CHAPTER 2

From the Margins
Reading Female Characters into History

The roles highlighted in Chapter 1 reflect the ways female characters can help define an English history play's relationship to foreignness, the place of disruptive emotion within its plot structure and how historical accuracy is deployed to either clear space for or obstruct female presence. The anonymous Elizabethan play *Thomas of Woodstock*, which has survived only as an incomplete manuscript, features a character who combines all of these features – but, unlike the female characters of Chapter 1, is unable to make much use of them. This chapter will consider such apparently ineffective female presences, arguing for the importance even of women who seem to hew to the stereotype that history plays only include silent, side-lined wives – a type that *Thomas of Woodstock*'s Queen Anne seems to epitomise. In a scene reminiscent of *The Scottish History of James IV*'s opening sequence, King Richard II of England enters early in the play to present his new bride, Anne of Bohemia – or, as the play calls her, Anne o' Beame – to the court. Unlike the ominous entrance of Margaret of Anjou, Anne is welcomed joyfully by the courtiers and, with her first speech, expresses her hopes to be 'English made, let me be Englishèd. / They best shall please me, shall me English call' (1.3.48). Any fear of a malign foreign presence is thus immediately neutralised, as Anne herself rejects any identification but as an Englishwoman. Alzada J. Tipton describes Anne as one of the 'moral arbiters' of the play, along with the titular Woodstock. The characters are united in their attempts to rein in Richard's abuses of his royal power.[1] Tipton goes on to trace the precedents for Woodstock's resistance to royal authority in political thought and literature of the time, while Kavita Mudan Finn and Lea Leucking Frost place Anne in a similar context of historical mediator queens.[2] I suggest that Anne instead has a

[1] Alzada J. Tipton, '"The Meanest Man Shall Be Permitted Freely to Accuse": The Commoners in the Anonymous Play *Woodstock*', *Comparative Drama*, 32 (1998), 117–145, p. 127.

[2] Kavita Mudan Finn and Lea Leucking Frost, '"Nothing Hath Begot My Something Grief": Invisible Queenship in Shakespeare's Second Tetralogy', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Shakespeare's Queens*,

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theatrical lineage: echoes of and precedents for her behaviour are to be found not only in political tracts, but in similar character types in other plays.

Despite her foreign origins, Anne becomes an emblem of the conscience of England that King Richard's indolence and corruption have caused him to neglect. Though not a commoner, she aligns herself with their interests: 'I do not sorrow in mine own behalf / . . . 'Tis England's subjects' sorrows I sustain' (2.31–36). This unity with the people of England – Anne does not just feel *for* their sorrows but claims to *actually* feel them – becomes unity with England itself. In a mirror of the romantic histories' conflation of violation of a female subject and violation of the kingdom, Richard's wrongs towards his subjects and his loyal uncle Woodstock are physically manifested in Anne. The first scene of Act 4 ends with King Richard having 'parted [his] whole realm among' his favourites, county by county (4.1.260), after which they set off to 'Surprise plain Woodstock' (4.1.266), exiting with an ominous couplet: 'Beware, Plain Thomas, for King Richard comes / Resolved with blood to wash all former wrongs' (4.1.273–4). 'Plain Thomas' himself enters and speaks next, following one ominous statement up with another: 'The Queen so sick!' (4.2.1). This direct juxtaposition creates a symbolic cause and effect, reinforcing the physical connection between the Queen and England itself. Where previously she felt the realm's sorrows herself, now she embodies its corruption. We hear no word of the Queen's illness before this point, and Woodstock's surprise emphasises its suddenness, which in turn strengthens the link between Richard's actions and Anne's disease.

Woodstock more explicitly highlights this unity later in the scene as he contemplates a brewing storm, yet another traditional means of demonstrating the link between King and country: 'I fear [Anne's] death / Will be the tragic scene the sky foreshows us. / When kingdoms change, the very heavens are troubled. / Pray God, King Richard's wild behaviour / Force not the powers of heaven to frown upon us' (4.2.69–73). Though Anne most frequently appears onstage in scenarios that would likely be described as 'domestic' or 'private' – sewing, talking with her ladies-in-waiting – Woodstock recognises that Anne's death would bring about reverberating change. Her sole direct interventions in affairs of state are the provision of goods for the poor and gentle warnings to Richard that are easily brushed

ed. by Kavita Mudan Finn and Lea Leucking Frost (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 227–249, p. 228.

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off, but Woodstock can foresee the political consequences of her death. After Anne dies, things do indeed change: Richard is overcome with sorrow and remorse. He tries to revoke his order to have Woodstock murdered, but his efforts come too late (4.3.172ff). Unlike the women of the romantic histories or the mourning women of Shakespeare, no one listens to Anne's legitimate warnings and fears for the state of the kingdom and her husband's unsteady reign until there is nothing left to be done. Instead, she is silenced and set aside, first by the other characters and ultimately by death.

Such silencing is the subject of this chapter, which turns to characters who, like Anne, attempt to intervene in the political plots of their plays, but fail or are ignored. These abortive engagements have been widely neglected, dismissed as docility or passivity when they can be more usefully read as efforts to act that are unsuccessful. In some cases, these female characters are pushed out of the realm of politics and into that of the 'domestic', marginalised by critics with an insistence that their irrelevance to the plays' political work renders them inherently secondary. However, as Anne of Bohemia demonstrates, failed participation is not lack of participation, and characters who operate in settings parallel to and apparently separate from the main political plot can still be agents of profound literal and symbolic change.

Where the female characters highlighted in Chapter 1 aggressively asserted their place in their plays and in history, the female characters of this chapter are more muted presences. They seem to uphold the stereotypical image of female characters in history plays and to reinforce the prevalent assumption that the only place for women in Shakespeare's histories is to be quiet, obedient and passive. But despite a common critical and artistic assumption that these traits manifest as untroubled submission to the events taking place around them, this chapter will argue that this reading misunderstands the nature of the characters' participation. They attempt to prevent battles, redefine allegiances and forestall marriages – but without success. Such interventions recur with surprising consistency across almost all of Shakespeare's history plays, to the extent that they should be considered an essential element of his historical dramaturgy. Through their curtailed interventions, these female characters open a gap between the facts of the chronicles on which the plays are based and the events of the drama itself, existing within what Graham Holderness describes as 'the absent, shadowy or marginal spaces' of history. However, as Holderness writes, 'the plays repeatedly demonstrate that absence ... both shapes the drama, and points to deeper levels of

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meaning within or beyond it'.[3] Within this shadowy space, the characters of this chapter blur the boundaries between history and fiction, allowing audiences to undertake their own individual, imaginative engagement with these figures at the margins of the plays. Such blending of categories creates a more decentralised vision of the history play's purpose, suggesting a genre that, in Shakespeare's hands, is more engaged with troubling received images of history and nation than reifying them.

Unheeded Warnings

King John's Blanche of Castile, the smallest and least-discussed of the play's three female roles, exemplifies both the dramaturgical tendencies described above and the most common critical responses to them. Blanche is thrust to prominence through a sudden marriage with the Dauphin, Lewis, in order to end the conflict between his France and her uncle John's England. Jacqueline Vanhoutte sees this as 'a dynastic marriage that comes to symbolise [John's] mistreatment of the nation ... The metaphorical dismemberment of Blanche foreshadows Lewis's invasion of England',[4] a reading that places Blanche in a parallel position to Anne of Bohemia: the foreign (in her case, Spanish) emblem of the wrongs done to England by its own king. Vanhoutte's reference to 'dismemberment' alludes to Blanche's own speech describing her impossible position when a declaration of war follows immediately on the heels of her marriage: 'Which is the side that I must go withal? / I am with both; each army hath a hand, / And in their rage, I having hold of both, / They whirl asunder and dismember me' (3.1.327–30). But this is far from Blanche's only speech on the matter. In fact, though she ultimately assents to both the marriage and to take her husband's side in the war, she does so in terms that are difficult to describe as 'acquiescent'. Falling short of open defiance, Blanche is an example of the recurring mode in which Shakespeare's more minor female characters interact with history. She attempts to reject or forestall coming events that cannot be sustained in the face of patriarchal opposition, and so she gives way to reluctant acceptance. In Blanche's case, her overlooked attempt to prevent war links her to Constance as both victim and warning of the unintended consequences of male politicking – consequences habitually left out of the cause-and-effect narrations of the traditional chronicles, but that are briefly but meaningfully highlighted by Shakespeare.

[3] Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare, The Histories* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 15.
[4] Vanhoutte, pp. 142–143.

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The war Blanche hopes to prevent is sparked by the arrival of Cardinal Pandulph, who excommunicates King John and urges the King of France to take up arms against him despite the fact that Blanche and the Dauphin have been married that very day. The Cardinal's entrance launches a series of appeals and negotiations: John to the King of France to ignore the Cardinal; Lewis to his father to listen and obey; Constance to King and Cardinal to go to war; and, far less frequently discussed, Blanche to Lewis to maintain the peace. She interjects into the debates twice, once in response to her new husband, and once in response to Constance:

> DAUPHIN: Bethink you, father, for the difference
> Is purchase of a heavy curse from Rome,
> Or the light loss of England for a friend.
> Forego the easier.
> BLANCHE: That's the curse of Rome.
> CONSTANCE: O Lewis, stand fast; the devil tempts thee here
> In likeness of a new untrimmèd bride.
> BLANCHE: The Lady Constance speaks not from her faith,
> But from her need.
> CONSTANCE: O, if thou grant my need,
> Which only lives by the death of faith,
> That need must needs infer this principle:
> That faith would live again by death of need.
>
> (3.1.203–14)

Constance's retort silences Blanche, though it also draws attention to the fact that Lewis gives no verbal acknowledgement of his new wife's speech. Constance's first line, however, might imply a silent response from Lewis, an appearance of inclining towards Blanche, prompting Constance's exhortation to 'stand fast'. Blanche's second line, in which she addresses Constance in the third person, could therefore be directed to either her husband, urging him not to turn away from her, or to Constance herself, as the only person onstage who has acknowledged Blanche's speech. Linked together verbally and visually as parallel petitioners, Blanche attempts to set herself in contrast to Constance, accusing her of drawing not on disinterested religious faith, but on personal need, while Blanche instead argues in the political terms her husband proposes, weighing the relative diplomatic and religious toll of a break with England or with Rome. It is only when this tactic fails that Blanche attempts to remind her husband of the personal, individual cost of breaking the alliance that Blanche herself is meant to symbolise.

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The gap the text leaves here in place of Lewis's response to these entreaties recalls Philip C. McGuire's concept of the 'open silence', a silence or lack of response 'whose precise meanings and effects, because they cannot be determined by analysis of the words of the playtext, must be established by nonverbal, extratextual features of the play that emerge only in performance'.[5] These silences are reminders, McGuire writes, of the fundamentally collaborative nature of Shakespeare's works, of 'the presence within Shakespeare's designs or strategies of moments that give full scope to the creative energies and talents of those who make performances of his plays possible'.[6] Here and in other history plays, Shakespeare deploys such silences in order to engage the 'creative energies' not only of his performers, but of his audiences, leaving gaps that must be interpreted and filled by the reader or spectator. It is notable that Blanche is generally figured in criticism as the silent partner but, in fact, she states her views explicitly throughout the scene. It is not Blanche who is the 'blank page', as critics have described her,[7] but rather it is Lewis whose failure to respond creates an open silence to be filled. Does he acknowledge Blanche, thus emphasising her role as a participant in the scene's debate? Or is she a fully marginalised figure whose interjections are ignored by everyone except Constance?

Whether or not she is listened to, Blanche's words make her position clear. When Lewis calls for the French to take up arms, Blanche deploys precisely the rhetorical strategy – temptation '[i]n likeness of a new untrimmèd bride' – that Constance previously accused her of abusing:

> What, shall our feast be kept with slaughtered men?
> . . . O husband, hear me! Ay, alack, how new
> Is 'husband' in my mouth! Even for that name
> Which till this time my tongue did ne'er pronounce
> Upon my knee I beg: go not to arms
> Against mine uncle' (3.1.302–309)

Only after this plea is roundly ignored does she begin imagining her own helpless dismemberment by the warring armies. At the end of this second speech, Lewis finally directly addresses Blanche, though he is curiously unresponsive to the bulk of what she has said, instead answering only her presumably rhetorical question about who she should side with: 'Lady,

[5] Philip C. McGuire, *Speechless Dialect: Shakespeare's Open Silences* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. xv.
[6] Ibid., p. xx. [7] Howard and Rackin, p. 122.

