

“MARGARET MY NAME”: RECLAIMING THE  
DRAMATIC NARRATIVE OF SHAKESPEARE’S GENTLE,  
PROUD, RUTHLESS QUEEN MARGARET OF ANJOU

**PART 1: RESEARCH**

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THA 99A: Senior Research

12/19/2019

“To be a queen in bondage is more vile  
 Than is a slave in base servility;  
 For princes should be free.”  
 (V.iii.114)

This is a quote spoken by a young Margaret of Anjou, soon to become Queen Margaret, at the earliest point in her story. At the time this text is spoken, Margaret is a gutsy French princess, running into an active battlefield for an unknown reason at the tail end of Shakespeare's *Henry VI part I*. It is only the beginning for this spitfire of a girl, who will soon go on to be crowned queen of England, grow to be hated by many of the courtly peers, form powerful alliances, engage in a passionate love affair, rise to political prominence, bear a child, command armies, murder her foes, curse those who wrong her, and ultimately bring about the final downfall of the house of York. She does all this over the course of four plays, and yet she is largely overlooked by scholars.

Queen Margaret is certainly unique as a Shakespearian woman. She is one of the few personalities that readers can watch over time, as well as over the span of several plays - an opportunity Shakespeare reserved for very few of his characters. In fact, no other woman even comes close to appearing in so many plays in the canon, with the exception of Mistress Quickly, who also exists in four plays, but has nothing near the dramatic arc of the unruly queen. Massachusetts-based artistic director and scholar of Shakespeare Tina Packer comments on this in her book *Women of Will*, noting that Margaret, one of Shakespeare's earliest women, was perhaps the first to truly fascinate him so much so that he could not stop writing for her. Packer describes it: “she so took hold of Shakespeare's imagination that she trained him to learn about women, in attraction and repulsion; eventually, she became a *whole* woman who would not go away!” (Packer 50)

Yet there are those scholars who have less than positive views of the “proud queen.” Harold Bloom, in his book *Shakespeare and the Invention of the Human*, criticizes these early plays at length, with a specific contempt for the women who lead them. He is particularly cruel to the Margaret of *Henry VI part II*. He claims that the only valuable portion of this play is the fourth act, which details Jack Cade’s rebellion, and asserts that all the rest is worth very little. He says of this play “Poor King Henry and his adulterous and termagant wife, Queen Margaret, [who] matters only when she chides him.” (Bloom 48) He later builds on this criticism in his tirade against *Richard III*, calling Margaret a “ghastly widow, for whom Shakespeare never could compose a decent line.” He goes on to say that none of the women’s roles in this work are playable, calling the roles “any actress’s nightmare.” (Bloom 68) Bloom boasts a stance that none of Shakespeare’s women are particularly well written until Juliet (though there is perhaps room to argue Margaret and Suffolk as prototypes to Juliet and Romeo – more on this later).

While Bloom may be the loudest, he is not the only critic of Margaret and Shakespeare’s handling of her character. Nineteenth-century scholar Anna Jameson, in her book *Shakespeare’s Heroines*, uses Margaret as a tool in her argument that these early history plays were not written by Shakespeare. Her central claim is that Queen Margaret fits none of the characteristics of “Shakespeare’s women,” and therefore could not have been written by the famed bard. In contrasting her with Lady Macbeth, whom Jameson seems to view as a charismatic and sympathetic heroine, the author opines that Shakespeare would never have penned Margaret, a “heroine without a touch of heroism.” (Jameson 281) Her tirade against Margaret only grows in vitriol, as she expresses:

“(Shakespeare) would not have portrayed a high-hearted woman struggling unsubdued against the strangest vicissitudes of fortune, meeting reverses and disasters, such as would have broken the most masculine spirit, with unshaken constancy, yet left her

without a single personal quality which would excite our interest in her bravely-endured misfortunes...he would not have given us, in lieu of the magnanimous queen, the subtle and accomplished Frenchwoman, a mere 'Amazonian trull,' with every courser feature of depravity and ferocity...he would have given the woman a soul." (Jameson 282)

Jameson pushes onward, addressing every moment of action for Margaret in the latter three of her four plays, miraculously finding an angle to tear down Margaret's agency, vulnerability, power, femininity, masculinity, speech, and silence at every turn; and if these descriptors seem contradictory of one another, it's because they are. It would seem that, in the eyes of Jameson, no stance of Margaret's is enough. She does not appropriately fit into any archetypal or behavioral box, and this fluid nature of her power is grounds enough to label her "un-Shakespearian."

Yet no scholars can dislike Margaret as much as she is loathed by the peers in her own plays. Through her dramatic critics within the works and contemporary critics alike, the modern reader finds Margaret in a storm of directed hatred. This woman, who endures constant cruelty, who struggles greatly for herself and others, is criticized ruthlessly for doing her best in a system that does nothing for her. In this way, Margaret of Anjou's story is far from past – it is relevant and pressing, at a time when women are attacked and criticized for laboring in any capacities they can to maintain agency. Modern women's speech is too described as shrewish, their passionate pleas labelled as tirades, their power dismissed as domineering and unpleasant. With this in mind, perhaps Margaret is deserving of a second look today, from feminist scholars who attempt to understand her rather than dismiss her. Perhaps it is time to pay attention to her, as Shakespeare surely did by writing her into four plays. Perhaps it is time to bring Margaret to the forefront of her own narrative.

