in the Shakespearean canon is disputed, meaning that its influence on the genre as a whole has never been fully felt. *Edward III* is now widely accepted as having been written in part by Shakespeare and is attributed to him in the *Riverside Shakespeare* (1996), *New Cambridge Shakespeare* (1998), *New Oxford Complete Works* (2016) and Arden Third Series (2017).[14] About half of *Edward III* does read like an early Shakespeare play, replete with battle scenes, political negotiation and disdainful depictions of foreigners, but that is not the half largely attributed to Shakespeare. Shakespeare is thought to have contributed the scenes that depict King Edward III's ultimately unsuccessful attempts to seduce the married Countess of Salisbury, who resolutely refuses his advances.[15] While some critics comment on the strangeness of this split structure, others have recognised that Shakespeare is in fact operating within the distinct subgenre of the historical comedy.[16]

In historical comedies, 'a King or Prince is overcome with foolish or ill-conceived sexual desire that must be vanquished before he and his realm can prosper'.[17] As the label suggests, these plays blend historical characters with comic structures, not in distinct subplots but interacting with each other. Both historical romance and historical comedy are anachronistic labels, of course, but their use reflects the critical tendency to segregate these works from more serious, canonical history plays.[18] Even in recent re-evaluations of the genre, they do not tend to be fully accounted for, an omission that cuts off one of the most interesting ways writers of history

[14] G. Blakemore Evans, ed. *The Riverside Shakespeare* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996); Giorgio Melchiori, ed. *King Edward III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Gary Taylor et al., eds. *The New Oxford Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Richard Proudfoot and Nicola Bennett, eds. *King Edward III* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

[15] Richard Proudfoot and Nicola Bennett, 'Introduction', in *King Edward III*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 69–78.

[16] Patricia A. Cahill, *Unto the Breach: Martial Formations, Historical Trauma, and the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 103.

[17] Jean E. Howard, 'Women and the Making of Shakespeare as Historical Dramatist', in *Women Making Shakespeare: Text, Reception, and Performance,* ed. by Gordon McMullan, Lena Cowin Orlin and Virginia Mason Vaughan (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 3–12, pp. 4–5.

[18] Janette Dillon, *Shakespeare and the Staging of English History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeares English Chronicles* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

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plays deployed their female characters. The semi-historical, semi-comic historical romances seem to have been a relatively popular trend, and there are several extant examples: Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, in which the future King Edward I pursues the commoner Margaret of Fressingfield; or his *George a Green, the Pinner of Wakefield*, in which conflicts between King Edward IV of England and King James II of Scotland are interspersed with the love travails of the eponymous George and the legendary Robin Hood; or the anonymous *Fair Em the Miller's Daughter*, in which William the Conqueror pursues the mysterious Marianna.[19] Though they rarely depict incidents explicitly described in chronicle sources, deliberate attention is drawn to their historical settings and characters, even though they otherwise do not adhere to the standards of historical accuracy that we expect. These plays strongly suggest, however, that we must realign these standards when considering early modern historical drama.

I wish to bring *Edward III* into conversation with a different Robert Greene play, *The Scottish History of James IV*. The latter play provides particularly extreme challenges to almost every accepted feature of the history genre. However, this comparison illuminates structural similarities that suggest *James IV* has a stronger claim to the status of history play than its muddy relationship to historical accuracy seems to allow – a claim that forces an expansion of our understanding of the history play genre and the place of female characters within it.

Despite the title, which in its full quarto version falsely implies that the play will contain the titular king's death in battle at Flodden Field, the characters bear no clear relation to any historical figures associated with King James IV of Scotland. The plot, too, digresses wildly from even fictionalised historical content, focusing instead on romantic intrigues until the fifth act, and is framed as a story told by the Scottish hermit Bohan to Oberon, King of the Fairies. However, as Dermot Cavanagh argues, our sense that all of these features are inappropriate to a history play is not reflective of the Elizabethan output of the genre as a whole, especially when one looks beyond Shakespeare.[20] Indeed, the phrase 'history play' would have been capacious almost to the point of meaninglessness for much of the sixteenth century, as 'history' was used interchangeably

[19] F. W. Clarke, ed. *The Comedy of George a Green* (London: Malone Society Reprints, 1911); J. Johnson, ed. *Fair Em the Miller's Daughter* (London: Malone Society Reprints, 1927).

[20] Dermot Cavanagh, *Language and Politics in the Sixteenth-Century History Play* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 60.

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with 'comedy' to mean little more than 'story'.[21] In contrast, most of Shakespeare's history plays, as will be discussed further in the next section, were at this point described as tragedies. In being called a 'history', therefore, one could argue that *The Scottish History of James IV* is not actually making any claim to being a historical drama. But an owner of the 1598 quarto now held at the British Library did indeed read 'history' as a claim to accuracy. He was so chagrined by the play's misleading title that he crossed it out and added instead, 'or rather fiction of English & Scottish matters comical'.[22] The annotator is believed to be Sir George Buc, who became Master of the Revels in 1610 and died in 1622.[23] When precisely he made this annotation is uncertain, but Alan H. Nelson notes that no play texts have been found in his collection with a publication date after 1605.[24] While this does not guarantee that the annotations predate the apparent end of his collecting habits, it may help narrow the potential time frame.

It would be instructive to know the date of Buc's annotation because the last decades of the sixteenth century and first years of the seventeenth marked a period of distinct change in the use and understanding of the label 'history' as applied to drama, a shift away from the relatively broad usage described at the beginning of this section. Benjamin Griffin writes that 'history play' began to appear as its own category in catalogues and descriptions of plays around 1591.[25] This newly distinct classification also seems to have begun taking on a distinct dramaturgical shape. By the time John Ford composed the prologue for his historical play *Perkin Warbeck* in the 1630s, he was careful to note that the play contained no 'Unnecessary mirth forced, to endear / A multitude' (Prologue 24–5): that is, theatrical fashion now saw the addition of comic elements as 'forced' and pandering to the uneducated – the trend scornfully described by Sir Philip Sidney in 1595 as 'mingling Kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust[ing] in the clown by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters, with neither decency nor discretion'.[26] Sidney disdained what he saw happening onstage; Ford assures his reader such mingling will not happen at all.

[21] Griffin, p. 8.
[22] Reproduced in Norman Sanders, ed., *The Scottish History of James the Fourth*, The Revels Plays (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 2.
[23] Alan H. Nelson, 'George Buc, William Shakespeare, and the Folger George a Greene', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 49 (1998), 74–83, p. 79.
[24] Ibid., p. 80. [25] Griffin, p. 19.
[26] Philip Sidney, 'Defence of Poesie', ed by. Risa S. Bear, Renascence Editions (Eugene: University of Oregon, 1995). Available at: www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/defence.html.

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Perhaps Buc's annotation represents a shifting view of *James IV* in light of the changes to both the use of the word 'history' and preferences for its onstage depiction – the 'mingling Kings and clowns' no longer seen merely as forced or indiscreet, but as disqualifying a play from the title of history altogether. Or perhaps it demonstrates that *James IV* was really never considered properly historical. Griffin states that the title's reference to the historical James should not be taken to mean that Greene intended his play to be seen as history, but rather as the printer's marketing ploy, an attempt to cash in on the vogue for history plays of the early 1590s.[27] Norman Sanders finds signs that the play was set from a manuscript in Greene's own hand, suggesting that the title may well have been Greene's – though Sanders likewise argues that Greene's only intention was to capitalise on the popularity of the history play genre.[28] Cavanagh and David M. Bergeron, on the other hand, argue in favour of the play's intentional engagement with history as a genre: Cavanagh sees the insistent troubling of all forms of authority within the plot as part of a broader interest in probing at 'the authority of history itself', an effort that demands the audience is simultaneously aware of the play as history, and aware of its deviations from both the expectations of the genre and actual past events.[29] Bergeron, discussing Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, notes that, broadly speaking, 'for Greene and others history does not exist as the opposite of fiction; rather, dramatic art moves along a spectrum between these seeming opposites'.[30] So, while *James IV* is not necessarily truthful, that does not mean it cannot be history.

To a certain extent, *James IV*'s historicity is a difficult premise to maintain. Greene's departure from the historical record becomes obvious in the very first scene. Instead of King James IV's actual marriage to Margaret Tudor, King Henry VIII's sister, Greene's King of Scots' bride is the fictional Dorothea. But the broad strokes of her story parallel Margaret's in ways that do not feel wholly coincidental: she is also an English princess, and she is caught in the crossfire of Anglo-Scottish aggression, just as Margaret was when James IV seized on Henry VIII's renewed wars with the French – traditional allies of Scotland – as an excuse to launch a campaign of his own in England. Audience members may well have noticed these parallels through familiarity with Holinshed or other chroniclers. But such familiarity with the actual events (or an

[27] Griffin, p. 20. [28] Sanders, p. xxxvi. [29] Cavanagh, p. 78.
[30] David M. Bergeron, '"Bogus History" and Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*', *Early Theatre*, 17 (2014), 93–112, p. 94.

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approximation of them) would also equip audiences to recognise the play's inaccuracies. Background knowledge, then, would be something of a double-edged sword, on the one hand allowing for a deeper understanding of the play's distinct and telling echoes of factual history, and on the other making the extent of its departures more starkly obvious. But intimate familiarity with chronicle histories would by no means have been the universal audience state. Despite critical implications that accuracy is a defining feature of a history play, and the perhaps contradictory awareness that Elizabethans widely accepted some things as accurate (particularly events and figures related to Britain's mythic past) that we now recognise as entirely fictional, the standards by which accuracy was supposedly judged have been taken for granted.