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with me, with me thy fortune lies'. Blanche responds, 'There where my fortune lives, there my life dies' (3.1.337–8). This couplet – Blanche and Lewis's last lines, though not the last lines of the scene – is indeed acquiescence, but in such negative and despairing terms that it undermines itself by drawing attention to the limits of Blanche's ability to meaningfully resist. The terms of her surrender are made abundantly clear: like Constance, she agrees not from her faith, but from her need.

In Shakespeare's Globe's 2015 co-production with the Theatre Royal and Derngate, director James Dacre cleared the stage for this exchange, leaving Blanche and Lewis alone as she made her appeal to him. The production was designed to tour spaces across England, primarily churches and cathedrals, in addition to both the outdoor Globe stage and one performance in the indoor Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. The historicity of the venues (or, in the cases of the two Shakespeare's Globe spaces, the appearance thereof) seemed to inform a design aesthetic that sought to complement the spaces with relatively straightforward medieval costuming, rendering the actors, as Clare Brennan wrote in a review of the production's stop in Northampton's Church of the Holy Sepulchre for *The Guardian*, 'as clearly outlined as stained-glass images'.[8] At the same time, the addition of songs performed by the company, generally with lyrics taken from the text of the play and sung over scenic transitions or montage-like dumbshow sequences, added a more modern pacing, disrupting any sense suggested by the venues and aesthetic that this was to be museum theatre or an attempt to faithfully render an untouched, 'authentic' version of Shakespeare's text.

In Dacre's staging of Act 3, Scene 1, the men having already run off to pursue battle, Blanche's plea became particularly helpless, an attempt to alter a foregone conclusion. Lewis listened with visible impatience, eager to join the other men and, at Blanche's grim conclusion to their shared couplet, he dropped her hand in frustration and stormed offstage. Alone, Blanche broke into plaintive song – the first instance of solo singing in a show studded with musical interludes – that transformed seamlessly into battle music. In a partial fulfilment of her vision of warring armies who 'whirl asunder and dismember me', the stage flooded with soldiers who swirled around the static Blanche, until at last she wandered offstage, alone. In this staging, Blanche was rendered even more powerless than in

[8] Clare Brennan, 'King John Review: A Stunning Pageant', *The Guardian*, 3 May 2015. Available at: www.theguardian.com/stage/2015/may/03/king-john-review-james-dacre-royal-derngate-shakespeares-globe.

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the text, begging to avoid a situation that was already underway. It marginalised her from the heart of the debate, rendering her public declaration instead a private plea and reducing her visual similarity to the disruptive Constance.

But in contrast to the disempowerment created by her isolation from the rest of the scene, her stillness and moment of solo song granted Blanche full possession of the stage for several moments, demanding attention to and consideration of the difficulty of her position. Her immoveable presence in the midst of battle suggested an enduring personal resistance – even if, ultimately, she was forced to leave the stage. The text supports this interpretation. Though critics and the onstage onlookers read Blanche's ability to be silenced as surrender, Shakespeare takes pains to emphasise that she has done everything within her power to change the outcome of the scene. Despite mirroring Constance's language and gestures – both end up kneeling to Lewis – she simply lacks Constance's ability to command attention.

Like Constance, Blanche also represents the unintended consequences of political decisions made by those in power over those who have none. Blanche's position does not seem to be on anyone's mind during the negotiation, but her 'metaphorical dismemberment' happens anyway, and she is left alone – literally, for Dacre – to deal with the private aftermath. Janette Dillon suggests that female characters often serve this role, 'to allow, even compel, the audience to consider the implications of the decisions and actions taken in more plot-driven scenes'.[9] But Blanche, who only ever appears in such 'plot-driven scenes', is not just an emissary from another, less plot-centred dramatic world. Both the King of France's betrayal of Constance and John and Lewis's betrayal of Blanche have unintended consequences far beyond the women's personal hurt and confusion: Prince Arthur's capture and death and Lewis's invasion of England in Blanche's name both stem directly from this moment. Ignoring the warnings of female characters proves to be, in short, a dangerous mistake. The moment is not just Shakespeare's uncritical replication of patriarchal governing structures, but a hint at these kings' failures as leaders. Conflating lack of success with lack of effort erases an important form of intervention for both Blanche and Constance, ironically re-enacting in criticism the marginalisation and erasure that they undergo onstage – and, thus, like the leaders who ignore them, overlooking the potential political import of their warnings.

[9] Dillon, p. 69.

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Lady Percy plays a similar role in *1 Henry IV*, highlighting the weakness of her male relations' political cause. She attempts to appeal to her husband Hotspur's good sense and, like Blanche, prevent him from going to war. Both Dillon and David M. Bergeron highlight Lady Percy's effectiveness in *2 Henry IV*, where she successfully persuades her father-in-law not to join an upcoming battle.[10] But they are less attentive to her matching intervention in *Part 1*, a scene that Dillon largely brushes aside as a picture of 'the small details and activities of domestic life' and Bergeron does not mention at all.[11] As with Blanche, Lady Percy's intervention in *1 Henry IV* seems to be ignored because she fails. Unlike the scene between Brutus and Portia in *Julius Caesar* that so distinctly mirrors Hotspur and Lady Percy's, Hotspur does not ultimately trust his wife to know his business.[12] Though she never demands it as directly as Portia, Lady Percy unquestionably seeks political information and a disruption to her husband's political plans: 'I fear my brother Mortimer doth stir / About his title and hath sent for you / To line his enterprise; but if you go –' (2.3.78–80). But Hotspur will not let her finish the question, much less provide an answer to it. Whether Hotspur's teasing of his wife is read as affectionate or cruel, his ducking the question hints at the shakiness of the rebels' party, a fundamental state of uncertainty and mistrust that even extends to a woman who is wife to one conspirator and sister to another. Hotspur's evasive answers are reminders of the blend of personal and political weaknesses that will lead to his downfall: his hot temper and his ill-advised cause. Within this very scene, we see him give too much information to an unsteady ally – as revealed in the letter he begins the scene reading – and too little to someone he ought to trust.

In his 2010 production for Shakespeare's Globe, director Dominic Dromgoole expressed the same visual impulse as Dacre's, and left Lady Percy momentarily alone onstage after her husband's exit, her silent, lingering reaction accompanied by transitional music. Like Dacre, Dromgoole's production sought a sense of aesthetic harmony between space and players, with the company dressed in early modern clothing that looked homespun and worn-in, unlike the pristine and ornate

[10] Ibid., p. 73; David M. Bergeron, 'Shakespeare Makes History: *2 Henry IV*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 31 (1991), 231–245, p. 235.

[11] Dillon, p. 75.

[12] Laurie E. Maguire, '"Household Kates": Chez Petruchio, Percy, and Plantagenet', in *Gloriana's Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance,* ed by S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 129–165, p. 143. See Chapter 3 for further discussion of these parallel scenes.

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costumes that sometimes typify the company's 'original practices' productions. The muted colours of the tavern-dwellers complemented the hues of the Globe stage itself, while the soldiers' surcoats echoed the family crests and coats of arms that were hung throughout the audience galleries, bringing the entire space into visual cohesion. Also like Dacre, Dromgoole frequently smoothed scenic transitions with the use of traditional English and Welsh folk songs. Dromgoole returned repeatedly throughout both parts of *Henry IV* to the image of a female character – usually Lady Percy – left to linger as the music and the action of the play proceeded without her, as if against her will. This recurring directorial urge to leverage the female characters' silence more explicitly, and to enhance their unspoken emotional state with music, suggests a recognition not only that Shakespeare has left something unsaid for these characters, but that the scenes themselves are enhanced by actively drawing the audience's attention to this fact. Act 2, scene 3 ends with Hotspur asking Lady Percy if his plan for her to follow him without being told where or why contents her, and she replies that 'It must, of force' (2.3.113). This resentful surrender, given particular weight as the last line of the scene, could serve as a theme for all of the female characters discussed in this chapter: they are 'content' to agree because they have no other choice.

The device of using female characters as a tactical and moral barometer for men appears more starkly in *Edmund Ironside*, an anonymous Elizabethan play that has occasionally been attributed to Shakespeare, but never with lasting or widespread acceptance. *Edmund Ironside* exists only in manuscript, and tells the story of the future King Edmund II's fight for the throne of England against the Danish Canutus (now commonly known as King Cnut). In the fifth act of the play, Edmund and Canutus prepare to face each other in single combat. Each is accompanied by a woman: Canutus by his English wife Egina, and Edmund by his stepmother Emma, the widow of Ethelred, the previous king. In parallel exchanges, each tries to persuade the man she follows not to engage in combat. Canutus's retorts to Egina are derisive and cruelly comic: 'Will you fight for me? / Give her my sword and shield . . . I had rather fight with him than scold with you' (5.2.181, 207). Edmund, in contrast, is far more respectful of Emma's pleas, though also ultimately dismissive: '[M]adam be content and you shall see / The God in whom I trust will succour me' (5.2.200–1). Coming immediately before they engage in ritualised combat, their treatment of their female followers becomes the combatants' final ethical test. Though both reject the women's counsel to avoid the fight, the terms in which this rejection takes place are framed as

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morally important: Canutus mocks and ignores Egina, where Edmund listens to and acknowledges Emma's argument. Unlike Blanche and Lady Percy, Emma and Egina's protestations are presented in terms that emphasise their importance despite their ineffectiveness.

Edmund Ironside's moral clarity provides a useful model for considering the subtler roles of Shakespeare's women. But, while Shakespeare does not underline their importance to the same extent, he gives his female characters much more time to make their case: Lady Percy has an entire scene to stage her attempted intervention, even if critics fail to recognise it as such. Blanche, too, has more stage time and text dedicated to her resistance than the lack of critical engagement with her role would suggest. In contrast to Emma and Egina's single speeches, Shakespeare leaves much longer threads of unresolved resistance, enhancing the importance of these female characters' exclusions by drawing out their failure to intervene over the course of entire scenes. Shakespeare could brush them aside in a line or two, as the author of *Edmund Ironside* does, but he chooses instead to increase the size and difficulty of these female roles by shining a light on them and their own form of resistance – a resistance that draws attention to untold histories and unfulfilled potential, the detritus of the play's overtly political actions that, as with the image of Blanche and Lady Percy alone onstage, the plays lack the words to express.

Political Marriages

Though frequently dismissed as silent, Blanche has two major speaking appearances in *King John* and arguably attempts to intervene politically in both. Her second scene, as the previous section argues, is unmistakably political in its dealings with war and alliances. Understanding her first scene as a political action, however, requires recognising that, in a history play, marriages are always political. Even the marriages that seem to be borne of love or passion – like the marriage of the Mortimers in *1 Henry IV*, or King Edward IV's lust for Elizabeth Grey and King Henry VIII's for Anne Bullen – are depicted as political decisions, with important consequences for the state. Equally politically charged, therefore, is the opposite scenario: marriages the participants attempt to refuse.

Forced or reluctant engagements recur repeatedly in Shakespeare's history plays and, frequently, the actual moment of consent to marriage by a female character is left undepicted. Once again, *Edmund Ironside* hints at the dramatic conventions potentially at work in these scenes. In the second act of the play, Egina is suddenly faced with a proposal of marriage

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from King Canutus. Egina obediently replies, 'What my dread Sov'reign, and my father wills, / I dare not, nay I will not, contradict' (2.1.49–52). Canutus suggests that they go 'straight to church', to which the bishop who is present agrees, 'if every part be pleased'. Canutus says he is, but the Bishop looks to Egina for confirmation.

> BISHOP: But what say you?
> EGINA: I say a woman's silence is consent
>
> (2.2.64–5).

The above exchange raises the possibility that an early modern audience would have read Shakespeare's unresolved proposal scenes through a perspective like Egina's: female characters' consent does not need to be literally depicted because their silence is widely understood as an acceptable substitute in theatrical terms. But when Shakespeare's political marriages are compared to those in other history plays, it becomes obvious that his female characters' habitual silence in the face of marriage is not the norm. Silence does not indicate consent for other writers, as the romantic histories discussed suggest; Egina's comment is surely ironic. In contrast, Shakespeare's deliberate, consistent elision of consent suggests that, in the political realm of the history play, a woman's frank consent may be beside the point, if not wholly impossible. The inability to refuse marriage becomes a key site of failed intervention, highlighting the potential of these female characters as political actors, and also underscoring the cracks in the patriarchal historiography that silences them – cracks through which the distance between the artificial structures of a history play and the unknowable events of history itself can be seen.