This study is being done to engage with one of Shakespeare's women who is so often ignored in the canon, despite the wealth of text Shakespeare gives to her. When opening a piece of feminist literature on Shakespeare, it is shockingly rare to find a chapter on Margaret among the endless material on Lady Macbeth, Viola, Beatrice, Katharina, Paulina, and Rosalind. This is understandable, considering just how multi-faceted she is. This complexity is no surprise; readers get to know Margaret over the course of four plays and a lifetime, incomprehensible compared to the short spans of time readers spend with Shakespeare's other heroines. A woman can make a lot of mistakes in a lifetime; she can vilify her husband, she can engage in an extramarital affair, she can attack other women, she can mock a man with the murder of his own son. But she can also do a lot of good; she can climb the ranks of political power as a woman alone, she can fall in love, she can command armies, she can fight ruthlessly for her only son, she can take down a tyrant. In short, she is perhaps Shakespeare's most complex, complete women, flaws and all.

This study aims to engage with these flaws and complexities and explore the full depth of a character who transcends type and age, who engages with all the female archetypes in literature. All of this as a woman during the historical Wars of the Roses, a context in which she has no business attaining power and agency yet struggles relentlessly to achieve it. Essential to this exploration is the notion that with each defeat or conflict, Margaret finds a new role and tactic through which to maintain her autonomy in a society that continues to marginalize and underestimate her. This study has also devoted attention and research to the action of cursing in Shakespeare's plays, and the role it plays in women maintaining their agency in an oppressive environment - this rings true both for Margaret as well as for the women that come before and after her.

All of this taken into consideration, it is worth noting that despite her prevalence throughout four of Shakespeare's plays, Margaret is certainly not written as the protagonist in these works, functioning rather as a secondary character to the violent men who dominate the action. If anything, she is perhaps portrayed - and commonly interpreted - as evil in these plays, though that may be an overly simplistic reading. This study aims to fully engage with the "archvillainess" (as Jameson describes her) and reclaim her narrative from the scholarship which paints her negatively as such, as well as from the men who attempt to silence her within her plays.

When one thinks of Margaret in the context of the four plays in which she appears, it is worth noting that her story does not start or end with her. While she lives a rich, full dramatic life, she is preceded by Joan of Arc and followed by Queen Elizabeth, and in many ways functions as a conduit for the passing on of an inherently female legacy. This is explored at length in the essay "Shakespeare's Queen Margaret: Unruly or Unruled" by Naomi C. Liebler and Lisa Scancellia Shea. They begin by noting that Margaret is "much underrated" by scholars of these works, elaborating upon how she is often torn down and described as "an archvillainess... epitomizing the worst qualities of her own sex," "monstrous," and "conniving." The co-authors address the contemporary discourse on this character, referencing her common characterization as the "tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide," as York describes her in the famous "molehill scene," rather than focusing on her "amazing endurance despite the pervasive corruption, duplicity, and political intrigue of which she is sometimes the agent and at other times the intended victim." The authors cite this as defense of Margaret's worthiness as an adversary to the force that is Richard III by the end of her long life. (Liebler and Shea 79)

Perhaps the most compelling argument made in this essay is the division of Margaret's story through Jungian female archetypes. Throughout her lifetime over these plays readers can register Margaret in the roles of "virgin, wife, mother, and 'wise old woman' or crone." (Jung 5-21; 41-53) Not only does Margaret take on these roles, but she is joined in each play by a female foil who exists within the same archetype who seems to fail where Margaret succeeds. Joan is the spitfire virgin, Duchess Eleanor the ambitious wife, Queen Elizabeth a grieving mother, and the Duchess of York a cursing mystic/crone. With this in mind, the contemporary reader can observe Shakespeare weaving a rich tapestry of female complexity and grasps at agency through his historical women, with Margaret in the center observing and experiencing it all. It is also worth tracking how Margaret strives and struggles for autonomy and mastery within each of these archetypes; and, when she is ultimately stripped of her power in each, her unending drive to move on to the next.

To understand where readers first meet Margaret, it is relevant to understand what precedes her. In *Henry VI part I*, before the young princess' arc begins, there is focus on another virginal, cursing Frenchwoman: Joan of Arc. Not only does Joan exist within the same Jungian archetype as Margaret at the start of her story, but the former uniquely possesses the same mysticism that will come to play in Margaret's final incarnation as the crone in *Richard III*. For one so young, Joan is powerful, feminine, sexual, mystic, and fiercely brave. At the end of Joan's story, the youthful Frenchwoman is captured and villainized for her witchcraft, and is ultimately dragged offstage, all the while cursing, to free up her role. And, immediately following, in runs young Margaret to take her place. Liebler and Shea note that in Joan's claiming that she is pregnant in order to combat her impending execution, she vacates the role of the virgin archetype, to be taken up almost instantly by Margaret of Anjou. (Liebler and Shea 81)

While Joan is captured by the Duke of York, Margaret is similarly captured, almost immediately, by William de la Pole, Earl of Suffolk (later Duke of Suffolk). It is never quite explained why Margaret might have been out on an active battlefield as a young, royal woman, though Tina Packer muses it could be anything from boredom at her royal home, a desire to see the men in combat, a hunger to meet a suitable English man to fall in love with, or simple “guts and adventurous behavior” (Packer 24). Whatever the case, Suffolk undertakes to secure the princess as a wife for England’s King Henry VI. His plan is momentarily sidetracked, however, when he quickly realizes he is smitten with her himself. This scene is a comedic moment of breath and joy preceding a much darker life for Margaret and feels almost out of place in the history plays. In fact, this first wooing scene feels loosely reminiscent of Romeo and Juliet’s early meetings – another instance of young lovers grasping at joy before the rules of a much crueler world descend upon them.