Griffin argues that historical material was widely available in a variety of sources, so '[e]ven the illiterate were familiar to a high degree with the story of England' thanks to 'popular literary arts – plays, ballads, and pamphlets – [which] formed, for the illiterate and the learned alike, a segmented but continuous patchwork History-of-England in the mind . . . [I]t was this that was operative when they watched history plays'.[31] *James IV* provides an example of how this relationship among plays, pamphlets and broadside ballads may have worked. Thomas Deloney recorded a ballad about James IV and his death at Flodden Field in a book whose earliest surviving edition dates from 1619, though Deloney himself died in 1600, and a stationers' register record suggests the earliest edition, now lost, was printed in 1597. Even then, Deloney claimed that the ballad was an old, popular tune – and therefore was possibly known by some of *James IV*'s first audiences and certainly by some readers of the 1598 quarto.[32] In the song, Queen Margaret begs her husband King James not to ride to war with England, for which he threatens her with imprisonment and death: 'Away, quoth he, with this silly fool / in prison fast let her lie: / For she is come of the English blood, / and for these words she shall die'.[33] Greene's King, too, ultimately has his queen imprisoned and tries to have her killed, thus creating a narrative echo between these two 'historical' works that has no basis in actual history. This repetition between song and stage may, however, have reinforced the apparent accuracy of this relationship dynamic in the popular imagination.

[31] Griffin, p. 76.
[32] Francis James Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vol. 3 (New York: Dover, 1965), p. 351.
[33] Ibid., p. 352.

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Then, as now, historical fiction could be a source for learning history; Griffin notes that 'allusions to playgoers who got their history from the plays . . . span nearly the whole social spectrum'.[34] How would an average audience member be poised to recognise *James IV*'s wild departures from the historical record – especially once Bohan has framed the story as true, even assigning it a specific date (Induction 106)? Or a reader of the quarto, faced with a title that promises historical events? It does not seem unreasonable to surmise that some – perhaps even most – audience members could not identify its inaccuracies. By drawing upon actual historical figures, comic history plays *made* history as well as depicted it, generating new legends and anecdotes to attach to their historical characters in addition to reinforcing old ones. For audience members previously unfamiliar with the life of King James IV, Greene's play itself became history.

When Bohan identifies his tale as taking place in 1520, seven years after the historical James IV's death, he explains that the court at that time was 'overruled with parasites, misled by lust . . . much like our court of Scotland this day' (Induction 107–9). To a large extent, early modern theatregoers experienced history plays as taking place simultaneously then and now, both depicting the past and offering analogies and lessons for the present.[35] Rackin and Walsh both argue that, despite this tendency, the aim of the history play was to create a kind of historical verisimilitude, an immersive frame that could be and occasionally was disrupted by intentionally but only periodically deployed anachronism.[36] However, this reading overlooks the state of continuous anachronism in which history plays existed onstage. Beyond any audience tendency to relate historical events and people to contemporary ones, the players onstage dressed like aristocrats of the audience's own time. Actor Edward Alleyn's papers indicate that historical costumes may have been created for some iconic characters (he notes several lost pieces intended for 'Harry the fifth'[37]), but the bulk of the players would have worn contemporary fashions that were likely reused across plays with both historical and present-day settings. Though Rackin describes the shift during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries towards greater historical specificity in visual art – indicating that people were perfectly aware that the Englishmen of the past did not dress

[34] Griffin, p. 77. [35] Grant and Ravelhofer, p. 7ff.

[36] Rackin, *Stages of History*, pp. 9–12; Brian Walsh, *Shakespeare, the Queen's Men, and the Elizabethan Performance of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 1.

[37] S. P. Cerasano, 'An Inventory of Theatrical Apparel', in *The Henslowe-Alleyn Digitisation Project* (King's College London and University of Reading, 2005). Available at: https://henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/essays/an-inventory-of-theatrical-apparel-c-16012/.

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identically to those of the present – there does not seem to have been any such movement onstage prior to the Civil War.[38] Anachronism was not a disruption, but the default backdrop for a history play, and one that forces us to look sceptically at the assumption that factual or temporal inaccuracies would have been either obvious or jarring.

In light of this relaxed relationship to strict historical truth overall, it is conspicuous that claims of disqualifying inaccuracy attach themselves most insistently to history plays like the historical comedies, which feature prominent fictional female characters. While such characters may seem to be an obvious transgression of the boundary between history and fiction, the presence of made-up characters who exert a considerable influence on the actions of historical figures should not be considered a disqualification from the history play form. For example, Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays are viewed as exemplary of the genre despite the fact that one of their central characters, Falstaff, is essentially fictional. Though Falstaff was originally named for the religious martyr Sir John Oldcastle, the apparent ease with which the character was separated from his supposedly factual origins (already dubious, given the lack of similarity between the historical Oldcastle and the fictional knight) and renamed highlights the tenuousness of his historicity. Yet the outsized plot influence of Falstaff and his comic compatriots, the wholly fictional misadventures of the wastrel Prince of Wales in Shakespeare's plays and *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, or the Bastard of both Shakespeare's *King John* and the anonymous *The Troublesome Reign of King John* are never seen as disqualifying the plays that contain them from the title 'history play', while Prince Edward's flirtation with Margaret of Fressingfield often is.

There is no inherent reason that a fictional love interest is less accurate than a fictional bastard brother, a fictional flirtation less real than a fictional robbery. But every popular narrative today reinforces the patriarchal lesson that historical worlds are filled with men. Men are the default; women must have a purpose, and thus unexpected or ahistorical female characters feel conspicuous and out of place. This assumption is closely related to the tendency, to be discussed in Chapter 2, to dismiss scenes with female characters as extraneous and unnecessary to the plays' plots. Historical comedies do tend to bend most forcefully away from accepted history in relation to their female characters. One effect, therefore, of embracing a more capacious understanding of the history play regarding historical accuracy would be to admit a type of historical narrative that

[38] Rackin, *Stages of History*, p. 9.

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makes much more room for female characters than the monarchical tragedies of Shakespeare and Marlowe manage to do. Howard proposes that *Edward III* was an opportunity for Shakespeare to intentionally stretch 'his repertory of ways to represent femininity in the history play genre, an expansion whose efforts we see in the second tetralogy'.[39] But this was not Shakespeare's innovation: it is a consistent feature of the comic historical genre in which he was working. Unlike in most of the canonical tragically-structured histories, women – specifically chaste, virtuous women – are essential to the dramaturgy of historical comedy.

Both *Edward III* and *James IV* feature pairs of contrasting female characters: the king's wife and the forbidden woman he pursues in her place. *James IV* begins with the entrance of the newly married King of Scots and Dorothea, who is officially crowned Queen of Scots during the scene (1.1.27–30). Ida, the noblewoman with whom the King is in love, is also present, and the scene transitions into a riddling conversation between the two, in which she expresses her disdain for both love and the court (1.1.100–38). The formality of the King's exchanges with Dorothea provides a marked contrast to the easy, comic tone of Ida's banter. But a flirtation that may seem harmless and appealing for a private citizen is wholly inappropriate in a monarch – much less a married one. When the King's companion Ateukin attempts to woo Ida on the king's behalf, Ida steadfastly resists, even when Ateukin reminds her that the king 'will enforce, if you resist his suit'. She replies, 'What though? The world may shame him to account, / To be a king of men and worldly pelf, / Yet hath no power to rule and guide himself' (2.1.146–9).

In these lines, Greene highlights dual dangers stemming from a king's inappropriate desire. He makes the traditional comparison between king and country as embodiments of one another's health and good government – how, Ida suggests, can James be expected to control a country when he cannot control himself? – but Greene's fears are not only metaphorical. Greene rather emphasises that the danger of a wilful king lies in his royal power to enact that will however and on whomever he pleases – that is, in his ability, because he is king, to force Ida's submission. Ida does not express doubt that James is capable of raping her, only noting that he would be shamed for doing so. This frankness is an example of the play's efforts to 'establish kingship itself, rather than those forces opposed to it, [as] the most dangerous source of intemperate speech and action'.[40]

[39] Howard, 'Women', p. 4. [40] Cavanagh, p. 67.

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And in *James IV*, as in the historical comedy subgenre overall, women are specifically highlighted as the subjects most at risk.

The titular king of *Edward III* echoes Ida's language of royal self-control as he grapples with his feelings for the married Countess of Salisbury during his preparations for war with France: 'Shall the large limit of fair Brittany / By me be overthrown, and shall I not / Master this little mansion of myself?' (3.91–3). As Howard writes, Edward's successful French campaign in the second half of the play will be proof of his reformation – but the conquest cannot be achieved without first achieving self-mastery, rejecting inappropriate lust, and turning from the wrong woman to the right one: his wife.[41] Shakespeare also echoes Greene's reminders of the practical dangers of a King's uncontrolled will. Like Ida, the Countess highlights the impossibility of meaningfully resisting Edward's advances: 'I see your majesty so bent / That my unwillingness, my husband's love, / Your high estate nor no respect respected / Can be my help, but that your mightiness / Will overbear and awe these dear regards' (3.126–34). She tries to rebuff him by suggesting that she is willing to give in if he agrees to remove the impediments to their love – that is, to kill their current spouses. But even this ploy is not enough to deter Edward; only the Countess's threat of suicide if he does not stop pursuing her forces Edward to be 'awaked from this idle dream' (3.196). He immediately begins preparations for war. Returned to himself, he can achieve victory. The Countess's speech makes explicit, however, that had he not relented, violence would have been the only possible outcome, whether in the form of murder, rape, or suicide. Like Edward's lust, this undercurrent of violence is redirected, not purged: his romantic energies are focused on his pregnant wife and his aggression towards the French enemy, rather than his own countrywomen.