Presented suddenly with the imperative to marry Lewis to secure an alliance with France, *King John*'s Blanche is evasive and equivocal in the face of the Dauphin's recitations of the expected assertions of instant love:

> BLANCHE: My uncle's will in this respect is mine.
> If that he see aught in you that makes him like,
> That anything he sees which moves his liking,
> I can with ease translate it to my will.
> Or if you will, to speak more properly,
> I will enforce it eas'ly to my love.
> Further I will not flatter you, my lord,
> That all I see in you is worthy love
> Than this, that nothing I do see in you,
> Though churlish thoughts themselves should be your judge,
> That I can find should merit any hate (2.1.511–21).

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Her convoluted language refuses to settle into any conventional mode: though she initially speaks of needing to 'will' herself to consent, she amends 'to speak more properly' and instead calls it 'love' – but brings in the word 'enforce' to describe what she must do to arrive at this love. While it is possible to read her jumbled thoughts on Lewis's likeability – or perhaps just lack of hateability – as coy or sarcastic flirtation, the other characters' responses suggest they are also confused about what she is trying to say. John presses her to answer more clearly – 'What say you, my niece?' – and Blanche replies 'That she is bound in duty still to do / What you in wisdom still vouchsafe to say'. This cool response, reminiscent of Egina's to Canutus in *Edmund Ironside*, contrasts distinctly with the Dauphin's reply when asked in turn if he can love Blanche: 'Nay, ask me if I can refrain from love' (2.1.522–6).

Blanche's lack of enthusiasm becomes starker when compared to her resistance to war after the marriage, forming a coherent narrative of reluctant acquiescence to events over which she is incapable of exerting any control. In the end, Blanche never actually says 'yes' to marriage to the Dauphin. Shakespeare's repeated construction of similar scenes might be read as a kind of open silence: it is unclear how the female characters are meant to react, if they do at all, to the fact that these marriages move ahead without their explicit consent, and sometimes in spite of their explicit resistance. In describing open silences, McGuire reminds us that their meaning is fundamentally irretrievable: 'we cannot deduce what their actions were by studying those words of Shakespeare that have come down to us. Whatever Shakespeare's intentions (if any), history has ensured that the silences . . . are "open" for us'.[13] But these open silences accrue implied meaning by looking more closely at their repetitions across the genre, by reading them not as isolated moments, but as what Janette Dillon calls 'scenic units': '[r]epetitions and variations of particular stage images . . . crucial to Shakespeare's early history plays' that can reveal 'important patterns within a single play as well as its links with other plays in the same series'.[14] By 'the same series', Dillon generally means within the two tetralogies but, as I will demonstrate, these patterns of elided consent can be found across Shakespeare's history plays. Such repetition suggests that these scenic units are not a sexist coincidence but should instead be considered a feature of the genre under Shakespeare. They suggest a historical dramaturgy founded on the tension between history and drama, and more at odds with its source material than criticism has traditionally

[13] McGuire, p. 122. [14] Dillon, p. 5.

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allowed. The repetition of this scenic unit embeds throughout the history plays female characters who are caught in the friction between history and fiction, generating a sense of the history play as a genre that does not simply seek to adapt the traditional modes of historical narrative, but operates in contention with them.

The scenic unit in question here is a scene in which a woman in a history play is offered marriage and, though she never openly consents, the play proceeds as if she has. A particularly clear example is that of Lady Grey, the future Queen Elizabeth, in *3 Henry VI*. When she comes before the newly crowned King Edward IV to plead for restitution of her dead husband's seized lands, Edward's brothers Clarence and Gloucester believe they understand exactly what kind of scene they are about to observe: 'I see the lady hath a thing to grant / Before the King will grant her humble suit' (3.2.12–3). But Lady Grey repeatedly defies the attempts of Edward and his brothers to 'fit her into a known narrative – that of the lusty widow able and willing to become the mistress of a notoriously lusty king'.[15] Gloucester and Clarence's conversation in asides make it impossible for Elizabeth to fully control the narrative the brothers are constructing for the audience, but she resists Edward's direct insinuations at every turn. She finally forces him to speak his intentions outright ('To tell thee plain, I aim to lie with thee' [3.2.69]) at which point she flatly rejects them: 'To tell thee plain, I had rather lie in prison' (3.2.70). The exchange ends awkwardly; her last line is to insist that '"Twill grieve your grace my sons should call you father', an objection Edward brushes aside with a speech that concludes with the command, 'Answer no more, for thou shalt be my queen' (3.2.106). When next we see her, she is his queen indeed (4.1.9). The moment in which she actually agrees to this goes undepicted and undescribed. There are many ways to imagine filling the open silence of her non-consent, for she remains onstage, not speaking, for almost twenty lines after Edward makes his declaration and before he directs her to leave with him.

In Shakespeare's Globe's 2019 production of the play, directed by Sean Holmes, the brothers' subsequent debate over the now-concluded marriage served as a potent reminder of the power of the silent female presence onstage. Only speaking once in the scene but present throughout, Elizabeth's place as subject of conversation, spoken about and spoken over

[15] Kavita Mudan Finn, *The Last Plantagenet Consorts: Gender, Genre, and Historiography, 1440–1627* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 161.

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without the ability to reply, underlined a sense of continuity from her so-called wooing scene. It created an embedded visual reminder that in her last scene, and as far as we have heard since, Lady Gray wanted this marriage as little as Edward's brothers did. In Holmes' production, her status as the only woman onstage made her an eye-catching presence. Both Edward and Gloucester were also played by women, reflective of the flexible approach to gender in casting throughout the production, but rather than smoothing over the differences in status between the characters, the casting in fact emphasised how Elizabeth was differentiated from the play's male characters by way of her costume and physicality. The production's costume design set contemporary fashions in a heightened, exaggerated register, including the entire company stripping down to shorts and numbered football tops, colour-coded in red and white and labelled with their names, to prepare for battle. After their victory, the three York brothers remained in these outfits, soiled by fighting in the onstage dirt, until the final scene of the play. So, despite being one of three female actors onstage, Elizabeth was rendered unavoidably conspicuous as the sole female character by her well-tailored, spotless pencil skirt and matching blazer, in contrast to the brothers' grimy sports kit. This was a case of offstage necessity dictating onstage meaning: because the textured material of Elizabeth's costume was extremely difficult to wash, the actor was forced to move extremely carefully through the space to avoid being dirtied both by the stage itself, and by contact with other actors who had dirt on their clothes. Elizabeth not only did not enter the grubby world of battle inhabited by her husband and brothers-in-law, she *could* not. In Act 4, scene 1, as Clarence and Gloucester discuss their dislike of Elizabeth to her face, the starkness of her visual difference in this production highlighted that it was not the playwright who was ignoring her presence, but the characters. This tension within the scene does not show as clearly on the page but becomes obvious when embodied onstage. In this scene, Elizabeth is briefly able to speak for herself, articulating her distress at Gloucester and Clarence's snubs before her husband hushes her; in the scene of her betrothal, our only hint at her feelings is Gloucester's description of her face after the deed is done: 'The widow likes it not, for she looks very sad' (3.2.110).

As Kavita Mudan Finn notes, while watching his brother in *3 Henry VI*, Gloucester thinks he can guess what is about to happen: the conventional courtship of a willing woman by a lascivious king.[16] His certainty raises

[16] Ibid., p. 16.

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once again the possibility that Egina's assessment of the pointlessness of verbal consent is accurate: explicit consent can be replaced with theatrical convention, and thus Lady Grey does not need to openly say *yes* because the audience, like Gloucester, recognises from the generic and poetic framework that she certainly will. But there is a different theatrical precedent to draw upon when considering questions of consent: the romantic histories discussed in Chapter 1. In these plays, when a king attempts and fails to seduce an uninterested or unavailable woman, often a commoner, efforts like King Edward's are roundly and explicitly denied. This generic pattern reinforces the fact that absence of female consent to marriage in most of Shakespeare's history plays is deliberate.

In his own foray into the genre of romantic history, *Edward III*, Shakespeare demonstrates that he is quite capable of turning a woman's polite resistance into explicit rejection. The Countess of Salisbury is initially playful but unequivocal that sleeping with King Edward is not on the table: 'But that your lips were sacred, my lord, / You would profane the holy name of love. / That love you offer me you cannot give, / For Caesar owes that tribute to his queen; / The love you beg of me I cannot give, / For Sara owes that duty to her lord' (2.415–20). The Countess and Lady Grey draw upon the same rhetorical tricks to walk the fine line of obedience and dissent that their situation demands, the two Edwards extracting a promise from each to give what he asks for, and each responding that she will, 'except I cannot do it' (*3H6* 3.2.47) or 'As near, my liege, as all my woman's power / Can pawn itself to buy thy remedy' (*E3* 2.370–1). Each then attempts to equivocate her way out of acceptance: told that her task is 'but to love a king', Lady Grey replies, 'That's soon performed because I am a subject'. Edward protests, 'But stay thee, 'tis the fruits of love I mean' and Lady Grey again agrees, 'The fruits of love I mean, my loving liege ... My love till death, my humble thanks, my prayers, / That love which virtue begs and virtue grants' (*3H6* 3.2.53–63). The Countess deploys the same strategy, promising 'That power of love that I have power to give / Thou hast, with all devout obedience' (*E3* 2.383–5).

The striking similarities between the two exchanges drive home Dillon's concept of the scenic unit, and furthermore suggest the kind of cross-play repetitions that allowed early modern companies to perform so many new plays in such a short period of time almost entirely without rehearsal. But the two scenes' structural and linguistic parallels make their ultimate divergence all the more noticeable, especially given that Shakespeare is

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now generally agreed to have written both exchanges.[17] Drawing upon the same tropes to set up a justified rejection in one instance and an unspoken acceptance in another complicates any assumption that Shakespeare is relying on theatrical convention to telegraph Elizabeth's forthcoming agreement. Indeed, the historical comedy genre that Lady Grey's careful evasions directly recall is one that firmly insists that even a king must obtain explicit romantic consent. Edward IV, judged by Shakespeare's own structural standards, does not.

In considering how to fill the silence that follows the Duke's proposal to Isabella in *Measure for Measure*, Pascale Aebischer proposes that it might be intentionally left open to be filled by the confusion of the boy actor playing Isabella: it seems obvious that the Duke is prompting the boy to speak, but he has no scripted lines to say. Shakespeare, therefore, could have been deliberately playing on the conditions of performance to create his desired effect of confusion and tension.[18] The same might be true in the case of Lady Grey and Edward, with the boy playing Elizabeth awkwardly uncertain as to how to respond to a command that contradicts everything he has said in the scene so far, but to which he is not granted lines to reply. However, as Aebischer goes on to note, because these scenes contain apprentice boy players, they were likely to have been rehearsed for the benefit of these less-experienced actors, suggesting that there was indeed once some planned, non-verbal response in these moments that is now lost. But given the preoccupation of Shakespeare's own canon with the illegibility of women, particularly regarding their chastity and sexual availability, he was plainly well aware of the narrative instability that could result from resting the full weight of a female character's meaning on her physical responses, which are endlessly vulnerable to being misread and misreported – as even these paragraphs of speculation demonstrate. That the reader, actor, and even audience member must engage imaginatively with Lady Grey's potential reactions highlights the acts of creative decision-making that underpin the plays' historiography. The real Lady Gray's thoughts and feelings are as unknown and unknowable as Shakespeare's. Thus, this gap in the script mirrors existing gaps in the historical record, drawing attention to the fact that the very things theatre

[17] Proudfoot and Bennett, p. 69; Santiago Segarra, Mark Eisen, Gabriel Egan and Alejandro Ribeiro, 'Attributing the Authorship of the Henry VI Plays by Word Adjacency,' *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 67 (2016), 232–56, p. 246.

[18] Pascale Aebischer, 'Silence, Rape and Politics in *Measure for Measure*: Close Readings in Theatre History', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 26 (2008), 1–23, p. 6.

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is most concerned with – the thoughts and feelings of individual people – are precisely what often go unrecorded by historians.

Characters themselves sometimes engage in the imaginative processes these gaps demand of audiences and readers, using ironic or metatheatrical awareness of their own circumstances to draw attention to the degree to which historical imperative can override individual will in a fiction based on history. The scenic unit in which Elizabeth Gray is introduced recurs in *Richard III* in slightly different circumstances, as Richard attempts to persuade her to woo her daughter on his behalf. Unlike Margaret of Anjou, whose four depictions are consistently read as forming a cohesive single character, Kavita Mudan Finn may be the only scholar to approach Elizabeth as a character with a cumulative identity across multiple plays.[19] The case of Edward's proposal, however, demonstrates the limitations of seeking a naturalistic emotional continuity across early modern plays. Elizabeth insists in *Richard III* that she loves her King Edward (2.2.76), while in *3 Henry VI* her feelings for him are framed much more practically as fear of what will happen to her, her family, and her unborn child if Edward should lose the war (4.4). However, where the continuity of personality and opinion that contemporary readers expect is absent, there is continuity in the literary terms Elizabeth draws upon in the recurring scenic units in which she is placed across the two plays. As Mudan Finn illustrates, Elizabeth's relationship with irony and misrepresentation remains consistent: her 'carefully equivocal language' when verbally sparring with Edward about their potential marriage returns when she faces down Richard in *Richard III*.[20] Indeed, in that climactic exchange, Richard's inability to accurately read Elizabeth's intentions becomes a key factor in his downfall, as he departs from their conversation thinking he has won the '[r]elenting fool, and shallow, changing woman' (4.4.350) to his side, while she leaves to immediately contract a marriage between her daughter and Richard's rival for the throne, Richmond (4.5.17–8).