It is worth analyzing, in the brief scene in which Margaret occupies the virgin archetype, how she grasps for agency within it. It cannot be doubted – especially as one considers the relationship that unfolds over the course of the next play – that Margaret is truly infatuated with Suffolk. Yet she is smart, quick, and nothing if not pragmatic, even in these early scenes. The youthful princess knows she is captured. She deduces her predicament quickly, almost immediately upon their meeting declaring “Say, Earl of Suffolk, if thy name be so / What ransom must I pay before I pass? / For I perceive I am thy prisoner.” (*Henry VI part I*) Margaret repeatedly asks what ransom she must pay, and when she sees this is not working, she changes her tactics. She banters with Suffolk and leans into the role he describes her as playing. Realizing that escape is not an option, Margaret makes the best of her situation and secures an alliance with Suffolk before she is even transplanted to England. Taking a chapter from Joan’s



book, Margaret utilizes one of the few tools she has currently at her disposal: her sexual allure to Suffolk. Liebler and Shea opine: “as Joan used her sexual appeal to ensure her place in the French army, Margaret uses hers to ensure her marriage to the king. She is first led onstage as England’s prisoner, but by the end of the scene she is its next queen.” (Liebler and Shea 82) In this single scene Shakespeare sets up a character who succeeded where Joan previously failed, as well as introducing a smart, pragmatic woman character who readers will get to watch grow over three more action-packed plays.

At this point the reader transitions to *Henry VI part II*. Margaret is forced to marry the young King Henry, pushing her out of the virgin archetype and into the role of wife. It becomes clear almost instantly upon her arrival that she is not a favorite of the courtly peers, due to her coming without any dowry. The political move of marrying Henry to Margaret is a complicated one, but it is one looked down upon by the majority of the men in Henry’s court. Very quickly the reader can see that it will be an uphill battle for Margaret in the English court.

The once coy Margaret takes this new role in stride. She swiftly forms alliances with the men at court, who oftentimes prefer to hold counsel with her than with the infantile king himself. Margaret also expresses displeasure at Henry’s inaction and is not shy about articulating her wants and needs to her main confidant, the Duke of Suffolk. It is worth noting here that she is only frustrated with Henry’s behavior in how it negatively affects her safety and status. Margaret was abducted from her home and promised a role as queen. As long as Henry is being ruled through his advisors, he is vulnerable; and this makes Margaret vulnerable as well. She perhaps feels the threat most acutely in the form of the Duchess Eleanor Cobham, wife to Duke Humphrey and current second woman in the kingdom. Eleanor, “whose elaborate dress (in direct

violation of the Elizabeth sumptuary laws) and haughty bearing cause strangers to think she is the queen,” (83) serves as Margaret’s inferior foil in this play: she is the other royal wife.

Margaret does what she must to secure herself in this foreign court. She assembles a horde of allies, including the Duke of York, the Cardinal, Somerset, and the most powerful and relevant, Suffolk. She continues to flatter the latter in attempts to ensure his protection, and it works. Yet while Margaret is intently focused on maintaining her station, Eleanor is keen on rising above hers. Eleanor attempts to stir her husband Humphrey to her in a similar fashion that Margaret employs with Suffolk, but to no avail. She eventually resorts to witchcraft in her attempts to take down Queen Margaret, but is ultimately found out, arrested, and exiled.

Within all of this is a fiery scene in which Margaret confronts Eleanor and attempts to assert her political dominance over the duchess. Margaret drops her fan and prompts Eleanor to retrieve it for her. Upon the Duchess’s hesitation Margaret enacts the stage direction “gives the Duchess a box on the ear,” publicly humiliating them both in the process. (I.iii.152) This is perhaps not one of Margaret’s finest moments. In a sequence of plays that say much (especially when considered from Margaret’s perspective) about the struggles of women in a world of men, this act of aggression against another woman does not paint the queen in the most positive light. This predicament is thoughtfully analyzed in the chapter “The Paradox of Power” from *Wooing, Wedding, and Power: Women in Shakespeare's Plays* by Irene G. Dash, who considers the women’s social disadvantages that lead them to their contentious behavior. This essay comments on the desperate position of royal women grasping for agency and control in a system that affords them very limited powers. Essential to this argument is the understanding of sexual politics as “the process by which women have been socialized into accepting the values of a patriarchal society in where men control every avenue of power.” Dash goes on to discuss the

effect that this patriarchal system has on the self-worth of the women within it, noting that it leads to “self-hatred and self-rejection, a contempt for both herself and for her fellows.” (Dash 156)

This definition comes into play when considering the interaction between Margaret and the Duchess Eleanor. Dash argues in defense – or at the very least, understanding – of Margaret’s actions, by explaining that women imitate the brutal actions of the men around them in order to cope with feelings of powerlessness within an oppressive system. In fact, Dash notes, Margaret may be so consumed with her struggle against the men who attempt to police her that she neglects to notice how much she and Eleanor have in common. Neither of the women leaves this exchange appearing entirely sympathetic, but Dash captures the moment in her analysis: “Both women are misjudging the meaning of power, thinking they are manipulating a situation when, in reality, they are exhibiting the frustrations of powerlessness. The men are in command.” (170)

The similarities between these royal women do not just end with their struggle against the patriarchal system. Liebler and Shea observe how similarly Margaret and Eleanor take on the wife archetype and thrive within the role. They note that the two women are each “the more complex partner in their respective marriages,” never getting comfortable in their position but constantly pushing to secure more for their husbands and themselves. (85) Despite their similarities, however, it is ultimately Margaret who comes out as the superior of the female foils, as she lives on and continues to pursue her agency while the duchess is exiled and removed from the court entirely.