While the Countess proposes violence towards their married partners as a test, the King of Scots actually pursues this course, leading him to a battle that illuminates a key element of Greene's unusual engagement with history. Urged to murder Dorothea by the sinister Ateukin, the King is initially torn "twixt hope and doubtful fear', but quickly convinces himself that '[a]ll likes me well that lends me hope in love' (2.2.194–9). But while Edward abandons his inappropriate lust and valiantly pursues war, the King of Scots' apparent murder of his wife causes him to be dragged unwillingly into conflict as the King of England seeks vengeance for his daughter's death. Both Edward and James are led to battlefield reunions

[41] Howard, 'Women', p. 9.

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with their proper wives, where mass destruction is delayed by the women's pleas for mercy – mercy for the French, in the case of Edward's wife Philippa; and, in Dorothea's, for the Scottish army and the King himself.

The historical James IV died in battle against the English at Flodden, as the play's full title emphasises, but Greene's James avoids an equivalent battle borne of his betrayal of his English allies and thus also avoids this death. By invoking historical reality, Greene raises the stakes of James's repentance and draws attention to the fate that making amends and renewing his loyalty to both wife and allies allows him to escape. Edward demonstrates his reformation by winning a battle and is rewarded with the conquest of France; the King of Scots demonstrates his by avoiding a battle and is rewarded with escaping his historical death. Jenny Sager describes *James IV*'s multiple plots and plentiful twists as a 'constant interplay between the aesthetic of shock and the aesthetic of recognition'.[42] In the King of Scots' survival, Greene activates both: a scenario recognisable from the not-so-distant past as the rough circumstances of the death of the first husband of the current queen's aunt; and the shock of its subversion, a betrayal of the promise of the play's title page and of Bohan's prologue that these events are true to history. But this duality depends on the play's self-identification as history, not pure fiction.

There is more to justify this claim than just *James IV*'s title. Rather than focusing on content, David Scott Kastan proposes that 'the history play can only be defined on the basis of dramatic form'.[43] The structural parallels between *Edward III* and *James IV* suggest that, on the basis of dramatic form or dramaturgy, the generic line between these two plays – one accepted as history and one generally rejected – is in fact not very distinct at all. The difference is only in our perception as modern viewers and readers. All onstage history is necessarily fictionalised: the question is merely what type and degree of fiction we deem acceptable. That *James IV*'s blend of fiction and history is seen as inappropriate is not due to any objective truth about how historical narratives must operate, but because our literary inheritance comes from a writer who applied his fictions more subtly and who barely participated in what seems to have been a popular mode of engaging historical figures in fictional scenarios. It is a fateful coincidence that Shakespeare's most explicit participation in this mode of

[42] Jenny Sager, '"When Dead Ones Are Revived": The Aesthetics of Spectacle in Robert Greene's *James IV*', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 16.2 (2012). Available at: https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/16-2/sagejame.htm.

[43] David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 41.

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history-making, a mode that symbolically and dramatically centralises virtuous women, is in a play of contested canonicity. The popular view of the genre of the history play might otherwise have been very different. That *Edward III* has now generally been accepted as Shakespearean cannot amend a centuries-old understanding of the canon. It *is* at least partly Shakespeare, but in many ways this does not matter; it has not been popularly *taken for* Shakespeare and has not contributed to the understanding of historical dramaturgy that Shakespeare's works have built. It is the opposite case from the *Henry VI* plays, discussed in the next section: although their collaborative nature is increasingly widely accepted, they are still fundamentally seen and understood as Shakespearean.

Although Shakespeare never wrote a historical comedy as strange as *James IV*, scholars have highlighted examples of subtler engagements in the comic historical mode within the Folio histories. Howard finds this comic dramaturgy in Prince Hal's journey through the *Henry IV* plays, but with a crucial difference: Shakespeare replaces the temptation roles usually reserved for virtuous women with corrupt (and similarly fictional) men.[44] Paul Dean notes shades of historical romance in *1 Henry VI*, where Suffolk's conflicted wooing of Margaret at the end of the play evokes the same ethical dilemmas as the comic histories, a tension between propriety, duty and lust.[45] The introduction of the Countess of Auvergne in the same play raises a similar spectre of potential romance, as one character explicitly suggests that her invitation for Talbot to visit her castle will change the play itself 'unto a peaceful comic sport' (2.2.45). Both Margaret and the Countess, however, reflect Howard's assertion that 'the good women [of historical comedies] are essential to the script in ways the 'bad girls' of the *Henry VI* plays are not'.[46] While it is hard to argue that, for example, the infamous Margaret of Anjou is not essential to the story, it is true that the virtuous women of the historical comedies occupy a distinctive and integral structural role, transforming the shape of the plays' historical representations by their mere presence. With the exception of *Edward III*, this is simply not a mode in which Shakespeare directly engaged. However, these plays offer a tantalising window into what our understanding of the history play may have been,

[44] Howard, 'Women', p. 11.
[45] Paul Dean, 'Shakespeare's *Henry VI* Trilogy and Elizabethan "Romance" Histories: The Origins of a Genre', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 33.1 (1982), 34–48, p. 42.
[46] Howard, 'Women', p. 5.

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had our cultural inheritance from early modern dramatists reflected the period's work more broadly.

History and Englishness: *Henry VI*

In the comic histories, the plays' political dimension and the role of their female characters are unified. Abuse of the motherland and attempted abuse of a female subject become a single danger, each symbolised and foreshadowed by the other: the king will mistreat his country because he mistreats its women, and vice versa. For these kings, proof of their transformation lies in undertaking (or reaffirming, in both of the plays discussed in the previous section) a foreign marriage. This transformation in turn promises stability and peace for the country. But, while the symbol of future domestic stability for the heroes of the historical romances is frequently union with a foreign bride, the opposite is seen to be true in Shakespeare's history plays, where foreign consorts have been read as representatives of all that threatens England and its people – and never more than in the *Henry VI* plays, where foreign female characters who threaten England's peace take up notably prominent roles. Howard and Rackin argue that, for Shakespeare, 'there is always the anxiety that women . . . will undo the patriarchal edifice' of government and history, but that danger is exacerbated when the women are foreign: 'Aliens in the masculine domain of English historiography, the women in Shakespeare's English history plays are often quite literally alien. Female characters are often inhabitants of foreign worlds, and foreign worlds are typically characterized as feminine'. As both are threats to English patriarchal identity and supremacy, femininity and foreignness neatly combine as historical antagonists.[47]

In most discussions of the history plays, Shakespeare's foreign female consort queens cannot be separated from the plays' larger historical project of English self-definition. These characters are a nexus where history and historiography meet, combining all of the chief dangers to the English patriarchy's sense of self: not only female, but foreign; not only foreign, but frighteningly forceful. Their otherness becomes, as Lloyd Edward Kermode writes, a means by which the English identity is determined; that is, 'by its reaction to the other, and specifically its insistence on its difference from the other'.[48] But Kermode then contests this common

[47] Howard and Rackin, pp. 99, 51.
[48] Lloyd Edward Kermode, *Aliens and Englishness in Elizabethan Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 7.

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reading, instead locating shifting patterns of exclusion and acceptance of the other in Elizabethan plays, and finding that '[t]he inevitable multivocality of the plays and the equivocal position of drama's political statements' make concrete ideological readings about English identity all but impossible, especially given that 'it is difficult to talk of an authoritative, native self when the self is involved in absorption, alteration, fusion, and confusion'.[49] Precisely this confusion between foreign and native is reflected in Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays, whose vibrant and violent female characters are often seen as the epitome of Shakespeare's thematic suspicion of foreign women. The *Henry VI* plays in fact defy this reputation to demonstrate that foreign female characters are not exclusively used to emblematise anti-Englishness, but rather continually trouble any tidy division between native and foreign, undermining both the ability of the plays to generate clear ideological meaning along national lines and the simplicity of an indelible link between female characters, foreignness and threats to England's safety and identity.

Critics often link negative depictions of foreign consort queens in early modern drama to anxieties about Queen Elizabeth I's own potential marriage, arguing that tensions over the prospect of a French or Spanish match would inescapably colour any encounter with a foreign consort character onstage. Therefore, it would supposedly be impossible for these characters to avoid this audience bias, no matter how much or little the playwright sought to activate it.[50] But though commonplace, opinions about foreigners were not so uncomplicatedly negative – and, moreover, Elizabethan plays themselves seem to demonstrate the willingness of audiences to embrace even the most potentially threatening foreign characters, under the right dramaturgical circumstances.

One apparently straightforward example of the inherent terrors of foreign consorts is George Peele's play *Edward I*, where the Spanish Queen Elinor of Castile is indeed a monstrous menace, not only wicked in her personal conduct but actively dedicated to undermining England itself. Though she puts on a good show before Edward and his courtiers in the play's opening scene, by that scene's conclusion she has revealed her true domineering intents, gloating that she will put these 'headstrong Englishmen ... in a Spanish yoke' (1.256–7). She veers inconsistently between devoted love for Edward and increasingly preposterous cruelty

[49] Ibid., p. 14.
[50] Richard Hillman, *Shakespeare, Marlowe and the Politics of France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 103.