Reading Elizabeth and Richard's dramaturgical positions in relation to one another as coherent across the two plays suggests Richard might recognise an echo of his brother's courtship in his own attempt to woo Elizabeth to his cause, granting him a metatheatrical knowledge of the scenic unit they are enacting. Richard bears a distinct awareness of his relationship to theatrical precedents, including 'acknowledg[ing] his kinship' with the traditional Vice figure.[21] He is thus a character particularly poised to act upon his consciousness of repeated scenic units: having

[19] Mudan Finn, pp. 145–172. [20] Ibid., p. 161. [21] Jowett, *Richard III*, p. 31.

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watched Elizabeth's resolve crumble despite consistent resistance once, Richard thinks he can recognise her doing so once more – only in this instance, he is wrong. Or perhaps it is Elizabeth herself who is manipulating Richard's ability to see dramaturgically: the appearance of enacting the scenic unit of the helplessly relenting widow, one she knows Richard will recognise either as a dramatic set-piece or from their shared past, is what allows her to lull him into the false security that she is no longer a political threat. Scholars frequently echo Richard's assessment of Elizabeth's changeability, suggesting perhaps she departs the scene intending to follow Richard's orders, but is persuaded once again by Richmond, offstage. But comparing these mirrored scenes in fact highlights the ambiguity of Elizabeth's consent in both instances.

Earlier in the same play, Lady Anne struggles to understand her own motives for consenting to marry Richard. Though she insists that 'To take is not to give' (1.2.188) when Richard places a ring on her finger, by Act 4, she has evidently married him – though it is entirely unclear when exactly this marriage takes place, much less how. The disbelief Richard expresses in his soliloquy immediately following their conversation is echoed by Anne herself when she recalls their strange courtship: 'When scarce the blood was well washed from [Richard's] hands / Which issued from my other angel-husband / And that dead saint which then I, weeping, followed . . . Even in so short a space, my woman's heart / Grossly grew captive to his honey words' (4.1.63–75). Her derision at her own actions and her 'gross' captivity emphasise the non-sensicality of her capitulation, even from her own point of view, and draws attention to the fact that we never see the exact terms or context of her ultimate consent to marry Richard. We are left to see the marriage as a natural consequence of Anne and Richard's conversation – a progression that both of them view as unbelievable and ridiculous. This sense of a missed step is present once more in the courtship of Anne Bullen (or Boleyn) in *Henry VIII*. In her first extended scene of dialogue, Anne insists that 'By my troth and maidenhead, / I would not be a queen' (2.3.23–4). The Old Lady, her companion, is teasingly sceptical of these protestations, the voice of the audience's awareness of the situation's dramatic irony, but Anne remains steadfast: 'I swear again, I would not be a queen / For all the world' (2.3.45–6). But when next we see Anne, she is processing to her own coronation (4.1.36SD). As with Lady Anne and Lady Grey, the transition from resistance to consent goes pointedly undepicted.

In repeated scenes of consensual confusion across three plays, particularly striking when set in contrast to the clarity of the Countess's rejection

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in *Edward III*, Shakespeare suggests that the moment of saying *yes* is beside the point. Shakespeare could contrive romantic scenes that offer emotional or even just intellectual logic for these marriages, as he does in *3 Henry VI*'s brief interlude with the French princess Bona. Initially mirroring Blanche's equivocal language of enforced agreement when presented with a royal marriage, Bona then speaks for herself: 'Your grant or your denial shall be mine: / Yet I confess that often ere this day, / When I have heard your king's desert recounted, / Mine ear hath tempted judgment to desire' (3.3.130–3). Shakespeare is capable of providing such language for Lady Grey or either Anne, but he does not. Instead he leaves gaps that suggest that the action itself is being propelled by forces that override individual human will, and over which individuals – or at least individual women – lack control.

For readers today, the case of Anne Bullen, whose story is very well known, illustrates this point particularly well. The Old Lady's teasing emphasises our foreknowledge of what will happen between Anne and Henry VIII. This awareness that Anne's reluctance will ultimately, somehow, give way to acceptance softens the distance between her onstage *no* and her unseen *yes*, rendering her initial protestations, in a certain sense, irrelevant. This particular form of powerlessness recalls Benjamin Griffin's definition of the history play as a genre that 'accentuates and exploits its "embeddedness" in the continuum of a known and familiar history'.[22] For Griffin, a history play is defined by its sense of all that came before and will come after, and exists not in spite of, but intimately concerned with the fact that the audience may well already know what is to come. In repeatedly jumping ahead from scenes of resistance to marriage and leaving consent unspoken, Shakespeare too plays upon this sense of background knowledge, using it to draw attention to the historical framework that constrains his female characters to submit to actions that they spend all of their dialogue resisting.

This sense that individual characters do not control the outcome of these exchanges is made still more visible when historical female characters are given a chance to consent, but do so in terms that emphasise the meaninglessness of the gesture. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who frame political marriages in resolutely romantic terms, Shakespeare draws attention to the fact that these characters' consent comes in circumstances where they, like Lady Percy, 'must, of force' agree. In her reading of Shakespeare's poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, Melissa E. Sanchez finds 'a

[22] Griffin, p. 74.

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cultural logic that so blurs ideas of female sexual activity and passivity that "no" and "yes" cease to have meaning as rhetorical acts'.[23] This logic seems to reappear in the history plays, where it is reinforced less by cultural norms (though they, too, contribute to the women's docile consent) than by political forces within the text, and historical forces outside of it. For example, the courtship of Princess Catherine Valois by Henry V, perhaps the most famous wooing scene in the history plays, reflects its political circumstances at every turn, catching Catherine in a double-bind of pre-determined political and historical decisions that undermine the character's illusion of agency.

Recent scholarship and performances alike have shifted to a darker view of a scene long viewed as romantic, including a 2018 production by New York's Public Theatre that had Henry physically threaten Catherine, at one point closing his hands around her throat. The production, designed to tour New York City libraries, employed a deliberately stripped-down and easily portable aesthetic, with actors dressed primarily in black base costumes that could be accessorised with removable pieces, colour-coded red for the English and blue for the French. While complementing the Chorus's opening reminder that the audience must assist the storytelling with their imaginations, it also eroded any sense of a natural division between English and French. Some divides remained, however. Though Alexis Soloski of *The New York Times* asserted in her review that the casting of actress Zenzi Williams as Henry meant that 'gender doesn't seem to matter' in the production, Soloski described Henry's 'violent and abusive' treatment of Catherine as derived from his 'battle-born authority', thus characterising his abuse as the intrusion of war into a space it should not enter, a violation of the codes of conduct between (military) man and (domestic) woman – or, perhaps, if gender truly did not matter, simply between soldier and civilian.[24] This sense that Henry's courtship of Catherine is, symbolically, a culmination of his military conquest has been noted by critics of the text as well. Katherine Eggert reads Catherine Valois as 'embody[ing] what Henry has come to France to achieve: not just a feminine France, but France in the person of a female. And as sweetly amusing as her "language lesson" scene may be, it contains extraordinarily

[23] Melissa E. Sanchez, *Erotic Subjects: The Sexuality of Politics in Early Modern English Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 98.

[24] Alexis Soloski, 'Review: Does Power Corrupt in *Henry V*?', *New York Times,* 27 April 2018, available at: www.nytimes.com/2018/04/27/theater/henry-v-review-public-theater-mobile-unit.html.

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dark hints of how Henry's conquest of her will stand in for a purely military rape of France'.[25]

That Henry's courtship of Catherine is wooing in name only is made explicit before their conversation begins. As the King of France departs to discuss Henry's peace terms, Henry asks that he be left alone with Catherine, for 'She is our capital demand, comprised / Within the forerank of our articles' (5.2.96–7). After their conversation, the King of France re-enters to offer his agreement to the peace terms, terms that include '[h]is daughter first' (5.2.319). The marriage is all but agreed before Catherine and Henry are ever left alone to discuss it. In fact, Catherine has been on the table as part of a peace settlement since the Chorus's introduction to act 3. As Henry makes for Harfleur, he does so in spite of the fact that 'the King doth offer him / Catherine his daughter' as part of a potential treaty (3.0.29–30), an offer Catherine seems well aware of when she informs Alice that '*Il faut que j'apprenne à parler [anglais]*' (3.4.4) a few scenes later. The phrase '*il faut*' indicates a necessity or obligation; thus, Catherine states not that she wishes to learn English, but that she *must* learn English. Henry's arrival in France, and his threat of violent sexual conquest, requires it.

This seems at odds with the tone of the courtship scene itself, and its usual charm and humour in performance. While it is possible, as in the Public Theatre production described by Soloski, to highlight a sense of coercion and even violence, that is not what Henry's share of the text most strongly suggests. But even if the scene's humour resists reading Henry's wooing of Catherine as a delayed enactment of the sexual dominance and violence threatened at Harfleur immediately before her first appearance onstage, his courtship must at least be understood as a charade, a pretence of gaining consent when in fact the answer is already concluded, and all that matters is what 'shall please de roi mon père' (5.2.238).

This foregone conclusion is distinctly unlike the equivalent scenes in the anonymous *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, upon which Shakespeare seems to have modelled at least some of the structure of his *Henry IV* plays and *Henry V*. This difference highlights the intentional emphasis Shakespeare places on Catherine's constrained circumstances. After winning the battle of Agincourt, the Henry of *Famous Victories* likewise presents a letter to the King of France listing his demands, though in this case there are only two: 'that immediately Henry of England be crowned King

[25] Katherine Eggert, *Showing Like a Queen: Female Authority and Literary Experiment in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p. 87.

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of France' and 'that after the death of the said Henry, the crown remain to him and his heirs forever' (*FV* l. 1460–5). This play's Katherine (whom I will differentiate by spelling) is not part of the bargain – indeed, it does not seem to occur to this Henry that demanding a marriage is even possible, as he anxiously reflects on whether it would be plausible to woo the French princess under the circumstances (*FV* 1493–7). *Famous Victories*' Katherine offers a mirror image of Shakespeare's Catherine's equivocal deference to her absent father's will: 'If I were of my own direction, I could give you answer. But seeing I stand at my father's direction, I must first know his will' (*FV* 1530). The nature of the answer she would give if she could is revealed in an aside a few lines later: 'I may think myself the happiest in the world, that is beloved of the mighty king of England' (*FV* 1540). In Catherine's case (and Blanche's, discussed in the first section of this chapter), the necessity to submit to the will of another is used as a means to avoid revealing her own feelings, an evasiveness that implies those feelings are negative; Katherine is likewise evasive, but the writer in this instance makes sure the audience is not left in any doubt about her true affections.

This instant romance between Katherine and Henry may strike the modern reader as laughably implausible, no less an elision of convincing consent than Shakespeare's, but it is much more clearly the stuff of accepted theatrical convention than Shakespeare's silences. Such sudden love is a staple of the romantic histories, a genre in which the symbolic use of unwilling potential romantic partners makes explicit acceptance of marriage essential. In Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, for example, Princess Elinor declares that she admired Edward at the sight of his portrait and happily journeyed to England to meet him (4.21–30), and that 'I lik'd thee 'fore I saw thee; now I love' (9.193). Elinor must consent: history demands it, and the negotiations for the marriage have taken place before the play begins. But Greene goes out of his way to frame her marriage with Edward as one she has partially chosen, and is happy to undertake.

Shakespeare, too, draws upon such established conventions of instant love to frame Henry's wooing of Catherine as an earnest courtship – and yet, Shakespeare places this convention within a framework that, unlike Greene or the anonymous author of *Famous Victories*, repeatedly separates the question of love and the question of consent to marriage. He does this first by presenting Catherine's marriage as an explicit bargaining chip within the story, and then by drawing repeated attention to its broader historical framework through the Chorus's reminders that even

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apparent suspense is in service of a foregone conclusion. Catherine herself

> forces historical awareness upon the audience … When Henry asks her what to him no doubt seems a rhetorical question, whether they shall 'compound a boy, half French, half English, that shall go to Constantinople and take the Turk by the beard', she answers, with all the knowledge of a woman who has already seen Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays [where matters do not go nearly so triumphantly for their son]: 'I do not know dat'.[26]

This historical awareness undermines the 'future … Henry believes he is forging', as Eggert writes, but it also undermines Catherine's sceptical resistance to the match.[27] Even if her marriage had not already been concluded by treaty, it has been concluded by history.