With her new-found alliances and status in the English court, Margaret becomes a key player in the plot’s action. She makes secret deals and masters the political scene. She conspires

with the men to have the Duke of Gloucester murdered, momentarily securing her place as wife to a true, independent king. As soon as Margaret is about to get comfortable, however, all is stripped from her and her story takes a tragic turn. Henry discovers Suffolk's involvement in Gloucester's murder, and banishes the duke from the kingdom. Margaret and Suffolk share a tearful, poetic goodbye scene, which feels almost out of place in these brutal history plays. Packer describes Shakespeare's writing here as "the most beautiful poetry in the canon up to this point." (Packer 26) – quite a contradiction to Anna Jameson's claim that Margaret's plays possess "not an atom of poetry." (Jameson 283) Soon after his banishment Suffolk is beheaded and his head is sent to Margaret, who carries it with her around the court as she mourns.

When reading these four plays with focus on Margaret, the loss of Suffolk serves as a major turning point. Margaret is forever changed after losing her only confidant and her true romantic love. It is clear in her language and in the language of those around her; until this point Margaret was able to give of her heart. For example, in *Henry VI part I*, she says "Yes, my good lord, a pure unspotted heart, / Never yet taint with love, I send the king." (V.iii.187) At the wedding she describes her heart as joyful. Her final words to Suffolk are "and take my heart with thee." (III.ii.424). Yet as soon as Suffolk is ripped from her the language changes; from that point forward, every time hearts are mentioned they are being split, displaced, torn, burst, hardened, or broken. Margaret's heart, which was once described as pure and unspotted, will later be ironically referenced as a "tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide." (*Henry VI part III*, IV.iv.140).

Soon after the loss of Suffolk, everything changes once again for Margaret. Inspiring a second major lifestyle shift for the queen, the Duke of York storms the English court and displaces Henry and his family. All of the mastery and authority Margaret had gained within the

wife archetype is torn from her with the removal of her allies, romantic love, respect for her husband (which, if she hadn't lost it already, will come soon), social status, and political power. With this shift, *Henry VI part III* begins.

At the top of this play, in a less than uncharacteristic move of cowardice disguised as diplomacy, Henry proposes a deal to York to relinquish the crown upon his eventual death in order to live out the rest of his life as king. York agrees and the oath is swiftly made, all while Margaret is offstage. The queen soon rushes on, and the reader comes to learn that some time has passed, as Margaret is now a mother to the young Prince Edward – a son that her husband has just carelessly disinherited. In her first scene of this play, the reader is greeted with a Margaret of unwavering resolve, who confidently tells Henry that she is “divorcing” herself from both his table and his bed (I.i.255-256), now officially liberating herself both from the king's control and from the wife archetype which she had previously occupied: freeing her to fully embrace the Jungian mother archetype. As Liebler and Shea describe it, she is “no longer a wife protecting her husband but a mother vehemently defending her son's right to succeed to the English throne.” (Liebler and Shea 87) Without hesitation Margaret assumes command over Henry's former soldiers and sets off in search of York. Liebler and Shea cite Jung, explaining: “Margaret takes on the characteristics of the ‘loving and terrible mother’ archetype, capable of maternal sympathy, wisdom, and authority but also harboring a dark side that devours and terrifies.” (88)

Margaret and her men finally find and capture York in the famous “molehill scene.” The queen commands her men to hold off on murdering York, only to hold him on a molehill to allow her to deliver him a delicious tirade. She takes her time to chronicle the wrongs that York has done to her. She sings, dances, and ridicules him, in a speech that one can only imagine the

queen would find incredibly cathartic. Yet more interesting, perhaps, is York's rebuttal. If Margaret has just spoken her whole truth, York eagerly unleashes his. His speech is a passionately misogynistic diatribe which reveals his views of Margaret (and, implicitly, the views of other men like him of all women). He says of Margaret:

"She-wolf of France, but worse than wolves of France,  
 Whose tongue more poisons than the adder's tooth!  
 How ill-beseeming is it in thy sex  
 To triumph, like an Amazonian trull,  
 Upon their woes whom fortune captivates!"  
 (I.iv.112-117)

The first matter to note is York's assessment of Margaret as animalistic. He calls her "she-wolf," implying a conflation of her expression of femininity and animal behavior. This comes up again later in this speech, when York exclaims "O tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide!" This interplay between animalistic behavior and hearts brings into conversation some psychological concepts which persisted in the Early Modern period as remnants of the Middle Ages, in which the soul was believed to be split into three factions: the vegetative soul, the animal soul, and the rational soul. Each soul was thought to be associated with an organ, the heart being the appendage of the animal soul. The animal soul behaves on emotion, passion, instincts, and aversions, as opposed to the more deliberate and careful decision making of the rational soul (associated with the brain). York in this speech draws on these notions of passionate, unrestrained emotional expression as a form of animal behavior as yet another way to detract from Margaret's strength and drive. (Bundy 519-520)

Yet this speech may be less about Margaret and more a commentary on women in general, as York goes on to say:

“’Tis beauty that doth oft make women proud;  
 But, God he knows, thy share thereof is small:  
 ’Tis virtue that doth make them most admired;  
 The contrary doth make thee wonder’d at:  
 ’Tis government that makes them seem divine;  
 The want thereof makes thee abominable.”  
 (I.iv.131-136)