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through the rest of the play, until even her husband is forced to concede that, despite his oft-repeated love for her, 'This Spanish pride 'grees not with England's prince' (10.198). One of her most frightening demands comes immediately after she at last gives birth to a son: as a reward for his birth, she demands that all Englishmen's beards and all Englishwomen's breasts be cut off. She thus strikes, Jacqueline Vanhoutte writes, at the 'very heart of Englishness' by threatening the outward signs of England's wholesome masculinity and virtuous maternity alike.[51] The particularly violent threat to Englishwomen is mirrored by her treatment of the Mayoress of London, whom Elinor despises for what she perceives as undue pride (3.126–43). Elinor's revenge is to murder the Mayoress with an adder (15.20–38). With the threat to cut off English women's breasts, Elinor's fury moves beyond unpleasant arrogance or symbolic emasculation in the form of shaved beards, but physical aggression that is aimed at literally cutting off English maternal procreation, culminating in an actual murder of a recent mother in the Mayoress. Her antagonism is explicitly framed as a Spanish assault on England: Elinor wants to undertake her mutilations in order to 'give your English pride a Spanish brave' (10.210) and the courtiers fume that the request is 'a Spanish fit' (10.212), a result of the Queen having been '[b]red up in court of pride, brought up in Spain' (10.261). Though references to her origins recur throughout the play, Scene 10 has the highest concentration of them, and it is surely no accident that these reminders of her foreignness are clustered around one of Elinor's most outrageous actions.

But *Edward I* is not Elinor's only appearance on the early modern English stage and murderousness is not her default mode. In the final scenes of the comic history *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, Prince Edward forsakes his fruitless and nearly-violent pursuit of the commoner Margaret of Fressingfield in order to undertake the marriage his father has arranged for him. His bride, described repeatedly as 'lovely', 'beauteous', 'sweet' and 'matchless', is a dutiful and gentle Spanish princess, protesting her love for Edward in highly conventional terms: thanks to his portrait and word of his noble deeds, 'I lik'd thee' fore I saw thee; now I love / And so as in so short a time I may; / Yet so as time shall never break' (9.193–5). At play's end, Edward's father demands that the sorcerer Friar Bacon reveal 'what shall grow from Edward and his queen'. Bacon replies, 'From forth the royal garden of a king / Shall flourish out so rich and fair a bud, / Whose

[51] Jacqueline Vanhoutte, *Strange Communion: Motherland and Masculinity in Tudor Plays, Pamphlets, and Politics* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), p. 139.

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brightness shall deface proud Phœbus' flower, / And over-shadow Albion with her leaves'. Though there will be a period of war before this time comes, afterwards 'peace from heaven shall harbour in those leaves / That gorgeous beautify this matchless flower' (16.45–56). This lovely foreign princess, prophesied to bring forth peace and beauty, is Princess Elinor of Castile. These contrasting depictions strongly suggest that, whichever version of Elinor a given audience member may have personally preferred, the wild murderess or the beautiful bride, they were content to accept the character in the terms presented by a given play. Likewise, a playwright could assume that negative audience feeling towards the mere fact of a foreign consort would not wholly disrupt the play's happy ending or the moral lesson that the kings and princes in question – in this case, Prince Edward – have made the correct choice of partner at last.

While the possibility of Queen Elizabeth's marriage may have made anxieties about foreigners particularly keen, the dates of her prominent courtships do not match up with the plays with which these pressures are commonly critically associated. Queen Margaret of Anjou in Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays is often linked with concerns about a potential marriage between Queen Elizabeth and the French Duke of Alençon (who later also held the title of Duke of Anjou, emphasising the potential connection).[52] But even at the earliest proposed date of composition for the first of the *Henry VI* plays, the protracted Alençon courtship had concluded nearly a decade prior. By the time Greene wrote about the upstart young writer with a 'tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide', an apparent allusion to Shakespeare and his Margaret, Queen Elizabeth I was nearly sixty years old. It would be strange for a playwright to actively seek to play upon decade-old anxieties, and equally odd for audiences to still be unavoidably plagued by them. Rather, it seems reasonable to assume that, as the queen aged and anticipation of her marriage morphed into anxiety about succession, the immediate negative resonance of theatrical depictions of foreign matches would have faded, and the mere presence of a foreign marriage onstage would not be enough to conjure fear and hatred in spectators.

In the cases of Margaret and Joan la Pucelle – not a consort, but generally seen as symbolically linked to Margaret as an antagonistic Frenchwoman – fear and hatred of their foreignness do seem, in large

[52] Linda Gregerson, 'French Marriages and the Protestant Nation in History Plays', in *A Companion to Shakespeare: The Histories*, ed. by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 246–262.

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part, to be the intended audience responses.[53] But their negative traits are not consistently linked to their French nationalities. Indeed, the characters themselves straddle the line between French and English, complicating the play's ability to nationalistically self-define through comparison with or contrast to the foreign other. Though Peele's monstrous Elinor may seem to be a prototype for Queen Margaret based on the latter's reputation, the associations the *Henry VI* plays actually draw between Margaret's French background and the danger she poses to English peace are not nearly as direct or as insistent as in Peele's play. The largely Francophobic insults most commonly quoted by critics – 'She-wolf of France', 'false Frenchwoman' and the famous 'tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide' – are not spoken until Act 1, Scene 4 of *3 Henry VI.* Even then, Margaret's French origins are notably only highlighted by her enemies. While even Edward I ruefully suggests in the end that Elinor's Spanish heritage makes her prideful, Margaret's allies easily find means to view her actions in a positive light. And, unlike the traditional association of the Spanish and pride, Margaret's bad behaviour is not entirely evocative of early modern French stereotypes. A. J. Hoenselaars describes her 'lascivious behaviour with Suffolk, her impatience, her scheming, and her vengefulness' as recalling 'current cliché assumptions about the French'. But her 'cruelty and masculinity' – precisely the traits she displays to provoke the most famous stream of xenophobic invective directed against her – are not, suggesting that 'Shakespeare does not mean his audience to automatically subscribe to the Duke of York's facile definition of her'.[54] Despite being the only foreigner in the English court of *2* and *3 Henry VI*, her vices are never depicted as unique; indeed, they are regularly matched in type and extremity by her English enemies and allies like. Even her crowning moment of cruelty, the taunting and murder of the Duke of York, has its English counterpart when York's sons callously murder Margaret's son, Prince Edward, before her eyes.

Joan la Pucelle occupies a similarly blurred position in *1 Henry VI*, highlighting the nuance that lies beneath a character that has been taken as an unequivocal example of the plays' intersections of sexism and xenophobia. Joan is indisputably French and presents an immediate threat to English interests, but even she shifts back and forth across the supposed line between English and French, reflecting an instability of identity that

[53] Hillman, p. 132.

[54] A. J. Hoenselaars, *Images of Englishmen and Foreigners in the Drama of Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: A Study of Stage Characters and National Identity in English Renaissance Drama, 1558–1642* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992), p. 35.

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the play does not seek to clarify. One of her first lines is to identify the Virgin Mary, the epitome of foreign popery, as the source of her power: 'Heaven and Our Lady gracious hath it pleased / To shine upon my contemptible estate' (1.2.74). Fear of foreignness was inextricable from fears of Catholicism in this period, and this explicit and immediate association of Joan with French Catholicism does seem straightforwardly threatening from an English perspective.

Antagonism between England and France was centuries old, but anxiety related to foreigners took on a new tenor in the post-Reformation era due to England's position as a Protestant nation surrounded by potential Catholic aggressors. Though written as a warning against Elizabeth's French courtship, the majority of the pamphlet *The Gaping Gulf* is dedicated to outlining the evils of Catholicism. The anonymous pamphlet *The Lamentation of England*, published about twenty years earlier, expresses concern that Queen Mary had inherited her mother's Spanish blood – a danger not because of negative stereotypes about the Spanish, but because Spaniards were Catholic.[55] But the relationship between France and Catholicism was in flux at this time. There was hope that the Protestant Henry of Navarre would win the throne of France; in 1593, he frustrated English ambitions by converting to Catholicism in order to claim the French crown. However, even after Henry's conversion, France was seen as the lesser of two evils in relation to Spain. Jean-Christophe Mayer writes that the ongoing French Wars of Religion meant that 'England began to consider France less as her traditional foe (one whose involvement in Scottish politics had been a source of resentment) and more as a potential ally in her conflict with Spain', a stance clearly reflected in Elizabeth's lengthy consideration of the Alençon marriage. Henslowe's diary, Mayer notes, also reflects a particular audience interest in French political and historical plays, works in which the French were not solely portrayed as caricatured villains.[56] English audiences appeared willing, in other words, to embrace the complexity of England's relationship with France, not merely loathe depictions of their traditional enemies on sight.

Even Joan's frank Catholicism may not have been as aggressively threatening as we generally assume. Catholicism itself held a complex position in England, and the Virgin Mary was one of many lingering cultural remnants of the former church. The virgin iconography formerly

[55] Kermode, p. 27.
[56] Jean-Christophe Mayer, *Representing France and the French in Early Modern English Drama* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), p. 33.

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associated with Mary and invoked by Joan was frequently appropriated and reapplied to Queen Elizabeth herself, particularly as she grew older, and the promise of an eventual marriage faded. Many of the other classical and Biblical figures to whom Joan is compared – notably Astraea and Deborah – were also commonly poetically equated with Elizabeth.[57] Leah S. Marcus highlights how these resonances would have complicated Joan's reception, calling to mind through this martial Frenchwoman, devoted to protecting her country, the queen who was alternately (or simultaneously) loved and scorned by her people.[58] But, loved or hated, Elizabeth was unquestionably English, thus muddying Joan's status as emblematically French.