But what is to be made of the fact that the courtship scene is often so charming in performance? While the Public Theatre's production let Henry's battlefield violence spill over into peacetime, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's 2018 production, directed by Rosa Joshi, presented a Henry who was emotionally drained by the war he had perpetrated, breaking into exhausted sobs at the news of their victory at Agincourt. His courtship of Catherine seemed, therefore, to be an active effort to move forward by a different means: not a continuation of his rhetoric of sexual violence, but a determined break from it. Much like the Public Theatre's production that same year, a small company blurred the lines between English and French by switching rapidly between roles and allegiances, enabled in this case by extremely clever reversible costumes that allowed the actors to change sides instantly, onstage. In this production, said fluidity created a sense of the war's omnipresence, with even Catherine visually involved through her double-casting as the Boy.

After the Boy's death, however, actor Jessica Ko could be associated more exclusively with Catherine's position outside of the battle, representing an opportunity for Henry to move into a new rhetorical and tonal space. Ko's Catherine was proud of her own efforts to speak English, and her glee at Henry's bad French levelled the playing field between them, allowing for a growing flirtation that culminated in them rushing away from one another, embarrassed, when the French King and other courtiers returned to the room while they were still in an embrace. But Catherine has no dialogue to explicitly support this reading. As with Lady Grey,

[26] Ibid., pp. 94–95. [27] Ibid.

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performing her active consent depends on unrecorded and unwritten physical and verbal signs of pleasure – signs that Henry's dialogue can be read to suggest she is indeed giving, but may require cutting his bawdy exchange with the Duke of Burgundy immediately after the scene, as contemporary productions almost uniformly do. In this conversation, Henry seems to admit that he has not had as much success with Catherine as he hoped, and 'having neither the voice nor the heart of flattery about me I cannot so conjure up the spirit of love in her that will appear in his true likeness' (5.2.279). This does not prevent the scene from continuing on to a triumphant announcement of their union. Thus, Catherine's presence is framed by reminders that her willingness or failure to consent cannot actually change the scene's outcome.

Across the history plays, in the face of this and similar powerlessness, Shakespeare deliberately embeds quiet resistance – including Catherine's resistance to just saying *yes* – that should not be overlooked simply because it is ineffectual. Recognising these moments of failed intervention and elided consent as examples of curtailed agency rather than bland submission revives the importance of these female characters as political actors, highlighting their power and their inevitably unrealised potential to derail history. This reading challenges the conventional understanding of a history play as driven by 'the private thoughts and agendas that are the engine of recorded history',[28] instead encoding a suggestion of the reverse – that it is history that drives the private agendas – within the female characters who exist at the margins of the power these plays are commonly understood to be devoted to depicting. These characters are thus doubly disempowered, separated both from in-play political power that would enable them to meaningfully intervene in the events they seek to alter, and from the extra-textual structural power that would allow them to act as agents, not victims, of the demands of history.

Offstage

When Blanche is silenced in her efforts to forestall war, she is able to retain some power merely through her physical presence – though she vanishes on the page, onstage she remains visible. In a theatre without electric lighting rigs and focused instruments to draw focus towards or away from

[28] Michael Ullyot, 'Seneca and the Early Elizabethan History Play', in *English Historical Drama, 1500–1660: Forms Outside the Canon,* ed. by Teresa Grant and Barbara Ravelhofer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 98–124, p. 114.

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the performers of the director's choosing, this opens up the potential for her mere presence to act as a disruptive and distracting reminder for some audience members. As argued in the previous section, this potential for subjective, individual engagement can be extremely powerful, and is a tool specifically permitted by live performance that Shakespeare deliberately employs. In the productions of *King John* and *1 Henry IV* discussed at the beginning of this chapter, directors James Dacre and Dominic Dromgoole leveraged this potential by having female characters linger in silence after the male characters had cleared the stage, deliberately drawing their silent, ambiguous and flexibly interpretable presence from the margin of the scenes into the centre of the stage once the scenes' spoken dialogue had concluded. Dacre allowed Blanche this privilege as war began against her will, imagining her surrounded by pre-battle chaos, an unmoving anchor of futile opposition. Her dissent, both spoken and silently staged, is a notable contrast to her role in the latter stages of the play, when she is discussed as the source of her husband's right to invade England, but does not actually appear, a confirmation of her total disempowerment.

Any history play must exclude some historical figures in order to remain theatrically practical, though the exclusion of women is often conspicuous: Henry IV, for example, has four sons and yet never mentions a wife. In other plays, the absence of key female characters is even more strongly emphasised by frequent discussion of women we never see. *Richard III* offers perhaps the most famous examples of such pointed absences, making repeated reference to Mistress Shore, the lover of both King Edward IV and the Duke of Hastings, and to Princess Elizabeth of York, whose failure to ever appear onstage herself is particularly starkly underlined when Richard III woos her mother on her behalf. Such figures are both difficult to discuss in critical terms – there are any number of practical reasons why a given female character may or may not have been included, including a dearth of boy actors to play them, which makes it difficult to draw the line between discussing thematic implications for exclusion and just veering into imaginative speculation about a play that could have been – and understandably appealing from the perspective of a theatre artist. The addition of one or both of Princess Elizabeth and Mistress Shore to productions of *Richard III* is a tradition with a long history: Laurence Olivier's 1955 film adaptation, for example, includes Mistress Shore, while Richard Loncraine's 1995 version features Princess Elizabeth. Barry Kyle's production of the play at Shakespeare's Globe in 2003 included both characters, and the combination of the inclusion of these unspeaking parts and the production's all-female cast offers a useful case study for visualising

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the presence of female roles Shakespeare did not intend for the audience to see, as well as the potential limitations of using casting to compensate for an absence of female characters. The silence of the unwritten character and these dual modern efforts to fill that silence – either with extra-textual embodiment or by making space for women within male roles instead – concretise the thematic position of the unseen female character as a dramaturgical complement to its onstage counterparts.

On one level, Kyle's entire production was an effort to restore invisible female presence to the stage. *Richard III* was presented as part of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre's first 'original practices' season, with the cast made up entirely of women, led by Kathryn Hunter as Richard. It was set up as a mirror to the all-male company performing in the other half of the repertory.[29] The addition of actors to embody the absent Mistress Shore and Princess Elizabeth functioned to both enhance and complicate the implication that an all-female company was a sufficient means of allowing women to reclaim a place in Shakespeare and on the Globe stage. Elizabeth Klett discusses this redressing/'re-dressing' in terms of that season's original practices costuming, the company's term for the use of period-accurate clothing constructed with materials and methods authentic to the sixteenth century. As the deployment of an all-female company in this original practices season suggests, in the context of Shakespeare's Globe as a company, the phrase does not necessarily refer to 'originality' in any element of staging practice beyond costume and, usually, music. In *Richard III*, the elaborate period clothing created a stark visual difference between male and female, one that Klett criticises as rendering the women 'artificial', and proposes was an attempt to 'justify the casting' by 'render [ing] the actresses who played male roles more "real" by comparison [to those playing female roles]', as only female characters wore heavy Elizabethan-style cosmetics and ornate and clearly artificial wigs.[30] However, the extremity of the female characters' styling might instead be interpreted as an opportunity to even out of the balance of artifice: rather than allowing the actors playing female characters to seem 'real' in contrast to the actors playing against their gender, all of the characters were performed and viewed through a distancing layer of historical artificiality.

[29] Quoted in Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper, eds., *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 197.

[30] Elizabeth Klett, 'Re-Dressing the Balance: All-Female Shakespeare at the Globe Theatre', in *Shakespeare Re-Dressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance*, ed. by James C. Bulman (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), p. 151.

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Such visual differences were marshalled to direct thematic effect at the end of the play, when Princess Elizabeth made her appearance. As Richmond promised peace for England upon his defeat of Richard III, courtiers entered from behind to back him, led by Princess Elizabeth of York, dressed in a pink gown that dramatically contrasted the sober colours of the male characters surrounding her. She and Richmond took hands as the future King Henry VII prophesised the union of 'the white rose and the red' (5.5.19) and then exited together, holding a Tudor rose in their joined hands. Though Howard and Rackin describe Princess Elizabeth as 'subsumed in[to the play's] hegemonic discourse', with 'Elizabeth literalis[ing] the legal status of a married woman as a *femme covert*, reduced to a disembodied name, a place-marker for the genealogical authority that Richmond needs to authorize the Tudor dynasty', in Kyle's staging, the 'conjoin[ing] together' (5.5.31) that Richmond describes was actually realised, with Princess Elizabeth silently accepting her prominent half-share of the play's closing tableau.[31] The decision to embody Princess Elizabeth placed a female presence at the heart of a scene in which, textually, all are absent, and projected a future of female inclusion in Richmond's reign that made a pointed contrast to Richard's consistent efforts to exclude and deny them. Her presence likewise disrupted a simple reading of the play's all-female casting enacting a reclamation of Shakespearean history for themselves as women merely through their presence as actors; instead, Princess Elizabeth and her pink gown were visual reminders of the character's singularity. By providing a reminder that women in this play had consistently filled a unique aesthetic space, Princess Elizabeth's presence recalled the violence specifically against women that Richard had enacted, and from which Richmond deliberately turned away by openly, peacefully and apparently consensually incorporating Princess Elizabeth into his vision of a happy future, as equals, hand in hand. This note of intentionally contrasting harmony was an impression further emphasised by the double-casting of Meredith MacNeill as both Lady Anne and Princess Elizabeth, thus bookending Richard's rise and fall with MacNeill's two marriages, one violent and doomed, and one peaceful and hopeful.

Mistress Shore's presence was both more frequent and less thematically clear. Klett offers an intriguing description of a scene that was removed from the production while it was still in previews: an intimate encounter between Mistress Shore and Hastings, in which they were interrupted in

[31] Howard and Rackin, pp. 106, 116.

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their shared bed by Hastings' summons to what would eventually be his arrest and execution. Klett describes the audience's titillation at the scene and its queer overtones, and suggests that fear that these responses were distracting was why Mistress Shore was ultimately removed from the scene.[32] The alteration of this scene disrupted what was otherwise a clear pattern in the production: due to the addition of Mistress Shore, the only scenes in the first three acts of the production to feature no women at all were Clarence's murder, the execution of Rivers and Gray, the young princes' escort to the Tower, the scene in which Hastings is sentenced to death (for allegedly conspiring with Mistress Shore), and the series of scenes in which Richard and Buckingham woo the Mayor and citizens of London to accept Richard as king. Intentionally or coincidentally, because of Mistress Shore's inclusion, the only all-male scenes were also the hinges of Richard's violent ascent to power. In bed with Mistress Shore, Hastings was arrogantly confident that Richard could not harm him; when she was absent, though named as his co-conspirator, he found himself powerless in the face of Richard's deadly histrionics. The usually-invisible Mistress Shore thus served to enact in miniature the same suppression of Richard's power that the Duchess of York and Queen Elizabeth eventually demonstrate so forcefully in their final scenes, reiterating a dramaturgical connection between female characters and scepticism of Richard – and seeming to reiterate that the presence of female actors cannot serve in place of female characters when it comes to women's roles in Shakespeare's play, and his vision of history. Kyle's decision to embody the absent Princess Elizabeth and Mistress Shore ultimately served to enhance the dramaturgical power of female characters, emphasising the purpose of the existing female roles rather than generating entirely new meaning through filling in a textual absence.

Another prominent all-female production probed the limitations of its much-heralded casting by introducing another common form of silent and heavily feminised (if rarely explicitly female) character: a baby. Phyllida Lloyd's 2014 production of *Henry IV* at the Donmar Warehouse, the second in her 'Shakespeare Trilogy' of all-female productions, drew upon a baby as a means of visualising the gendered difference between the two Percy spouses in a production that otherwise largely eschewed aesthetic markers of gender difference. Co-produced with Clean Break, an organisation that works with incarcerated women, all three productions in Lloyd's trilogy were set in a women's prison. The productions explicitly

[32] Klett, p. 115ff.