York challenges Margaret with some serious assumptions about femininity in this text. In his words, it is beauty that would make women proud, yet he notes that Margaret is not beautiful. Virtue permits them to be admired, but in York’s eyes the queen is not virtuous. Political office affords them divine status, but she holds none. Yet the reader knows from previous scenes that Margaret is, in fact, beautiful, virtuous, and of royal status. York seems unable to comprehend a complex understanding of feminine gender, in which women can be all of those things and still exhibit violent, assumedly masculine behaviors. York reveals his true understanding of gender several lines later, stating

“Women are soft, mild, pitiful and flexible;  
 Thou stern, obdurate, flinty, rough, remorseless.”  
 (I.iv.144-145)

York, arguably the most archetypally masculine character in these plays, expresses an anxiety of needing women to fit into a box of a very specific type of femininity. Tina Packer discusses the distinctions between masculine and feminine in these Early Modern plays, defining:

“The feminine: Those qualities in a human being which have to do with feeling, valuing feeling more than the logical sense. The feminine is associated with the body, holding relationship to be of primary importance, willing to trust intuition and make decisions on intuition alone. Soft, tender, a gentle voice. Tends toward associative thinking.

The masculine: Goal-oriented, looking for abstract or logical reasons to go into action, challenging the body to obey the dictates of the mind, being careless of collateral damage when going for the top prize. Tough, independent, loving idea of justice. Tends toward linear thinking” (Packer 151)

Utilizing Packer’s definitions, Margaret at this point in her narrative is almost certainly displaying behavior that is equal parts feminine and masculine. She is defined by the feminine archetypes that bind her, and she thrives within them, but she is also driven in this scene by masculine ideals, perhaps ones usurped by her from her husband and his lack of “masculine” action. This dialectical, dynamic expression of gender enrages a misogynist like York. He cannot handle an expression of gender that he cannot understand, and so even in what he surely knows are his final moments he feels the need to disassemble and classify Margaret’s gender. Liebler and Shea note this in their essay, stating that “York cannot reconcile Margaret’s actions with his definitions of appropriate feminine behavior [so] he attempts to paint Margaret as an animal.” (Liebler and Shea 88)

Liebler and Shea proceed to muse on the notion that as Margaret begins to exhibit masculine qualities within her feminine archetype, the men likewise seem to express some feminine traits. York, as he realizes his assassination is impending, cries and pleads for vengeance, a traditionally feminine expression of emotion. Henry, similarly, upon hearing of York’s murder also reacts emotionally. In a world where Margaret is demonized for her masculine behaviors, there do not seem to be any other traditionally masculine-behaving men to rule in her place. Beyond this, none of the men appear to be villainized for their feminine expressions and behaviors.

It is also around this point that the reader meets Margaret’s female foil in the third play, Elizabeth. By the fourth act Elizabeth is pregnant and is therefore sharing the same archetype as



Margaret. Yet, even though Margaret loses her son, it is clear that she is the superior mother; where Elizabeth is passive and opts to flee from conflict, Margaret is aggressive and is compelled to fight with little restraint. (91)

In her attempts to secure the ultimate goal – the crown – for her son, Margaret flourishes within the mother archetype. She becomes the epitome of the mother, willing to fight to the death to ensure her son's security and future. And, yet, just as occurred during her time within the virgin and wife archetypes, right when Margaret masters her archetype it must be stripped from her. Despite valiant efforts on the part of Margaret and her soldiers, York's sons find and murder Prince Edward in front of his mother, swiftly and roughly jarring her from the mother archetype.

Margaret is far from silent in her defeat here. She remains as vocal and unruly as ever, shouting, screaming, and scolding the sons of York for their despicable deed. The turnaround in archetypal shifts is its shortest in this scene; barely several lines following the murder of Prince Edward, Margaret cries after York's sons "So come to you and yours as to this prince!" (V.v.84) In this moment she utters her first of many curses – launching herself swiftly into the "crone" archetype.

Now begins easily the most famous play of the Margaret cycle, *Richard III*. Margaret is in far less of this play than in the preceding two, though her role could not be more significant – despite the choice of some contemporary adaptations, such as the famous 1995 Loncraine film, to cut her character entirely. Margaret undeniably sets into action the entire plot of the play, and without her curses Richard's downfall could never have occurred.

Margaret is now the crone, the mystic, the "wise old woman." Robbed of her youth, her powerful husband and status, and her son and followers, Margaret is left with only her voice,

with which she assumes the final archetype. Liebler and Shea note the nuances of the crone figure, identifying that sexuality and gender expression are not stripped from these characters (as they are sometimes depicted quite simplistically in more contemporary media), but rather the domestic duties that once bound them in the previous archetypes are no longer relevant, freeing up the character to focus on larger, more mystical tasks. (92)

Margaret has resolved to be anything but quiet in the newly-Yorkist court. In the very beginning of the play she identifies Richard III as her primary adversary and promptly releases a slew of curses upon him that predict and detail his downfall. At the end of *Henry VI Part III* Richard had asked “why should she live, to fill the world with words?” (V.v.44) and she does just that. Margaret fills the Yorkist court with her words, and when she has said her piece, she takes her graceful exit and remains physically absent until her final scene in the fourth act of the play. In her absence, every one of her curses comes to fruition, as one-by-one each of Richard’s supporters is taken from him.