Indeed, Joan occasionally appears to distance herself from her French compatriots and implicitly link herself with the English instead, most notably when she persuades the Duke of Burgundy to abandon the English and return to the French. She celebrates her success in converting him with a sarcastic aside: 'Done like a Frenchman – turn and turn again' (3.3.85). Singling Burgundy out as French in this way – and smugly characterising the French as fickle – seems to suggest that she herself is not. The gesture of the aside further allies her with the English audience. Other alliances with the English emerge as Joan distinguishes herself as devoted and courageous in comparison to the Frenchmen who follow her. If foreigners function in history plays to define the English identity through contrast, the French specifically tended to serve as a feminine contrast to the manly English. Andrew M. Kirk highlights how Joan operates as a semi-subversion of that strategy, 'clearly out-perform[ing] those who should be her natural superiors, ironically joining herself with the English in highlighting French royal inconstancy, weakness, and passivity'.[59] But she also outdoes the English in her ability to unify her countrymen, to the extent of luring the defected Burgundy back to her cause. She frequently enters immediately on the heels of scenes depicting the deeply divided state of the English. Such juxtaposition suggests that if the French are to be criticised for relying on the leadership of a woman (and, as it transpires, one aided by demonic forces), the English are no less to blame for being weak and divided enough to be beaten by her.

[57] Leah S. Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 137.
[58] Ibid., p. 53ff.
[59] Andrew M. Kirk, *The Mirror of Confusion: The Representation of French History in English Renaissance Drama* (New York: Garland, 1996), p. 136.

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In this changeability, Kirk finds similarities between Joan and the allegorical figure of Fortune. Like the dizzying back-and-forth of success and defeat that the play's battle scenes depict, Fortune supports and abandons at will those who rely on her. Kirk suggests that the association of Joan with Fortune 'allow[ed] the English audience to comprehend events that seemed inconsistent with providence', such as Joan's temporary, demonically-inspired victories over the English forces.[60] But I argue that Shakespeare is not interested in smoothing over such inconsistency. Even the most devoutly providentially-minded Englishmen of the 1590s would have known perfectly well that, whatever the rightness of the English cause and the perfidy of the French, England's holdings in France were ultimately lost and had yet to be regained. However, the association of Joan with Fortune does emphasise her symbolic dual alliances: truly neither French nor English, she represents simultaneously French luck and English division, French deceit and English weakness. She is not, in short, a nationalistic emblem of the enemies of England, but rather a representation of the multiplicity of forces that sometimes allow an apparently right cause to fail.

History and the Stage: Margaret of Anjou

Unpicking Joan's complicated web of associations demonstrates that the power of Shakespeare's historical female characters often lies outside of the play texts themselves. While the example of Joan draws primarily on the broader Elizabethan political culture to find important resonances within the character, another key extra-textual realm to consider is that of the stage itself. Many essential aspects of these characters' and plays' engagement with national identity only become legible when one looks beyond the confines of the printed page to consider the conditions of early modern performance. As Kermode suggests, it is these texts' identity specifically as theatrical works – an art form that is particularly resistant to unified readings, both due to the multi-vocality of the onstage characters and the diversity of understanding and experience contained within any single audience – that makes their ideological positions all but impossible to concretely define.[61] *Henry VI*'s Queen Margaret of Anjou exemplifies the ways in which extra-textual elements of the theatrical culture, including considerations of the practical processes of print and performance, complicate and occasionally undermine the understandings of a character that

[60] Ibid., pp. 134–135. [61] Kermode, p. 14.

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seem obvious in textually-focused readings. She is a particularly instructive case-in-point in relation to the above argument about the history play's association with defining English national identity, as many of the features that call into question Margaret's reputation as Shakespeare's most iconic foreign threat can only be located within the conditions of early modern performance.

One onstage relationship in particular gains new resonance when considered in terms of performance: that of Margaret and her son Edward. Their close connection complicates any simple reading of foreign consorts, and Margaret in particular, as destabilising forces of evil. While Peele's Elinor dies revealing that all of her children but one are illegitimate (and that one will become Edward II, whose famously troubled reign was dramatised by Christopher Marlowe at the same time Peele was depicting that of his father), Margaret's son Edward emerges from the start of *3 Henry VI* as a welcome contrast to his weak and indecisive father. Providing such a comparison to insufficiently masculine men is a common function of child characters in Shakespeare's history plays[62] but, in this instance, it also forges an association between mother and son, as both serve as ironic contrasts to King Henry's weakness. Their supporters see this as an unequivocally good thing: 'Women and children of so high a courage, / And warriors faint? Why, 'twere a perpetual shame', their ally Oxford declares. 'O brave young prince, thy famous grandfather / Doth live again in thee' (5.4.50–3). Oxford links Margaret and Edward as exemplars of laudable courage, hope that England may yet see another Henry V.

This promise and its specific connection to Margaret were underscored in Shakespeare's Globe's 2019 production of a conflated version of the *Henry VI* plays, where this scene was staged as a surreal fantasy. Performed in the indoor Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, the production overall was therefore claustrophobic and dim, lit by the space's requisite candlelight only intermittently complemented by additional electric lighting that shone through the windows behind the audience from the corridor outside. Over the course of the evening, in which *2* and *3 Henry VI* were combined into a performance lasting slightly over three hours, broken up by two intervals, the stage fell into a state of increasing disrepair, as the elegant panelling was covered with chipboard and tarpaulined for 'safety'

[62] Rebecca Ann Bach, 'Manliness before Individualism: Masculinity, Effeminacy, and Homoerotics in Shakespeare's History Plays', in *A Companion to Shakespeare: The Histories,* ed. by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 220–245, p. 236.

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during Jack Cade's rebellion, and subsequently covered in graffiti that proclaimed allegiance to the factions of York and Lancaster. As battle began, the stage was also covered in mounds of real dirt.

Entering to a bare but dirt-strewn stage, Margaret delivered a speech attempting to rally her followers in the wake of a massive defeat (Act 5, scene 4 in the original text of *3 Henry VI*), initially with a frantic, defeated air. As the speech went on, she grew in confidence, and seemed to assume control over the materials of the stage itself: the electric lights brightened, triumphant music began to play, her followers multiplied and acquired giant Lancaster banners to wave – in preview performances, the same flags that were used in the same company's production of *Henry V* (though these were ultimately replaced for fireproofing purposes). The scene culminated with Oxford's description of Edward as a 'brave young prince' (reassigned in this production to another lord), while Margaret gazed, overjoyed and incredulous, at what she had managed to conjure. Her position in the centre of the stage, looking ecstatically upwards and lit beatifically from above, emphasised the moment as her triumphant fantasy, not her son's – but even so, praise of her son as the new Henry V formed a climactic element of the realisation of her dream.

The two boy players in the roles of Margaret and her son would themselves have been matched through their shared status as company apprentices, and traces of a further extra-textual partnership are present within the text itself. Margaret and Edward as pair seem to be a clear example of an actor training partnership at work, their scenes displaying traits that suggest the role of Edward was created to support a boy player still learning his trade. For Prince Edward's first several scenes, Margaret is the only character to provide cues for his lines and the only time in the play that he enters or exits without her, he is carried on as a captive and off as a corpse. His speeches throughout the play are never more than four lines long, until he is at last given a ten-line speech in Act 5, Scene 4, followed shortly thereafter by his death scene, his first and only involvement in the kind of stychomythia that demands attentive listening for several cue lines in quick succession. This growing complexity over the course of the play, buttressed by the constant presence and primary support of a single fellow player, is the precise pattern of textual 'scaffolding' that Evelyn Tribble describes as a means of training and supporting novice players.[63] Such continual linking of characters is inevitably visible onstage, as the practical

[63] Evelyn Tribble, *Cognition in the Globe: Attention and Memory in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 138.

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demands of scaffolding require creating dramatic scenarios that allow the players – and, thus, their characters – to remain paired.

Intriguingly, unlike the examples of potential adult actor/apprentice actor partnerships that Tribble highlights, *3 Henry VI* features a presumably more senior and experienced boy, one entrusted with a large and complex role like Margaret, helping to train a more junior one. The continual onstage coupling borne of this partnership draws attention to the characters' similarities: they enter together, she sometimes verbally guides his movements and, because Margaret provides the majority of Edward's cues, his speech frequently follows on the heels of hers. Setting aside unknowable details of specific company apprenticeship structures, the boy playing Edward could equally plausibly have been tied to the actor playing King Henry, just as Edward himself could have chosen to follow his father instead of his mother – but the actor was not, and the character does not. *3 Henry VI* begins by dividing Edward from Henry and allying him with his mother instead, as Henry disinherits his son in favour of the Duke of York. Edward turns this symbolic severing into a literal one, vowing not to see his father until he can reclaim his inheritance – and thus affirmation of his connection to Henry – in battle: "till then I'll follow her' (1.1.263).