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established a framing device of female prisoners performing the play by beginning each production with a procession of prisoners and featuring moments of frame-breaking interaction with their guards. But each production also suggested that the action itself had been relocated to a prison setting, as when the rebels of *Henry IV* established mutual trust by exchanging contraband sweets. Shakespeare's language was not changed, but the design and direction of *Henry IV* suggested that the play's various political factions were clashing prison gangs rather than aristocratic families and, though masculine pronouns were retained, unlike in Kyle's production, no effort was made to make the company seem obviously visually 'male'. Indeed, the actors' tight-fitting tank tops and often visible sports bras can be seen as drawing deliberate, continual attention to the apparent separation between body and pronoun; simultaneously, however, the production's refusal to engage in any kind of drag or exaggerated 'manly' body language normalised this contrast, another notable distinction from the stylised aesthetics of Kyle's *Richard III*. However, the inclusion of the Percys' baby, which appeared for the first time when Lady Percy did, carried in her arms, forced the audience to conceive of Kate and Hotspur's genders in more literal, biological terms than the play's non-specifically gendered physical and aesthetic choices had previously demanded.[33]

The baby provided a concrete reason, within this ambiguously gendered play, for Lady Percy's failure to directly participate in the battles to follow (though the actors who played Kate in the various iterations of the performance doubled, along with the rest of the company, as a soldier). By linking her political exclusion to motherhood, Lloyd marked Lady Percy's difference from her husband, and rooted that difference in a specifically feminine prop. The baby also provided a symbolic prop around which to centre Lady Percy's efforts, described in detail in the first section of this chapter, to remind Hotspur of the shared life that his impulsive decisions, taken without her input, threatened to destroy: not simply their relationship, but the responsibilities of fatherhood. In her review of the production for *London Review of Books*, Jacqueline Rose notes that between actor Sharon Rooney's frank performance and the presence of the baby, Hotspur's '[s]linking off to war [appeared] as a form of evasive action, as cringing as it [was] brave'.[34] As in Dacre and Dromgoole's

[33] It is worth noting that while this apparent disjunction between body and pronoun could and perhaps should be read as gender fluid or transgender interpretations of these characters, quotations from Walter and others make plain that this was not the production's intention; see Walter.

[34] Jacqueline Rose, 'At the Donmar', *London Review of Books*, 36.23 (2014), p. 21.

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productions described above, Lloyd turned to music to express Lady Percy's feelings in terms that Shakespeare's text as written did not allow. After the scene, Lady Percy led the ensemble in a cover of the Scottish band Glasvegas' song 'Daddy's Gone', reimagining a song written in the voice of a son to express instead the perspective of a neglected wife both warning her child what to expect, and her husband of what he stands to lose. This further established the baby as not merely a useful symbolic prop, but a character with an identity, capable of being addressed, even if only in song.

These two forms of offstage female presence – the unseen (or even, in the case of the Percy's baby, purely hypothetical) women who Shakespeare mentions but does not depict, and the female actors who are excluded from the plays by a dearth of roles to play – are brought onstage for a range of purposes and with varying levels of success in contemporary performance.[35] In the two productions discussed here, the harmonious integration of unwritten characters reflects an understanding – perhaps not entirely consciously – of how these silenced roles operate thematically, both in themselves and in relation to other female characters in the play. The Percys' baby embodies the feminised, home-based responsibility that Hotspur rejects and Kate represents – responsibilities that are not limited, as Hotspur dismissively puts it, to women who 'play with mammets and . . . tilt with lips' (2.3.88), but upon which future generations, and his own legacy, depend. Lloyd's decision to invent and include the Percys' baby thus literalises the scene's existing themes, giving Hotspur's spoken rejection of Kate's bed – and thus of the potential for procreation and a shared future – a physical form, an actual child from whom to turn away. Mistress Shore and Princess Elizabeth embody the power of resistance and scepticism afforded to women throughout *Richard III* but limited, in the play's original structure, only to a relatively small number of scenes. Kyle's inclusion of both characters in the flesh expands the reach of the female characters as a thematic collective, clarifying the nature of their power to quell Richard's abuses, and emphasising that it is their absence that permits his tyranny – and their re-entry into a position of political power, embodied by Princess Elizabeth, that confirms its end.

[35] See Hailey Bachrach, 'Shakespeare's Feminist History Plays: The Case of *Henry V* and *Queen Margaret*', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 37.4 (2019), 491–510 for my own discussion of a production of *Henry V* which sought to expand the play's female presence by conflating the characters of Princess Catherine and the Dauphin.

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Both productions, despite choosing very different aesthetic techniques for defining the gender presentation of their all-female companies, acknowledge through these added characters the distinction between an increased presence for women in performing histories and an increased presence within the histories themselves. Neither the productions' desire to strengthen female voices within the plays nor the dramaturgical roles of female characters can be fulfilled by female characters inhabiting male roles; they must be complemented, especially in Kyle's production, by increasing the number of actual female characters. The added characters reflect in turn the fact that even silenced, invisible female characters echo the dramaturgical functions of their onstage, speaking counterparts, and are most successfully embodied when they, too, are brought onstage to allow their silence to visually fill a distinct, if constrained, structural space.

The Domestic Realm

While some female characters exist at the margins of power, efforts to reintegrate absent female characters should serve as a reminder that being marginalised from political influence is not the same as being marginalised in narrative or dramaturgical terms. Discussing female characters in terms of a separation into the 'domestic' or 'private' sphere is a commonplace of criticism of the history plays. For Phyllis Rackin and Jean Howard, female characters aside from Margaret of Anjou, Joan of Arc, Constance and Eleanor are 'enclosed in domestic settings and confined to domestic roles'.[36] Dillon calls the chapter in which she discusses female characters 'Bodies and Objects in Domestic Space', a definition 'not primarily driven by location' but 'by the nature of the interaction they portray'. That is, 'highly personal interaction' or 'scenes [that] are often, strictly speaking, excessive, extraneous to need and additions to the chronicle sources . . . Very often they include women or children as a way of insisting on an alternate perspective to the predominantly male world of politics, battle, and the struggle for power'.[37] A domestic scene 'deals with the private life of the emotions and private exchanges between women'.[38] While Dillon does discuss one all-male scene (that between Hubert and Prince Arthur in *King John*), in practice, the presence of female characters seems to be the most reliable indicator of a domestic scene, for Dillon herself acknowledges that several of the scenes and characters she describes, such as Lady Percy's intercession, are in fact political.[39]

[36] Howard and Rackin, p. 137. [37] Dillon, pp. 68–69. [38] Ibid., p. 72. [39] Ibid., p. 73.

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The separation into public and private (or domestic) derives to a certain extent from a historicist perspective that seeks to contextualise female characters in terms of the actual legal status of early modern Englishwomen. Howard and Rackin, for example, draw repeatedly upon the principle of the *feme couvert*, 'a married woman . . . whose identity was legally subsumed in that of her husband'.[40] However, as Marianne Novy highlights, there is currently no scholarly consensus about the degree to which such a division between the (masculine) public sphere and the (feminine) private, domestic realm would have been recognised as fully developed in the early modern period.[41] Furthermore, insistence on this historically-based division has obscured what the plays actually do with these characters structurally, overstating the degree to which dramatic representation is fully reflective of literal social practice. It is a reminder once again of the necessity of reading these characters not as women subject to the real-world laws and social expectations of early modern England, but roles designed to operate within a theatrical framework with laws and needs of its own. By drawing the scenes traditionally cordoned off under the label of 'domestic' or 'private' into the main current of the plays' plots and themes, they, like the marriages discussed earlier, demand an expansion of our understanding of the plays' political and historiographical interests. These scenes transform a theatrical world that centralises men and marginalises women into one that uses women as a sometimes unexpected but essential source of connection and commentary, often rooted in their seemingly marginal position.

The limitations of domesticity or the private as analytical categories are made obvious in John Garrison, Kyle Pivetti, and Vanessa Rapatz's reading of Catherine in *Henry V*. They suggest that, while 'ostensibly excluded from masculine political spheres', Catherine is in fact forming a 'clandestine female community [that] emerges onstage to threaten fathers, husbands, and kings with the ambiguity of unseen and unheard collaboration'.[42] This just-offstage world of female conspiracy means that 'Henry might insist [Catherine] accept him as a husband in public, but he cannot know if she does so in private'.[43] Their sharp segregation of the public and private makes little theatrical sense: Catherine is not a human being with an offstage life, but an onstage character whose private feminine collaborations with Alice

[40] Howard and Rackin, p. 207.
[41] Marianne Novy, *Shakespeare and Feminist Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 146.
[42] John Garrison, Kyle Pivetti and Vanessa Rapatz, 'Navigating Shakespearean Representations of Female Collaboration', in *Mapping Gendered Routes and Spaces in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 251–288, p. 252.
[43] Ibid., p. 255.

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are explicitly depicted by Shakespeare as a process of surrender to the necessity that she learn English. Furthermore, there is no meaningful difference between the public and private acceptance of marriage suggested in this quotation, especially for a couple who, we are assured in the play's epilogue, do indeed have a son – though not the promising warrior Henry envisions. Garrison, Pivetti and Rapatz's analysis demonstrates, however, the logical extreme of a long history of criticism of these characters that takes their fundamental separation from the 'main' story as a given.

But this separation is neither as obvious nor as essential as its default status in criticism suggests; as Alison Thorne writes, '[w]hat might be construed as an irrelevant detour from the linear syntax of history ... reveals itself, from a different standpoint, as a door opening briefly onto areas of social history that were largely occluded by the state-centred focus of most Tudor historiography but that we have since come to value'.[44] Both of these essays use the metaphor of a door, though their differences in terminology are instructive: Thorne describes a 'door opening'; for the other trio, 'the closet door fails'.[45] Garrison, Pivetti and Rapatz assume that the starting place is a temporary failure of exclusion through which Catherine inadvertently slips, while Thorne suggests an intentional opening into a different perspective. More importantly, Garrison, Pivetti and Rapatz imagine a separate life for Catherine that somehow exists offstage, where Thorne's analysis is limited to possibilities available in events that actually occur onstage. Though my discussion of open silences highlights the imaginative potential that these silenced female characters invite, it is still essential to consider them not as human women with full, undepicted lives, but characters whose existence is limited to the time they spend in view of the audience, or offstage events described to us.

Recent criticism generally recognises the presence of the political within the apparently private space of Catherine and Henry's courtship. Jordi Coral, for example, illustrates how rape and military conquest are metaphors for one another throughout the play, a linking that culminates in Henry and Catherine's final scene.[46] Unlike Garrison, Pivetti and Rapatz's

[44] Alison Thorne, '"There Is a History in All Men's Lives": Reinventing History in *2 Henry IV*', in *Shakespeare's Histories and Counter-Histories*, ed. by Dermot Cavanagh, Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Stephen Longstaffe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 58.

[45] Garrison, Pivetti and Rapatz, p. 252.

[46] Jordi Coral, '"Maiden Walls That War Hath Never Entered": Rape and Post-Chivalric Military Culture in Shakespeare's *Henry V*', *College Literature*, 44 (2017), 404–435. See also: Eggert; Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590–1612* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Marjorie Rubright, 'Incorporating Kate: The Myth of

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exclusion-based reading, Coral's recognises that we must attend closely to what the plays are actually doing structurally and linguistically, rather than just assuming exclusion from the central narrative on the basis of the setting of the scenes and the gender of their characters. By taking the segregation of female characters into the 'domestic' as a premise, any reading that understands female characters as essential to the plays' historical dramaturgy is cut off before it can begin.

Like Coral, Molly Smith looks to language to argue for the importance of *Richard II*'s apparently domestic female characters to the play's broader themes. Critiquing the tendency of previous analyses of the play to 'equat[e] length of female presence on the stage with textual significance', she insists upon the importance of what she deems the 'mutant' and 'minor' scenes featuring female characters, often overlooked as inessential.[47] She highlights, as an example, the Duchess of Gloucester in *Richard II*, who spends her single scene unsuccessfully attempting to encourage her brother-in-law Gaunt to help avenge her husband's murder. Smith argues that 'despite the Duchess of Gloucester's marginal role in the text of the play, her concerns mould our vision of Richard as monarch, and Gaunt's famous censure of Richard draws force and legitimacy from her earlier grief'.[48] The Duchess of Gloucester's influence on Gaunt, who transforms from urging patience towards Richard into his most scathing critic, is best understood as a political intervention: an apparent failure in the moment, but one whose force is gradually felt, for, as Smith notes, Gaunt borrows the Duchess's linguistic style to condemn Richard in later scenes.

Smith sees a direct line between the Duchess of Gloucester at the beginning of the play and the Duchess of York at the end, both of whom make a plea for royal justice and receive very different responses:

> the association of these [York family] scenes with the new monarchy in place at the end of the play and with a modified ideology of kingship is hard to miss . . . Through the Duchess of York's actions, strategically placed in the concluding act and in Henry's court, Shakespeare deliberately continues and concludes an argument initiated in the opening act of the play by the Duchess of Gloucester.[49]

The two Duchesses bookend the play's central questions about the nature of kingship, and Richard and Bolingbroke's competing visions of England

Monolingualism in Shakespeare's *Henry the Fifth*', in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment*, ed. by Valerie Traub (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 468–490.