Margaret surfaces for the last time in a scene of three lamenting women alone together on stage, a unique moment within these male-dominated history plays. Before Margaret joins the crying women, she is afforded a rare instant of direct address and aside with the audience, the likes of which she has not enjoyed since her first wooing scene with Suffolk in *Henry VI part I*.

Hiding from Queen Elizabeth and the Duchess of York, she says:

“So, now prosperity begins to mellow  
 And drop into the rotten mouth of death.  
 Here in these confines slyly have I lurk'd,  
 To watch the waning of mine adversaries.  
 A dire induction am I witness to,  
 And will to France, hoping the consequence  
 Will prove as bitter, black, and tragical.  
 Withdraw thee, wretched Margaret: who comes here?”  
 (IV.iv.1-9)

The fact that Margaret has any direct address at all is significant. Unlike the many men in these plays who take the time to talk at length to the viewers, Margaret is never alone onstage and seldom takes time to confide her thoughts and feelings with the audience. When she is onstage, Margaret is fiercely active. She last joked with the audience about Suffolk's comical behavior three plays ago. Only now, when she is so close to accomplishing her ever-moving goals, is she able to indulge in this direct address.

She quickly reveals herself, however, to the distraught women. Margaret engages with her female foil in this play, the Duchess of York, an older woman who wishes for the power to curse like Margaret. Margaret at this point maintains the animosity she has always held for these Yorkist women, but after berating them appropriately she recognizes that the justice she has worked for has been achieved, and she agrees to teach them how to curse. She imparts her wisdom:

“Forbear to sleep the nights, and fast the days;  
Compare dead happiness with living woe;  
Think that thy babes were fairer than they were,  
And he that slew them fouler than he is:  
Bettering thy loss makes the bad causer worse:  
Revolving this will teach thee how to curse.”  
(IV.iv.121-126)

Finally, Margaret unburdens herself. She spends four plays accumulating burdens of others, especially within the structures of archetypes that are inherently relational: she is the virgin until she has taken a lover; her status as wife relies on a husband; she remains the mother as long as she has a son. But as the mystic she is for herself, and as a final act of feminine agency she makes the choice to unburden herself by imparting her wisdom onto her fellow women, with

whom she shares an alliance that seems to defy political and familial lines. With this action, Margaret excels in the crone archetype, and ultimately fulfills her dramatic function in these plays.

This passing on of cursing also brings the reader back to Joan. Margaret's story began with Joan leaving while cursing the men who wronged her. It ends with Margaret passing on the action to the Duchess of York and the younger Queen Elizabeth, who utilizes the wisdom in the coming scenes. This concept of cursing as a female legacy positions Margaret as a catalyst in a longer system of women grasping for agency when it is continually stripped from them, and as such claims a stake in femininity in a world of men telling her she is nothing of the sort.

Margaret is met with adversity at every corner throughout her arc in these four plays. Despite her bravery and resourcefulness, she is seldom without an antagonist (or several) who claim that she is ungentle, ruthless, or animalistic. These instances occur most often in reference to Margaret's use of her voice (and employment of the tongue, language, and rhetoric). And, undoubtedly, Margaret is a talker. She seems to live to "fill the world with words" (according to Richard III). Yet what exactly did it mean for a woman to employ her tongue heavily in the period when Shakespeare was writing these plays? Carla Mazzio explains in her essay "Sins of the Tongue," from the larger work *The Body in Parts*, that tongues are often referenced as synecdoche for speech and rhetoric. She goes on to cite the writings of scholar Thomas Adams, and describes the tongue as "an unruly 'member', an 'unsubjectable subject'...a somatic manifestation of all that resists containment ('the eye, the eare, the foote, the hand, though wild and *unruly* enough, have been tamed...but the tongue can no man tame')." Mazzio goes on to explain the anxiety that existed regarding the tongue in the consciousness of the Early Modern

period, due to its inability to be wholly restrained. The notion that a member could have such a degree of agency was more terrifying to English men than it was exciting.

Perhaps it is Margaret's liberally employed "grace in speech" (*Henry VI part II*, I.i.35) and her complex mastery of rhetoric that inspire such masculine anxiety in her contemporaries. Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne muse on this in *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England*, specifically in regard to Margaret's generous use of the rhetorical device of adynaton (a form of ironic hyperbole which comments on the inadequacy of speech to express an experience). The authors here meditate on the uniqueness of adynaton as a femininely gendered rhetorical device. The device is most often employed in Early Modern plays by women and in private spaces, which Richards and Thorne note are the spheres of women (as opposed to public spaces, which tend to be the spheres of men). Margaret employs adynata in the final scene of *Henry VI part III*, regarding the murder of her son, exclaiming

"What's worse than murder that I may name it?  
No, no, my heart will burst and if I speak,  
And I will speak, that so my heart may burst.  
Butchers and villains! Bloody cannibals!"  
(V.v.58-61)

Soon following Margaret's passionate outburst, she is met with Richard's rebuke "take away this captivate scold." (Richards and Thorne 94-95) As explained by feminist scholar Lynda Boose, the label of scold is not only a commentary on Margaret's freedom in speech, but an attack on her unruly sexual and feminine expression.

Boose writes at length about the Early Modern conflation of liberal tongues and unruly sexuality, and the implication that a looseness in one area indicates looseness in the other. As such, unpalatable behavior of the tongue, such as that of scolding, could be indicative of a sexual

freedom that is unhealthy, unattractive to men, and therefore in need of policing. Boose elaborates in her essay “Scolding Brides and Bridling Scolds: Taming the Woman's Unruly Member,” noting that in early modern England “an obsessive energy was invested in exerting control over the unruly woman - the woman who was exercising either her sexuality or her tongue under her own control rather than under the rule of a man.” Boose explains that the behaviors of scolds and whores were often associated to one another in this period. She ties these arguments back to a pervading anxiety about the freedom of women in the minds of early modern men. (Boose 195).