King Edward IV characterises mother and son as not merely linked, but interchangeable when he frames his murder of the prince as an act of violence against a substitute for the queen herself, with Prince Edward serving as 'the likeness of this railer here' (5.5.38).[64] The visible traces of actor training make Edward doubly Margaret's likeness, for she is his tutor twice over: one boy player of another, and Margaret of Edward, raising him to be the king his father could not be – but may look a little like the king she herself would have been. Explicitly noting this likeness as a cause of Prince Edward's death highlights the ambivalence of a comparison with his 'she-wolf' mother. But as the Duke of York's dying invective so vividly demonstrates, what makes Margaret's behaviour particularly monstrous in the eyes of her onstage contemporaries – and perhaps the audience – is that a woman undertakes it. In a boy, such audacity could be figured instead as precocious courage.[65] Edward, then, may be the ideal mixture of his parents: his mother's aggression in his father's form. Unlike Peele's Elinor, whose wickedness is attested by her many bastard children and

[64] Katie Knowles, *Shakespeare's Boys: A Cultural History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 19.
[65] Bach, p. 236.

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the ultimate weakness of the heir she bears, Margaret has a hopeful son. And from her first words in *3 Henry VI*, she acts in his name and constantly in his company. The personal ambition she expresses in *2 Henry VI* is not clearly in evidence in this sequel. Some audience members would certainly recall it and remember, too, that her previous adultery could render Prince Edward's parentage suspect. But no such suspicion is ever raised in *3 Henry VI* itself.

It may seem strange to consider these two *Henry VI* plays, and Margaret's character as established within them, separately from one another. But while the *Henry VI* plays have been performed almost exclusively in chronological cycles in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, this was not the case in the early modern period. Emrys Jones argues that 'Shakespeare could not have expected an identical audience for each of the three plays', and so did not write them with that assumption in mind.[66] Today, plays are generally programmed for runs varying in length from a few weeks to, in the commercial sector, several years, after which time they generally are not revived on the same scale for some time. In the early modern period, plays would recur periodically, every few weeks or months, sometimes for years. But Henslowe's Diary reveals an inconsistent policy regarding the presentation of multi-part plays sequentially. For example, on 19 July 1594, Henslowe records the debut of *The Second Part of Godfrey of Bullen*. On 26 July comes just plain *Godfrey*, and then another *Second Part* on 6 August. *Godfrey* pops up through the remainder of the diary's records, but never on two sequential days. In contrast, there are the two parts of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, which were frequently performed one immediately after the other or with a day in between. But sometimes they were not: on 15 September 1595, *Part One* was performed, but never followed by *Part Two*. On 25 October 1595, the first of a two-part play called *Hercules* was performed. Though it was usually also performed sequentially, in this instance, *Part Two* did not appear until 2 November.[67] We cannot know whether the *Henry VI* plays were treated more like *Tamburlaine* or more like *Godfrey* (though if the play Henslowe records as *Harry the 6* is one of Shakespeare's, it is never joined by its sequels and/or prequels, which could suggest that at least one of the plays spent several years standing alone). But I argue, like Jones, that these patterns make it impossible to assume that every audience member

[66] Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 129.
[67] Philip Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. by R. A. Foakes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 18–25.

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would have seen all of the plays sequentially: perhaps they were never at leisure to see plays two days in a row, or perhaps they just kept missing the staggered parts. We have reason to think that the *Henry VI* plays were popular because of outside references like Greene's, but we don't know exactly which of them, or for how long.

Both Henslowe's Diary and the extant canon offer examples of plays that left their sequels or prequels behind, becoming successes independently. John Jowett suggests that *Richard III* could be one such play, its extended theatrical life perhaps leading to rewrites to accommodate for the fact that its three prequels had fallen out of the repertory, and thus the audience could not reliably be expected to remember the information contained within them.[68] In a 2009 talk at the Huntington Library, Emma Smith makes a parallel argument regarding the print versions of the histories, highlighting evidence from printers and readers strongly suggesting that even once collected into the 1623 Folio, the histories did not tend to be read as the chronological series we are accustomed to taking them for. Prior to the publication of the collected plays in folio, Smith reminds us, the separately-published quartos and their distinct print histories suggest that readers approached the plays separately and likely only purchased the part of the series they liked best.[69] In addition, the plays did not receive their obviously sequential numbering until their 1623 Folio publication; in quarto, their titles are *The First Part of the Contention Betwixt the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster*, which was followed not by the Second Part of the Contention, but by *The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York*. While we have been trained by recent print, performance, and scholarly history to view these plays as an intimately linked sequence, the circumstances of original print and performance provide strong reason to think many early modern audience members and readers would not have seen them that way.

With these circumstances in mind, it becomes important to consider Margaret's four depictions not only as a singular character arc, but as four discrete characters who may well have been conceived and encountered entirely separately. Thus divided, the Margaret of *3 Henry VI* is introduced and continually framed as a fiercely devoted mother, defined (perhaps ironically, in the view of those who are accustomed to linking her with her actions of *2 Henry VI*) by her loyalty to the English throne as

[68] John Jowett, 'Introduction' in *Richard III* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 121.
[69] Emma Smith, 'The Politics of Shakespeare's Folio Histories', *Shakespeare and His World* podcast, Huntington Library, 25 September 2009.

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represented by her son. Her presence is not nearly as hopeful in *2 Henry VI*, where her appearance in the play's first scene sends the male courtiers into striking series of staggered exits, by which the various layers of faction and division in the court are revealed. This revelation also, however, draws attention to the fact that Margaret is merely a new expression for, not the root cause of, the internecine strife. As she and Suffolk work steadily to undermine the strength of the Lord Protector in order to control King Henry for themselves, Margaret looks much more like Peele's Elinor in her determined erosion of English values as embodied by the noble-minded Duke Humphrey. But the preceding events have made it clear that her aggression is, as Felicity Dunworth writes, 'the product of the breakdown of masculine relations, rather than its source'.[70]

The relationship of *1 Henry VI* to the other two instalments in the series has been the subject of debate, and this uncertainty raises interesting questions about how early modern audiences may have perceived Margaret's appearance at the end of *1 Henry VI*. The current consensus is that *1 Henry VI* post-dates its sequels and was perhaps written to capitalise on their popularity. Margaret herself may well have been a key element of this popularity, as Robert Greene's much-quoted 'tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide' jab at Shakespeare has been seen to suggest.[71] In this case, Margaret's one-scene cameo at the end of *1 Henry VI* could have been one of gleeful anticipation of the wickedness to come, her threatening nature requiring no explicit introduction because it was already well known to habitual theatregoers – though still unknown to others, given the previously discussed uncertainty about what a given theatregoer may have had the opportunity to see. However, the resurgence of the plays' popularity from the mid-twentieth century onwards has come almost exclusively in cycle form, linking or adapting the plays (with or without *Richard III* as the concluding instalment) into a series performed by a shared cast in order to create continuity of character and story. When the plays are performed or read in a chronological cycle, Margaret theoretically enters to a clean slate. The Royal Shakespeare Company's 2000 production offered her no such opportunity: by doubling the role with Joan, and having Margaret emerge from the flames of Joan's execution in a scarlet gown, her danger to the English was plain from the start. But without the context of Margaret's future acts, it is not at all

[70] Felicity Dunworth, *Mothers and Meaning on the Early Modern English Stage* (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 2014), p. 101.
[71] Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 71.

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obvious that her appearance near the end of *1 Henry VI* should be read as threatening beyond the fact that she is French. While it is certainly possible to perform her and Suffolk's first encounter as laden with knowing innuendo, it is equally possible to read Suffolk as lascivious and Margaret as stubbornly or innocently resisting his implications. Suffolk himself is full of blustering ambition, but Margaret comes across as his tool, not his accomplice, in the closing line of the play: 'I shall rule both her, the King, and realm' (5.6.108). The final scene of ominous marriage negotiations takes place without Margaret there. Her absence makes explicit that Margaret herself is not the problem; the issue is rather the marriage terms that the male, English characters propose and accept: Margaret's lack of dowry, the recompense her father demands and, most of all, the breaking of Henry's betrothal to the Duke of Armagnac's daughter.[72] This last fact emphasises that the danger of the match does not lie in its foreignness, but in the political dealings surrounding it. Thus, a character that seems to be a microcosm of the history play's purpose – the definition and defence of masculine Englishness against all that is female and foreign and thus threatens to undermine it – becomes distinctly more complex once integrated with the realities of early modern print, performance, and practice.

While characterisation as 'threatening foreigners' is a generalisation about the women of the *Henry VI* plays, and Margaret in particular, that seems accurate on the surface, it makes assumptions about audience knowledge and associations that simply are not universally true. Further, it is a characterisation undermined by the complexity of Shakespeare's multi-vocal depiction of history. Recognising the contradictory and layered relationship these female characters have both to their foreignness and to English interests demands grappling with the material conditions of the history play as a specific form of artistic and historical engagement, one whose meaning cannot be read in purely textual terms – though even at the textual level, these roles' interactions with emerging ideas of Englishness, and contemporary tensions regarding religion, marriage and foreigners, render them far more complex than mere emblems against which English identity can be defined by contrast. By shunting the female characters out of the category of Englishness, and thus to the margins of what is perceived to be the history play's purpose, these critical commonplaces inaccurately insist on female exclusion as an essential feature of the genre.

[72] See Kirsten N. Mendoza, '"I Am Content": Race, Seduction, and the Performance of Consent in *The Hollow Crown*', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 39.4 (2021), 617–635 for an analysis of how Margaret's presence in performance transformed the meaning of the scene into a critique of her powerlessness.