[47] Molly Smith, 'Minor Scenes and "Mutant" Conflicts in *Richard II*', in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. by Dympna Callaghan (Malden: Blackwell, 2016), 281–293.

[48] Ibid., p. 286. [49] Ibid.

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and monarchy, distilling the difference into the Duchesses' parallel pleas for justice. To dismiss these scenes as extraneous, however, is to gloss over this echo entirely.

When we cease to take as a given that female characters exist in a category of their own, even the most resolutely private characters can reveal intimate connections to the plays' broader historical dramaturgy, a connection that is sometimes dependent upon their politically marginal status. Looking again to *Richard II*, most of the Queen's stage time in the play is devoted to emphasising her marginalisation: she is left behind when Richard goes to Ireland (2.2), is the last to learn that he has been deposed (3.4), and is exiled to France in the wake of his imprisonment (5.1). But the dramatisation of her personal exclusion is essential to the play's dramaturgy and historiography in a way that characterising her presence as a domestic or private subplot obscures. Like Queen Elizabeth in *Richard III*, discussed in Chapter 1, the Queen's scenes are often used to deliver essential information for the first time. Her exclusion becomes the audience's exclusion as well, for we learn about Bolingbroke's arrival back in England, Richard's official deposition, and his sentencing to confinement in Pomfret, the castle in which he was famously killed, only when she does. Her persistent sense of melancholy foreboding might likewise ally her with an audience who partly knows what's to come, from the play's title and genre (*The Tragedy of King Richard the second* in the first surviving quarto edition, from 1597) if not from their knowledge of history.

Reading the Queen as a spectator is indeed a kind of marginalisation, but in the most practical terms, theatre cannot exist without an audience, a fact of which the self-consciously theatrical titular king is particularly aware. Scott McMillin's reading of the play suggests an essential unity between the Queen's distorted perspective on events and Richard's yearning for a new kind of self-definition, separate from the meretricious politics that defined his reign. After his deposition, Richard

> progresses toward something intractable to the theatre, something summarized by the word "unseen" in both the Queen's experience of grief and in Richard's journey towards loss, something that takes the form of being entombed, graved, walled from sight, immured. Richard is immured from the spectators of England in his final prison soliloquy, and this is only a stage on the way toward the final immuring, when his coffin is presented to the new King and to us at the same time.[50]

[50] Scott McMillin, 'Shakespeare's *Richard II*: Eyes of Sorrow, Eyes of Desire', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 35 (1984), 40–52, p. 49.

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However, even when immured from the sight of his countrymen, Richard gives his prison soliloquy – his only speech delivered without the presence of an onstage audience – to the real-world audience. Even alone, he is not unseen, again recalling the contradictory position the Queen and the audience share: able to see the unseen, yet still unable to know anything they are not directly told.

Through this positioning, the Queen transcends the category of the private, reinforcing instead the inescapable publicness of her position as watcher and watched. As Chris Fitter notes, 'theatrical vitality, generated by ludic bonding with spectators, has the potential to transform a play's meaning' based on 'the audience member's interest and attachments'.[51] The meaning, or rather many potential meanings of a scene, cannot be separated from the viewer encountering it. Susan Bennett argues 'theatre audiences bring to any performance a horizon of cultural and ideological expectations' that cannot be disregarded when considering the range of possible audience responses to a work.[52] But the Queen's presence as transformative spectator incorporates rather than excludes her marginalised perspective into the play's ideological horizon and narrative frame. She shifts the Gardeners' gossip into the scene of a tragedy – reflected in the Gardener's movement from demanding the garden be pruned and trimmed in a parody of governance at the beginning of the scene (3.4.33–4) to planning, by the end, to plant 'a bank of rue ... In the remembrance of a weeping queen' (3.4.105–7) – and thereby fundamentally alters the shape of the encounter, pulling both onstage characters and offstage audience into her worldview.

Like Shakespeare's many fickle onstage crowds, the Queen serves as a reminder that the perception of the audience transforms the meaning of the plays they watch – and, thus, in a history play, the arc and purpose of the historical lesson itself. Thomas Nashe may have famously imagined the character of Talbot 'new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators', but some of them surely laughed when Joan la Pucelle mocked his litany of lofty titles in death.[53] Ralf Hertel suggests there is an 'intrinsic openness of drama that creates engagement – one has to place oneself within the web of standpoints offered – and that turns it into a site of controversy and negotiation rather than of mere propaganda'.[54] Such

[51] Chris Fitter, *Radical Shakespeare: Politics and Stagecraft in the Early Career* (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 9.
[52] Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 165.
[53] Nashe, p. 1010.
[54] Hertel, pp. 26–27.

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openness is reflected in the Queen, whose presence, like that constituting the 'open silences' of Lady Grey and Anne Bullen, probes at the boundaries of a play's ability to control meaning. This lack of control seriously troubles conventional understandings of the didactic and patriotic purpose of a history play, as the subtly subversive voices of these female characters speak to an awareness of the fact that many audience members will see themselves not in the moral lessons of the figures in power, but in those who lack the ability to influence their actions.

Such pockets of marginalised sympathy are not limited to queens and aristocrats: Kay Stanton describes how, in the *Henry IV* plays, 'Shakespeare pauses the dramatic action registering this crucial transition in England's history to depict some aspects of the lives of . . . women who have had to involve themselves in prostitution in order to deal with the realities of social, economic, and political upheavals accompanying and consequent of civil uprising and international conquest'.[55] Stanton refers specifically to Hostess Quickly and Doll Tearsheet, but across the canon of history plays, lower-class women are described in similar terms of extraneousness to those that characterise discussions of upper-class women. Stanton's description of Shakespeare 'paus[ing] the dramatic action' clearly separates these characters from the central plot, suggesting they are not merely a detour from, but a complete arresting of the story.

Not all lower-class women are thrust to the margins of the narrative, of course: Joan la Pucelle is a notable exception in the history plays. But, as Stanton suggests, most of these characters, like their upper-class counterparts, bear the consequences of decisions beyond their control. As Paola Pugliatti writes, 'Shakespeare's commoners are not many, and they never rise, in number and in sort, above the figures of power. But they are frankly popular, and in many cases they are summoned at fateful junctions of the story, where they are allowed to have their say about the momentous events at hand'.[56] In contrast to Stanton's framing of their role as a pause in the action, Pugliatti's description illuminates the structural similarity of these lower-class characters to the aristocratic female characters discussed in this chapter so far, as similar glimpses of alternate perspectives that are not fully admitted into the plot but are essential in their marginality.

[55] Kay Stanton, *Shakespeare's 'Whores': Erotics, Politics and Poetics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 51.
[56] Paola Pugliatti, *Shakespeare the Historian* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), p. 185.

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As demonstrated by the case of Anne of Bohemia at the beginning of this chapter, female nobility and the commons are often linked implicitly or explicitly, and both often serve to critique or destabilise the smooth progress of events directed by men in power. In *Richard III*, for example, Thomas Cartelli finds that Margaret and Queen Elizabeth are joined with the citizens in being the only characters entirely unimpressed and unpersuaded by Richard's theatrics.[57] While Andy Wood points out that 'there are no woman rebels in *2 Henry VI*' and that 'this is indicative of the broader dramatic and historical treatment of rebellion in the early modern period',[58] as with the abbreviated interventions discussed in relation to Blanche and Lady Percy, this reading overlooks the extent to which Shakespeare's lower-class female characters are engaged in disrupting and questioning the political hegemony, both literally and structurally, by means less overt than armed rebellion.

Wood's comment also overlooks a pointed but complicated exception to his generalisation about woman rebels, one attributed partly to Shakespeare: Doll Williamson in *Sir Thomas More*, a play that survives only in manuscript and was likely never performed in the early modern period. A primary victim of the censor's proposed cuts, the character of Doll is one of the leading anti-immigrant rebels calmed by More, and it is she who is about to be hanged when word arrives that More has successfully pleaded for their pardon. Though her most prominent scenes are not attributed to Shakespeare, there is, as John Jowett highlights, a key Shakespearean resonance in the character. She is one of only a handful of characters in the period named Doll, each of whom is 'a feisty London citizen; in some [plays] she is potentially or actually a prostitute'.[59] One other such character is, of course, Shakespeare's Doll Tearsheet.

In Doll Williamson and her attempted rape by the foreigners she riots against (all suggested for excision by the censor, Edmund Tilney), Jowett sees a role not unlike the women of the comedic histories: 'she might have been emblematic of City, nation, or religion. Her resistance to rape might

[57] Thomas Cartelli, 'The Speaking Silence of Citizens in Shakespeare's Richard III: Hidden and Public Transcripts', in *Shakespeare and the Politics of Commoners: Digesting the New Social History*, ed. by Chris Fitter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 102–122, p. 106.

[58] Andy Wood, 'Brave Minds and Hard Hands: Work, Drama, and Social Relations in the Hungry 1590s', in *Shakespeare and the Politics of Commoners: Digesting the New Social History*, ed. by Chris Fitter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 84–100, p. 91.

[59] John Jowett, 'Introduction', in *Sir Thomas More*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 30.

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even have offered a reminder of Queen Elizabeth's opposition to threatened invasion from Spain'. But the censor's required tempering of the play's religious politics, Jowett notes, disrupts this connection.[60] Further, Tilney's demand to '[l]eave out the insurrection wholly and the cause thereof' (139) erases the specifically sexual nature of Doll's grievances against the foreigners; her attempted rape by Barde, a Lombard, opens the original first scene of the play (1.1). Doll therefore provides a very literal example of the ways in which lower-class female experience is deemed inappropriate historical material. Jowett proposes a parallel between 'More as a liminal figure in early modern England and the play of *Sir Thomas More* as a liminal text within the Shakespearean canon';[61] the same might be said of Doll Williamson. The fact that Doll's excised lines speak more of xenophobic fantasies of foreign sexual threats than the likely realities of female experience does not erase the fact that her disrupted contribution adds an important dimension to the riot's more commonly accepted economic and religious facets, and that her perspective – specifically female in its sexual aspect and articulated by Doll herself, not only as a report from her husband – is ultimately prevented from entering the canon of early modern performance and of the Shakespearean history play.

In a smaller-scale example, Pugliatti highlights the case of Simon Simpcox and his wife in *2 Henry VI* . She finds that their presence alludes anachronistically to contemporary treatment of vagrants rather than their supposedly medieval context: 'In the sources, in fact, the beggar (who is not given a name) appears an instrument of corrupted priests (indeed, his personal motivations for feigning the miracle are difficult to grasp), while Shakespeare focuses on Simpcox and his wife and makes their forgery spring from need'.[62] Specifically, it is Simpcox's Wife – a character added by Shakespeare – who introduces this economic element. Once Simpcox's deception is revealed, as she and her husband flee from the Duke of Gloucester's threats of whipping, she protests, 'Alas, sir, we did it for pure need'. Gloucester is entirely unmoved: 'Let them be whipped through every market town / Till they come to Berwick, from whence they came' (2.1.130–3). Even though the other characters do not acknowledge it, Maya Mathur notes that 'the unmasking of imposture does not disqualify the vagrants' grievances; rather, Cade and Simpcox become victims of

[60] Ibid., p. 31. [61] Ibid., p. 8. [62] Pugliatti, pp. 214–215.

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economic inequality at the very moment of their exposure'.[63] And it is not Simpcox himself, but his wife who articulates this fact, exposing an unexpected strain of cruelty in the Duke of Gloucester's virtuous persona. It is the female character, added by Shakespeare, who is the conduit for this alternate perspective.

Hostess Quickly of the *Henry IV* plays and *Henry V* is often read as performing the same revelatory role in a comic mode, accidentally letting unintended truths slip through her malapropisms as '[h]er character is both defined and undone by her absurdly original speech'.[64] This is a peculiar kind of silencing, reliant not on literally preventing or curtailing her speech, but on undermining her control over its meaning. Thorne highlights the Hostess's importance as a bearer of a localised oral history – her memories, Bulman agrees, are uniquely characterised 'by details of her material surroundings', rooting her in an anachronistic sixteenth century present even as she looks to her own past.[65] But these memories derive comedy from their double layers of meaning: what the Hostess says, and what listeners both onstage and in the audience understand. Her bawdy malapropisms and puns, of which she seems entirely unaware, deprive her of power over her own speech, silencing her by leaving the definition of her words' meaning to others. This form of silencing is echoed in a pattern Fiona McNeill finds throughout Shakespeare's canon, whereby '[p]oor women often do not get to speak for themselves, even as boy actors. They are recollected and remembered from somewhere offstage. Yet they are persistent in the minds of the characters, present in the conversation although not always participant'.[66] As with Mistress Quickly, their invisible presence is mediated through the words of others, and left to the imagination of the audience to fully define.

