

Believe it or not, Shakespeare did not write a one-hour play about the full life of an expectation-defying Frenchwoman-turned-Queen of England. He DID, however, write four plays about power-hungry men destroying one another for control of government; and hidden in the throes of that narrative lies the tale of a woman struggling desperately and valiantly to stay alive, maintain her autonomy, and protect her legacy.

I fell in love with Margaret while working on the plays I now lovingly dub the “Margaret Cycle” (*Henry VI parts 1, 2, 3, and Richard III*) at Commonwealth Shakespeare Company in 2018. I needed to research Margaret further. I was shocked to discover that most scholarship ignored the queen entirely, or else dismissed her as a villain. Shakespeare scholar Harold Bloom goes as far as to call her “termagant,” “any actress’ nightmare,” and “a ghastly widow, for whom Shakespeare never could compose a decent line.”

I realized I was getting nowhere with scholars who only analyze Margaret for how she functions in the story of the men clashing for the English crown. In that context, she is so easily diminished to a plot device. But what if we were to cut out all the noise of a Shakespearean history play and bring Margaret to the forefront of her own narrative? What if these plays were about a woman and not a piece of bejeweled headwear?

As it turns out, Margaret has proven (in my humble opinion) to be one of Shakespeare’s most dynamic characters. She traverses and transcends all the female literary archetypes and employs endless tactics to protect her agency. She lives a full, complex lifetime in four plays.

At its core, this piece is a celebration. It is a celebration of a woman, simply because she lived, made a mess, and fought ruthlessly, ungently, and savagely for her agency. This piece is a rejection of the simplistic dismissal of Margaret as an “archvillainess,” and with that, the dismissal of so many women today for behaving loudly and unapologetically.

Crafting this script and portraying Margaret has taught me a lot about my role as a woman, an actor, and a theater-maker in 2020. I feel that reclaiming the narratives of complex women neglected by time and popular interpretation and telling their stories with truth and love is my responsibility as a contemporary theater artist. Beyond this, Margaret has reminded me how and why women deserve to fight for themselves constantly and without apology.

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I must also share my deepest gratitude towards the team that made this show happen: to my director, Zoë, for your endless patience and passion, and for going above and beyond to help me craft this script and this dream into a play; to my stage manager, Hana, for being a part of this from the very beginning and being a constant source of support; to my costume designer, Kat, for your incredible attention and care in designing this piece; to my phenomenal cast, Alan, Eliana, Jason, and Seth, for building this world with me and for always bringing your hearts, minds, and humor to the work. Thank you all for trusting me, teaching me, and telling this story with me.