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History and Tragedy: *King John*, *Henry VIII*, and *Richard III*

Insisting that female characters are fundamentally removed from the heart of the history plays' concerns extends beyond the question of foreigners versus the English. The character of Constance in *King John*, for example, seems to make both critics and fellow characters impatient. She is a constant disruptive presence, never more so than in her famous series of speeches lamenting her son Arthur's capture by John's forces. These speeches are a theatrical coup, grinding the scene to a halt and forcing audience attention through her powerful and poetic language about grief. Though the other characters find her behaviour mortifying, this affective power is a source of immense potential strength in terms of audience sympathy. However, scholar John Kerrigan finds Constance 'absurd' and 'altogether trying' and warns that 'the switch-off point for audiences is imminent when "hystericized" femininity forces itself on the attention'.[73] Perhaps most tellingly, Constance is consistently described in criticism as 'mad', and her scene lamenting Arthur's loss as a 'mad scene', despite the fact that it bears no linguistic resemblance to Shakespeare's other scenes depicting madness and that her speeches are entirely linear and rational. But in the eyes of critics, extreme female emotion and 'madness' become interchangeable: both are inappropriate disruptions to the orderly progress of the scene and of history and can only be explained by shunting them out of the category of reasonable behaviour entirely.[74] In describing Constance as mad, critics are quoting the Cardinal's description of her, an assessment Constance directly denies (3.4.3–4). Katharine Goodland wonders why 'critical responses *to* the play sound so much like the critical responses of characters *in* the play' and views Constance's emotional outpourings as 'seductive ... for Constance, the characters in the play, and perhaps the audience'.[75] Despite Kerrigan's certainty that audiences, broadly put, dislike Constance, performance history does not support this assertion. Tillyard, for example, finds Constance to be 'the second great character of the play: partly perhaps because Mrs Siddons played her with

[73] John Kerrigan, *Motives of Woe: Shakespeare and 'Female Complaint': A Critical Anthology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 55, 65.

[74] See, for example, A. R. Braunmuller, 'Introduction', in *King John* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Deborah T. Curren-Acquino, '*King John*: A Modern Perspective', in *King John* for the Folger Shakespeare. Available at: http://shakespeare.folger.edu.

[75] Katharine Goodland, *Female Mourning in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama: From the Raising of Lazarus to King Lear* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 120, 126.

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enthusiastic devotion'.[76] This is in reference to English actress Sarah Siddons, who did indeed make Constance one of her signature roles in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, creating an association so enduring that Tillyard could allude to her without explanation over a century later.

Tillyard finds it impossible to distinguish the appeal of Constance from the appeal of the actress who most famously played her. A. J. Piesse suggests that the early production history of the play is largely a history of who has played Constance and how the character is inseparable from the famous actresses who have taken on the role. Like Margaret, she seems to be a character who can only be fully understood in performance. Siddons' performances in the role were so renowned, some spectators would come just to see her, departing after her final scene, thus completely divorcing the character from the wider play.[77] Popular eighteenth-century actress Susannah Cibber frequently performed opposite David Garrick, but not when she played Constance: he did not like to play John. Thus, as Fiona Ritchie notes, when scholars 'focus on the works of Shakespeare which Garrick popularised with his acting [they] miss some of the plays such as *King John*, which proved enormously popular in the eighteenth century repertoire as a result of the talented actresses who brought them to life'.[78] Constance was not Cibber's consolation prize for supporting Garrick in another leading turn, but a star vehicle all her own. To a certain extent, this disruptive association with celebrity is fitting: Constance is written to break through at moments the other characters perceive as inappropriate, to demand the attention she believes is her due, whether or not others agree. But it is a disruption that critics find uncomfortable for precisely the reasons actresses find it appealing: she represents the intrusion of a highly emotional mode into the centre of a historical drama, an intrusion that shifts the play's poles of power by redirecting audience sympathy.

Constance is not alone in Shakespeare's canon of history plays, though such disruptive female characters tend to be found in plays that are no longer particularly popular. Sarah Siddons, for example, claimed Queen Katherine in *Henry VIII* as one of her favourite roles. However, strong audience affection for Katharine can awkwardly unbalance the sympathy for King Henry VIII required to uphold the play's triumphant final scene,

[76] Tillyard, p. 299.

[77] A. J. Piesse, '*King John*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. by Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 126–140, pp. 127–128.

[78] Fiona Ritchie, *Women and Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 41–42.

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read by most scholars as unambiguous Tudor propaganda.[79] Though we tend to associate eighteenth-century Shakespeare with heavy adaptation, both *King John* and *Henry VIII* were, aside from (sometimes extreme) cutting for length, largely left in their original shapes. I suggest these emotional female characters may have been the reason for both plays' structural preservation, as their scenes of suffering and firm moral stances recall the heroines of the then-popular 'she-tragedy' genre. Considering these plays within the periods in which they were most popular illuminates the artistic conditions under which they are considered successful, which points in turn to fundamental features of their dramaturgy. In the case of *King John*, *Henry VIII* and ultimately *Richard III*, it is a dramaturgy within which disruptive, emotionally expressive female characters and the depiction of history prove fundamentally intertwined.

The eighteenth century revival of Shakespeare that is now most commonly associated with David Garrick was equally brought about by powerful actresses, including Hannah Pritchard, Catherine Clive, and Susannah Cibber, who turned at first to Shakespeare's cross-dressed heroines such as Portia, Viola and Rosalind as vehicles for their star power and still-novel sexual appeal.[80] The birth of she-tragedy slightly predates this Shakespearean revival, first appearing in the 1680s. In these plays, 'action revolves around a central female character who suffers for most of the play and dies pathetically at the end'. They emerged, as Jean I. Marsden writes, from an era in which audiences were increasingly unwilling to accept heroism based in impeccable moral goodness, but profound feeling was found to offer an affecting and effective substitute.[81] Direct appropriations of the she-tragedy style can be found in eighteenth-century adaptations of Shakespeare's works, including Colley Cibber's adaptation of *King John*, where both Arthur (re-written as a trouser role and played by Cibber's granddaughter) and Constance take up the central, impotent but emotional role associated with the genre.[82] But echoes of the form can be found in the unadapted texts as well. Neither Constance nor Katherine are ever quite as pathetic as the traditional she-tragedy heroine,

[79] Jay L. Halio, 'Introduction', in *Henry VIII* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 50, 36.
[80] Ritchie, p. 110.
[81] Jean I. Marsden, 'Tragedy and Varieties of Serious Drama', in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. by Susan J. Owen (London: Blackwell, 2001), 228–242, p. 237.
[82] Elaine M. McGirr, 'Shakespeare, Cibber, and the Troublesome *King John*', in *Shakespeare in Stages: New Theatre Histories,* ed. by Christine Dymkowski and Christie Carson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 22–36, p. 30.

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but their grand scenes of emotional distress offer a similar means by which audience members can locate themselves in the plays' muddy moral landscapes, providing emotional appeal to replace pristine morality – and thus a site for audience sympathy that the plays otherwise can be seen to lack.[83] The popularity of she-tragedies was inextricably linked to the power and fame of the actresses who starred in them; companies without a dominant female star tended not to do them.[84] Thus, both Shakespeare and she-tragedy straddle onstage past and offstage present, articulating a vision of history that is rooted in the experiences of women because it is inseparable from the influence of the actresses filling the female roles.

Like the historical comedies already discussed, one might argue that these plays' association with she-tragedy suggests that they were valued not as histories, but fundamentally as tragedies that happened to have historical trappings. But *King John* and *Henry VIII*'s heyday overlapped with another theatrical trend that explicitly demonstrates their perceived value as legitimate engagements with historical storytelling: archaeological theatre. This was a production style interested in historical accuracy and intense naturalistic detail in both scenic and costume design and which frequently interpolated scenes of opulent pageantry such as processions and coronations, as well as massive battle scenes. These scenes were sometimes not originally found in Shakespeare but were added to enhance the plays' fidelity to history. The most famous example of this style is Herbert Beerbohm Tree's lavish 1899 *King John*, which heavily cut the text to make room for several added battle sequences and a scene of John signing the Magna Carta. But Tree's production was the apex, not the origin, of this trend.[85] The Kemble siblings – Sarah Siddons and her two brothers, all celebrated actors – created a similar version of *Henry VIII* in 1811, often considered the first attempt at prioritising historically accurate sets and costumes in production. Their *King John* of 1823 likewise explicitly advertised its fidelity to history.[86] Eugene M. Waith speculates about this overlap between actress and archaeology in the case of *King John*, wondering if Constance's appeal 'may have been heightened for the spectator by the visual contrast between her solitary figure and the comings

[83] Marguerite A. Tassi, *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare: Gender, Genre, and Ethics* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2011), p. 73.
[84] Marsden, p. 238. [85] Braunmuller, p. 86.
[86] Ellen Lockhart, 'Staging Shakespeare's History Plays: The Past as Tone and Material, 1779–1830', in *Staging History: 1780–1840*, ed. by Michael Burden, Wendy Heller, Jonathan Hicks and Ellen Lockhart (Oxford: Bodelian Library, Oxford University, 2016), pp. 34, 37.

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and goings of the French, Austrian, and English armies'.[87] But the Kembles' production of *Henry VIII* emphasised precisely the opposite, increasing the elaborate shows of deference shown to Siddons as Katherine, embedding her more firmly in the richly portrayed historical context.[88] It bears repeating that the same plays became the vessels for both of these trends: both archaeological theatre and displays of powerful female celebrity in the style of sentimental tragedy. What seems like an awkward or unexpected coincidence may in fact be more deliberate than we realise. Perhaps we must understand the vogues for female pathos and for historical pageantry not as contrasting, but as complementary, the former an essential element of the latter.