The darker potential of such forced redefinition was explored in Phyllida Lloyd's adaptation of both parts of *Henry IV*, the second play in her all-female Shakespeare Trilogy originally produced at the Donmar Warehouse in 2014. Zainab Hasan, who played Hostess Quickly in every iteration of the production, stripped away much of the character's comic befuddlement, presenting her instead as proud and assertive, with much of her misspeaking glossed over or cut. But in the scene designated 3.3 by the

[63] Maya Mathur, 'An Attack of the Clowns: Comedy, Vagrancy, and the Elizabethan History Play', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 7 (2007), 33–54, p. 41.
[64] James C. Bulman, '*Henry IV Parts 1 and 2*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. by Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 158–176, p. 170.
[65] Thorne, 'There Is a History', p. 58; Bulman, p. 170.
[66] Fiona McNeill, *Poor Women in Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 10.

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Oxford edition of *1 Henry IV*, the production's framing device – that female prisoners were performing the play – temporarily broke into the drama, as the actors playing Hal, Falstaff and Bardolph began taunting Hostess Quickly with sexual insults that were clearly not Shakespearean: 'Sex with you is like throwing a sausage up a street' and 'You've got a snatch like a clown's pocket', among others (quotations taken from the 2018 BBC broadcast). Breaking out of the Hostess Quickly character into her prisoner-character, an increasingly tearful Hasan finally burst out, 'Do you think that's funny? You're disgusting! We agreed that we weren't going to do this bit!' In her review of the 2014 Donmar production, Jacqueline Rose describes this as one of the play's 'most unsettling moments' and, despite its brevity, it was highlighted in several reviews.[67] In addition to crystallising the way Lloyd's adaptation engaged with its prison framing device, the moment underlines the fundamental instability of the role of Hostess Quickly. Even an attempt to depict the character as a fiery equal ultimately had to be punctured with crude and unjust reminders of her unruly sexuality, her right to fully participate in the play's history-making questioned by voices from both within and without the frame of the play, just as the textual Hostess Quickly is undermined by Hal, Falstaff, and the audience's awareness of the unintended meaning of her speech. Her continual double meanings thus mirror, in a different tone, the imaginative space generated by the contradictions between Lady Grey's speech, offstage actions and descriptions by onstage characters: the full story is told not by the text but by the audience's experience of it.

Historical Fictions

As McNeill writes in her study of poor women in early modern drama, '[t]he textual production of capitalism – that is the rise in bureaucratic record-keeping – was dependent upon creating the absence of women – pushing them to the margins of the [bureaucratic] text'. This marginalisation means that 'poor women are more often than not written out of history rather than into it'. However, McNeill argues that we too readily extend this absence from the historical record into an assumed absence from the drama, an assumption exacerbated by the fact that many poor female characters inhabit spaces between the categories of femininity –

[67] Rose. See also Gemma Miller, '*Henry IV* by Donmar Warehouse', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 33 (2015), 369–372 and Peter Kirwan, '*Henry IV* (Donmar/Illuminations) @ BBC iPlayer', *Bardathon*, available at: http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/bardathon/2018/07/19/henry-iv-donmar-illuminations-bbc-iplayer/.

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virgin, wife, widow, prostitute – that are most readily recognised by critics. But '[w]hen poor women shift [between and around categories] in the early modern drama they stage the sometimes toxic friction between legal constraints on femininity and the improvisational possibilities for poor women in the larger culture'.[68] This friction recalls that which I have described in the preceding two sections, the tension Shakespeare generates between the possibilities of self-determination that theatre's character-based nature supposedly explores and the constraints of a genre defined by its basis in known events. The 'improvisational possibilities' created by audience members' ability to read these characters on their own individual terms depend on the fact that these characters exist at the margins of the narrative and the culture, with Shakespeare unwilling or unable to conceive of a dramaturgical framework that can admit them fully.

And yet, at work here is something subtler than simply patriarchal and classist exclusion – for these characters are *not* fully excluded. Rather, through them, as Pugliatti writes,

> the mimesis of the greater, visible history crystallised in history books is rendered more varied and complex by the light which is shed on the obscure zone of invisible history ... at those moments during which the dramatist explores the unrecorded possibilities of lost truths, a sense of the individuality, peculiarity and uniqueness of the represented events emerges, so that the intuition of the peculiar and distinct is transmitted from the margins to the core of historical events.[69]

While Stuart Hampton-Reeves finds, for example, that the 'semi-historical intervention' of Jack Cade seems to suspend 'the structure of history itself',[70] Shakespeare's semi-fictional incursions into the lives of both aristocratic and lower-class female characters *are* history itself. But it is not history rooted in chronicles or documents; rather, like the open silences already discussed, this 'invisible history' must be filled in imaginatively by both playwright and spectator. Recognising this imaginative element of the history plays is essential to understanding both why these minor characters have been so insistently misread and why doing so underestimates the importance of their contributions to the plays' drama-

[68] McNeill, pp. 7, 11. [69] Pugliatti, p. 186.
[70] Stuart Hampton-Reeves, 'Kent's Best Man: Radical Chorographic Consciousness and the Identity Politics of Local History in Shakespeare's *2 Henry VI*', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 14 (2014), 63–87, p. 68.

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turgy. 'Domestic' scenes and lower class characters feel extraneous because they undermine the history play's premise of historical authenticity – a premise more highly prized now than in the early modern period, as discussed in Chapter 1. By providing, as Thorne puts it, 'a door opening briefly' into areas of history unrecorded by Tudor chroniclers, these scenes feel like digressions because they are the scenes where even the most informed reader cannot know what will happen.[71]

Situated at the margins of the action, the female characters of this chapter insistently blur the divide between history and fiction. Doll Tearsheet, Hostess Quickly, Doll Williamson, and the heroines of the romantic histories are fully fictional, but they are also reminders of the ordinary people who witnessed, accompanied, and facilitated the events of history from just behind and beyond the boundaries of the historical record. Even when it comes to female characters directly derived from the historical sources, we often assume a strict relationship to history that is not entirely clear or present in the text. The Queen of *Richard II*, for example, is frequently referred to as Isabel or Isabella in criticism, often with no acknowledgement that she is never called by that name in the play, either by characters or in stage directions. She shares some similarities with the historical Isabella: she is married to King Richard, of course, and she is French. But she diverges from history in what would likely be considered Isabella's most striking characteristic: at the time of Richard's death, Queen Isabella was nine years old. Paired with her lack of name, it seems plausible that the character was conceived not as the actual Isabella at all, but as a relatively generic Queen figure – a fictional Queen character, not a historical personage.

A similar case is that of Lady Percy, Hotspur's wife. The confusion about her first name has been well-documented: given (repeatedly) as Kate in Shakespeare's play, she was historically named Elizabeth, but chroniclers Holinshed and Hall both call her Elinor.[72] Her family tree is likewise muddled. The historical Elizabeth Percy was not the sister of the Edmund Mortimer who staked a claim to the throne, but his aunt. An Edmund, Earl of March was indeed Elizabeth's brother, but this elder Edmund was not Richard's heir. It may seem a trivial mistake, but without this connection, Hotspur's implied right to England through his wife – a connection hinted at but curiously never directly explored – disappears, changing the tenor of Hotspur's claim to a third of the country. Kate Percy, ahistorical sister to the Edmund Mortimer named as Richard's heir,

[71] Thorne, 'There Is a History', p. 58. [72] Maguire, p. 131.

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transforms Hotspur's position in relation to King Henry and, thus, his role in the rebellion. Her fictional kinship connections reshape the plot. Laurie E. Maguire notes that Kate Percy's renaming aligns her with Shakespeare's other Kates – Kate Minola of *The Taming of the Shrew*, the Kate Valois and Kate of Aragon yet to come in *Henry V* and *Henry VIII* – a parallel that, Maguire demonstrates, goes deeper than a shared name. All are K/Catherines re-christened as Kate, an act that carries a great deal of symbolic weight in both *Shrew* and *Henry V*.[73] Gordon McMullan similarly highlights the nicknaming of Katherine of Aragon as proof that 'Katherine is, like all dramatic characters . . . a construct, pieced together from prior textual material' including *Henry V* and *The Taming of the Shrew*.[74] He does not highlight Kate Percy as one such example, but she is: renamed not by her husband, but by Shakespeare himself, a cross-play connection that suggests a lack of interest in Elizabeth (or even Elinor) Mortimer the historical figure. His Lady Percy is not fully a historical person, but a character to be renamed and redeployed for his own storytelling purposes. Yet nor is she fully fictional. Lady Percy's dramatic potential is still limited by her roots in history. She must consent, 'of force', to her husband's plans. She cannot refuse to follow him or refuse to cooperate. The power to say *no* is to be found almost exclusively in the purely fictional female characters of the romantic histories – and, even then, those who do not subsequently say *yes* to someone else quickly disappear from the narrative.

As characters whose interactions with the male historical characters are wholly or largely fictional, the romantic histories' would-be lovers have the power to negate themselves, to absent themselves from the historical narrative by refusing to participate. A historical female character has no such power for, if she is not to marry, then why, under the patriarchal framework of traditional history, would she be in the story at all? This is the dual marginalisation of the female characters of this chapter: from the political power to contribute forcefully to the play's events and what I call the structural power to escape or shape the already-inevitable outcomes the plays' source material forces upon them. Thus positioned, there is no other anchor in patriarchal history aside from those provided by male relations, particularly spouses. The fictional women of the historical comedies have the power to undertake such self-erasure when they refuse to become

[73] Ibid., p. 158.
[74] Gordon McMullan, 'Introduction', in *Henry VIII*, Arden Shakespeare Third Series (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), p. 124.

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mistresses or wives. For Shakespeare's women, these are the terms that render their ability to consent meaningless: they cannot remove themselves from the story, and thus cannot refuse to consent to the roles that grant them entry into the patriarchal world of the history play – but, in entering, they bring the imaginative possibilities of fiction in their wake.

Their constrained position both affirms and undermines the traditional understanding of female characters as marginalised and suppressed by patriarchal historical dramaturgy. Female characters are indeed only ever present for a reason – but that means, in turn, there is always a reason that they are present. They *could* be fully excluded but, in the case of Shakespeare, they are not. Inhabiting the border between fact and fiction, between lost and recorded history, the female characters discussed in this chapter highlight the extent to which Shakespeare's historical dramaturgy engages imaginatively with the gaps in chronicle history, both through fictionalised female characters and the deliberate space he leaves to acknowledge stories that Elizabethan historiography does not record. Often, as Dillon and other scholars recognise, such scenes are weighted with the emotional consequences of political actions undertaken elsewhere; however, Shakespeare's embedding of curtailed protests by female characters within the political action, not separate from it, suggests we must revise our understanding of the relationship between these two apparently separate 'spheres' of the history play – and between the history plays and the chronicle sources whose historiographical traditions to which they are generally read as unproblematically contributing.

As these first two chapters have explored, female characters have a consistently destabilising effect on the expected structure and style of the Shakespearean history play – but this is only true if we accept the long-standing assumption that history plays are concerned with replicating the chronicles and are explicitly designed to contribute to a cultural project of patriarchal nation-building that takes the exclusion of the female as a central premise. Instead, we should understand these characters as destabilising not the history play itself but our accepted definition of it. If we do, female characters can instead be read as part of the foundation of the plays, transforming them from a monolith into a patchwork within which female characters are deployed to fill specific structural roles, including to call into question the completeness of the chronicle vision of Elizabethan history. The full incorporation of female characters into our readings of the plays produces a historical dramaturgy centred less on the nation than around the people who comprise it and their contradictory and complementary understandings of its direction. Audiences, too, are provided

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space for their own imaginative and opinionated engagement with what they see, relying not purely on their foreknowledge or political sympathies, but with the recognition that their encounters with the text or performance can and will transform its meaning. This collaboratively-generated meaning, necessarily incomplete until it is experienced by the viewer or reader, stands at odds with the traditional view of the history play as a largely conservative, didactic nationalistic tool. While such patriarchal ideas are contained in the plays, they are one narrative of many, and readily undermined by shifting and uncontrollable audience sympathies, and by the often-sceptical presence of Shakespeare's female characters, who call from the margins a reminder that the events being witnessed are not history itself, nor England itself, but a messy, incomplete, artificially constructed play.

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