With this literary analysis and historical context in mind, it is significant to consider Margaret as she lives on in contemporary performance. While productions of Shakespeare’s first historical tetralogy are far rarer than those of some of his later works, there is a fascinating production history of these plays and of depictions of Margaret within them. To depart from the text itself and note how Margaret has since been portrayed in performance is essential to understand modern public and artistic interpretation of this dramatic character. Anna Kamaralli writes on these at length in her work *Shakespeare and the Shrew: Performing the Defiant Female Voice*.

Kamaralli, as well as many other scholars, note the famed Peggy Ashcroft as one of the most notable performers of the unruly queen. Ashcroft performed the role of Margaret in 1965 in the Royal Shakespeare Company’s *The Wars of the Roses*. This scholar opines that Ashcroft, who appeared in the cycle of all of Margaret’s plays, was able to portray the queen as dynamic and believable, focusing specifically on her wrenching love affair with Suffolk as driving motivation. In the chapter “Peggy of Anjou,” within the larger work *Woman Making Shakespeare: Text, Reception, and Performance*, professor of Shakespeare Russ McDonald

elaborates on Ashcroft's performance, noting her skilled manipulation of vocal range and inflection to portray all life stages of the queen. Powerful work was also done with hair and costuming in this production to convey the passage of time and Margaret's journey through her life.

McDonald devotes a large portion of his analysis of Ashcroft's performance to her work in the molehill scene. While the actress delivered many memorable moments throughout the production, McDonald says of this scene: "we witness both the extent of her violent malice and early intimations of her capacity to be injured. Her sexual and political scheming and her disloyalty to Henry manifest themselves early in the show, but the duel with York exposes her bloodthirstiness, her triumphant glee at being able to terrorize her enemy with the bloody napkin, the ghastly relic of infanticide." (McDonald 268) McDonald goes on to comment on the work the actress did between her lines of text, concentrating in particular on Ashcroft's performance during the "She-Wolf of France" speech. He writes:

"As he assaults her verbally, she initially gestures to him with inverted palms and beckoning fingers, as if to say 'come on, do your worst,' and as he gains traction she seems to intone a high-pitched *vocalize* over his lament, as if his emotional outburst were arousing her, the wordless hum something like a hysterical version of the familiar laugh...her ironic disgust at his contumely also expresses itself in a gleeful cackle; but as York builds his curse, weeping, howling over the murder of young Rutland...Margaret's hysterical joy, so her face suggests, is converted to anxiety, perhaps even latent sympathy" (269)

This account is a testament to the complexities of the Margaret character when treated with reverence and careful performance. This "villain", as she can be simplistically portrayed in this scene, has the potential (when performed appropriately) to exhibit the full gamut of human emotion. Rather than a cruel icon of evil, Ashcroft's Margaret engages with York so

dynamically that the observer leaves the scene feeling appropriately perplexed regarding Margaret, but nevertheless stunningly impressed.

Kamaralli shares the accounts of some other famous Margarets. In a contrasting perspective to Ashcroft's, Australian actress Penny Downie shares of her experience portraying the she-wolf of France in *Players of Shakespeare*. She projects considerably negative judgements on the character she was playing, calling the queen "mad Margaret," "monstrous," and making use of language like "animal," "atrocious," and "depravity." (Downie 133) Kamaralli comments on Downie's assessment of Margaret, musing that perhaps the actress allowed the antagonistic opinions of the Margaret's enemies seep into her own views of the character. (Kamaralli 58-59)

In this chapter Kamaralli describes an even more recent production of these plays, from the Benedict Andrews production at the Sydney Theater Company in 2009. This account details a production that seemed to struggle with depicting Margaret with all of the facets of femininity she perpetuates. Kamaralli notes of Marta Dusseldorp, the actress who portrayed Margaret, that the performer had powerful moments but seemed to be fighting against the directorial vision; for example, she was expected to convincingly command armies in *Henry VI part III* while traipsing around in a dress and high, sparkly heels. This production attempted several other bold interpretations of pivotal scenes for Margaret; Kamaralli details a sequence in which Margaret was staged to breastfeed Henry to comfort him following the news of Duke Humphreys death - perhaps a too on-the-nose approach to Margaret's catering to Henry's infantile behavior. She describes the portrayal of the queen's affair with Suffolk as equally mystifying. Kamaralli tells of a staging in which Margaret's monologue about Henry's inadequacies in comparison to Suffolk - a speech that is usually delivered in person to the latter - was instead performed as a



detached aside to the audience “while miming a strange kind of caricature of female seductiveness, pulling up her skirt and writhing in a mockery of lasciviousness.” She adds “Suffolk watched from upstage, then grabbed her from behind and held a hand over her mouth as she struggled. There were no more lines, or further indication of why their romance should be depicted as a rape.” (62-63) This choice to rob Margaret of her text – which is indisputably eloquent and character-building – and to reduce her to a physical “caricature” of feminine sexuality does nothing for her character, and serves only to rob her of her agency in a scene where she is so desperately grappling for it.