These previously popular Shakespearean histories offer a reminder that, at one time, the form of historical narrative that was not only widely accepted but apparently preferred centred on female anger and sadness, on women who express their discontent in highly emotive terms. The fact that these particular histories were rarely more popular than when showcase scenes of female suffering were in vogue implies that these 'hysterical' scenes are an essential element of the plays' historical dramaturgy and sincere appreciation of such scenes is fundamental to the plays' success. Waith suggests that the overall shift in attention to the Bastard as the favoured character in *King John* is 'characteristic of a shift in sensibility' towards self-awareness and satire: 'even his patriotism, less appealing to some of our contemporaries, can be seen as tempered by an ironic view. Nothing tempers the passions of Constance; we turn away from her "gorgeous affliction" with a certain embarrassment and impatience'.[89] Though Waith wrote this over forty years ago, the sentiment lingers, as demonstrated by Kerrigan's analysis quoted at the beginning of this section and by former *Guardian* theatre critic Michael Billington's comment in a 2012 review that Constance is 'often a Niagara of self-pity', unpleasant to watch.[90] The key to these plays seems to be not only understanding their scenes of affect as essential to their story, but to their historical dramaturgy. An era obsessed with historical accuracy in Shakespeare, to the point of

[87] Eugene M. Waith, '*King John* and the Drama of History', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 29 (1978), 192–211, p. 207.

[88] Shearer West, 'Siddons, Celebrity and Regality: Portraiture and the Body of the Ageing Actress', in *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660–2000*, ed. by Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 191–213, p. 204.

[89] Waith, pp. 199–200.

[90] Michael Billington, '*King John* – Review', *The Guardian,* 20 April 2012. Available at: www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/apr/20/king-john-review; directed by Maria Aberg for the Royal Shakespeare Company.

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adding in 'missing' scenes such as the signing of the Magna Carta, did not cut out these speeches and characters as unnecessary and frivolous but rather framed them as the human centrepiece of the historical drama.

James Robinson Planché worked with the Kembles to research their costumes and to produce books showcasing their meticulous work on *King John* and *Henry VIII*. In 1830, he produced a third costume book that was not explicitly linked to any production, though it was of a play Siddons and her brothers had all appeared in: *Richard III*.[91] Of course, the text that Planché and the Kembles worked with was not fully Shakespeare's, but rather the Colley Cibber adaptation that dominated stages until the late nineteenth century. But through Planché's book, *Richard III* provides another example of the intersection between interest in historical reproduction and actress-driven focus on extreme emotion. For, although the book did not feature a specific cast, Sarah Siddons and other stars of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries all counted Queen Elizabeth among the roles in their repertoire. Rackin and Howard write that '[i]n *King John*, Shakespeare goes as far as he will ever go in making women, women's skeptical voices, and women's truth central to the history he staged, leaving his sources behind and venturing into the realm of the unwritten and conjectural'.[92] More recent criticism sees equal investment in women's history, if not more, in *Richard III*, where Shakespeare likewise abandons the chronicles to create a series of scenes of female interaction and lament that have no original in his known sources.[93] Queen Elizabeth, favoured by the stars of the eighteenth century, and Margaret, excised entirely by the Colley Cibber adaptation but often the focal point today, especially when *Richard III* is performed in a cycle production, are the most prominent of the play's four major female roles. Lady Anne's attempted defiance, though popular with actors, is undermined by her ultimate capitulation to Richard, and the Duchess of York's scenes – and often the character herself – are frequently cut.

Critics increasingly read the conflict between Richard and the female mourners of the men he has killed as fundamental to the play's themes: '*Richard III* encompasses a struggle between Richard's will to forget the dead, to effect political amnesia by a perpetual orientation toward the future, and the mourning women who embody the past, the insistence and

[91] Lockhart, p. 37. [92] Howard and Rackin, p. 133.

[93] Tassi, p. 22; Alison Thorne, '"O, lawful let it be/That I have room . . . to curse awhile": Voicing the Nation's Conscience in Female Complaint in *Richard III, King John,* and *Henry VIII*', in *This England, That Shakespeare,* ed. by Willy Mally and Margaret Tudeau Clayton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 105–126, p. 108.

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intrusion of memory upon human action'.[94] Constance and Katherine's laments win audience sympathy, but gain them nothing from the other characters onstage. Constance in particular is unceremoniously shunted from the narrative by her abrupt offstage death. Queen Elizabeth and her companions in grief actually achieve the aims of their laments – bringing Richard down and elevating his Tudor rival – for 'the appearance of the ghosts and Richard's troubled dreams', the harbingers of Richard's downfall, 'are poetically and dramatically linked to the ritual laments of the widowed queens'.[95] As Paige Martin Reynolds writes, female mourning in this play is not just retrospective – rather, 'memory through female mourning determines the future'.[96] Shakespeare repeatedly disrupts the linear progression of Richard's ascent to return to Elizabeth, and it is through her and the other women that the audience receives confirmation of some of the play's most dramatic turns: King Edward's death (2.2), Richard imprisoning the young princes (2.4), Richard's crowning (4.1) and the publicising of the death of the princes (4.4). Because Shakespeare so obviously departs from his chronicle sources in these scenes, recent critics have been more inclined to see them as essential to his historical dramaturgy, recognising that such imagined scenes must be intentionally and artistically motivated.[97] In an ironic contrast to the reception of the romantic histories, their lack of precedent in Shakespeare's source material is what helps critics recognise their importance.

Even so, these scenes and characters have a chequered history in performance and adaptation, and today the female characters' structural importance is likely to be disrupted by heavy textual cuts. At the same time, however, the characters continue to attract what sometimes amounts to little more than celebrity cameos, highlighting both the enduring power of these roles and the enduring ability of celebrity to draw attention to them. The two most recent screen adaptations of *Richard III* demonstrate this phenomenon: in Richard Loncraine's 1995 film, Queen Elizabeth is played by American actor Annette Bening and the Duchess of York by Maggie Smith (Margaret is cut, though some of her prophetic lines are

[94] Goodland, p. 141.

[95] Ibid., p. 140. See also: Tobias Döring, *Performances of Mourning in Shakespearean Theatre and Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Isabel Karreman, 'Rites of Oblivion in Shakespearian History Plays', *Shakespeare Survey*, 63 (2010), 24–36; Paige Martin Reynolds, 'Mourning and Memory in *Richard III*', *American Notes and Queries*, 21.2 (2008), 19–25; Lina Perkins Wilder, *Shakespeare's Memory Theatre: Recollection, Properties, and Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[96] Reynolds, p. 19. [97] Thorne, 'O, Lawful', p. 108ff.

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reassigned to Smith's Duchess). In 2015's BBC mini-series *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses*, which presents an abridged version of the full tetralogy, the Duchess is played by Judi Dench, and Elizabeth by television star Keeley Hawes. Margaret is played in all three parts of the series by Sophie Okonedo, though in *Richard III*, the film's energy is drawn firmly away from her story arc and towards Richard's. In both versions, the roles of the women are relatively small, but the heft of celebrity provided by these recognisable actresses refocuses attention in adaptations that are otherwise wholly preoccupied with Richard (in both instances, also a showcase celebrity role). This casting pattern reflects an understanding, conscious or otherwise, that these roles are important and require a degree of audience attention and sympathy that the adapted texts do not otherwise leave space for. Thus, in *Richard III*, the history women tell – and history that places the contributions of angry, mournful, unruly women at its centre – at last becomes 'real' history, both in the eyes of critics and artists, and within the confines of the play text itself, where these characters' interventions reshape the story.

Rather than conceiving of Shakespeare's female characters as disfiguring history, straining at its edges until it loses the shape of accuracy, in this chapter I have tried to articulate an understanding of historical dramaturgy that includes and even centralises them. Contextualising the plays lends support to this more inclusive vision, be it the context of other writers' work, as with the romantic historical tradition in which Shakespeare only briefly participated; the context of early modern English performance, literary, and political culture, all of which contribute essential strands of understanding to characters who otherwise seem inescapably foreign; and even the context of periods beyond Shakespeare's own during which now-neglected plays found particular success. The broader historical culture of early modern England likewise reminds us that there are forms such as ballads and genres such as comedies that were as much a part of shaping an Elizabethan and Jacobean understanding of history and the individuals within it as Shakespeare's histories. Shakespeare's plays cannot be taken as the final word on the shape of early modern historical narratives overall. Structures that insist upon women as exceptional or marginal, fundamentally separate from or in opposition to the broader historical aims of the plays, are constructed, not inevitable. In the case of Shakespeare, we have been too willing to let assumptions about this apparently inevitable place of women in historical narratives – assumptions derived, in part, from popular neglect of the plays that disprove them – obscure what his female characters actually *do* in the plays, onstage and on the page.

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What they do is far from uniform: the foreign female characters such as Margaret and Joan, who have been seen to define England through opposition, in fact emblematise the complexity of national identity and the diversity of internal and external threats facing England. In contrast, disruptive roles like Constance and Elizabeth bring the weight of tragic emotion to bear on their cause, rallying onstage and offstage audiences in defiance of a corrupted nation. But unlike Ida, Dorothea and the Countess of Salisbury, who also oppose corrupt kings, these lamenting women assert a tragic conception of history. The women of the historical comedies instead become the mechanism by which the king – and thus the country – is redeemed. These varied intersections of character, country and context demonstrate that our understanding of what Shakespeare is doing with history in these plays cannot be separated from an understanding of what he is doing with his female characters. Thus, through examining them, we can begin to discover not simply what women do in Shakespeare's vision of history, but to address the question posed at the beginning of this chapter of what a Shakespearean history play actually is.

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