Another production is discussed, one helmed by John Bell at the Bell Shakespeare Company. In this version Margaret is portrayed as a “leather-clad dominatrix,” with all of the costuming (or lack thereof) of that archetype. (65) Again, this over-eroticizing of Margaret seems to serve only to demonize her femininity and sexual expression, to somehow equate the young queen’s power with a dangerous, unruly sexuality. In fact, this “contemporary” take on the character echoes the perception Margaret within her plays by the men who seek to silence and contain her. These portrayals, however, may still be preferable to the companies which still opt to cast male actors in the role, effectively eliminating much of the nuance in Margaret’s gendered behavior. All of this is to say, it would seem that time has not yet gifted Margaret with the nuanced, feminist portrayals that Shakespeare’s writing begs for her. Even today, contemporary artists fear this dangerous, sexually liberated, romantic yet vicious character, and feel the need to direct her into easily devoured boxes – just like York himself would have liked.

Through analyzing Shakespeare’s four Wars of the Roses plays, contemporary readers can unearth a treasure of a character who has been often neglected in scholarship on and performances of the canon. By taking a historically informed, feminist lens to these texts it may

be gleaned that there is still much to be reclaimed in performance of the unruly queen. Through these feminist readings, Margaret can be interpreted as powerful within her oppressively patriarchal framework and seen as romantic, violent, and vengeful all while still believably human. A brief look at the production history of these plays reveal that, while progress has been made in public view of Margaret, there is still a ways to go for modern directors to fully synthesize Margaret's complexities into performance.

This research is only half of this study, which will also encompass the crafting of a script which reframes Margaret as the protagonist of these plays, as well as a performance of the character. Academic exploration and dramaturgy will be critical in creating a rich, informed performance of Margaret. By synthesizing the work done here in the way of close reading, scholarly research, and production history with performance, audiences will hopefully have the opportunity to watch Shakespeare performed much like how they've always known it, only thoughtfully refocused with a woman in its center. Through the work of this study, one will learn the capacity to which contemporary theater artists can reclaim the narratives of historical women and early modern plays to make them vibrant and relevant to women artists today.

REFLECTING ON *MARGARET MY NAME*: A  
RECLAMATION OF THE DRAMATIC NARRATIVE OF  
SHAKESPEARE'S GENTLE, PROUD, RUTHLESS QUEEN  
MARGARET OF ANJOU

**PART 2: REFLECTION**

Rachel Greene

THA 99B: Senior Thesis

4/27/2020

## The Idea

It was an incredibly hot day during the summer of 2018 when I stood backstage with castmates at Commonwealth Shakespeare Company, rehearsing a production of Shakespeare's *Henry VI part II*. I was speaking with two friends of mine about the character of Queen Margaret, who happened to appear in all three plays being produced by the theatre company that summer. One of us - and to this day I cannot recall who - noted that it would be "pretty cool" to string together all of Margaret's material into one big "Margaret Play." I remember thinking "yeah, that would be cool" and letting the idea slip away into the recesses of my mind.

A few short weeks later I sat wide awake at 2:00AM in my dorm room at Brandeis University, unable to sleep. An idea was nagging at me. Seemingly out of nowhere, brought on perhaps by the heat or the insomnia, I felt suddenly overwhelmed with an urge to do just the thing my friends and I had spoken about during that one summer day.

I opened my laptop. I opened my Complete Works of Shakespeare. I started a new page and compiled absolutely every line spoken by or about Queen Margaret of Anjou across all four of her plays: *Henry VI parts I, II, III*, and *Richard III*. The document was exceptionally long.

At that point the script was just a seemingly endless document of disjointed text. Yet as I scrolled through, I found myself growing increasingly excited about this story. It had a dynamic beginning. It had a perplexing ending. It had all the highs and lows in between that anyone could ask from a Shakespeare play.

I imagine that it was around this point when I fell asleep.

### Pre-Rehearsal Process

It is difficult to trace back to where the idea for *Margaret My Name* truly began. Perhaps it was that day backstage at Commonwealth Shakespeare Company. Perhaps, rather, it was sophomore year while rehearsing and performing in another woman's senior acting thesis about Shakespeare with a feminist tilt (*The Most Excellent and Lamentably PC but Incomplete Tragedy of Shakespeare's Womyn [without a single reference to Lady Macbeth], Or What You Will*, helmed by Sara Kenney). Perhaps the idea sparked while portraying other powerful women in classic plays, such as Agave in *The Bacchae* (Brandeis Department of Theater Arts) or Olivia in *Twelfth Night* (Brandeis Hold Thy Peace). Perhaps I have been preparing for this over a lifetime of living as a woman and an artist and experiencing the world's lack of appreciation for both. Whenever it began, the phrase "Margaret My Name" ended up on a script on my computer late into the night in September of 2018 and I have not gone a day without opening that document ever since.

I embarked on this thesis project to explore the capacity of contemporary artists to reclaim classical narratives for the very women who drive these stories forward. Despite their deeply heroic hardships and triumphs, these woman characters are so often ignored, treated as secondary, and even villainized for their behavior. Yet in so many cases these women are simply fighting to maintain their agency, stay alive, and protect those they love.

Margaret captured my attention for many different reasons. Firstly, her big-picture arc is as nuanced as it is expansive. She alone (with the exception of Mistress Overdone, who plays a far less central role in her plays) spans four of Shakespeare's plays, playing a pivotal role in each. Beyond this, the reader or actor can experience Margaret living a uniquely full life, as

Shakespeare writes her narrative from age fourteen all the way through the end of her life, presumably as a much older woman. Interestingly, she tries on each female literary archetype throughout her lifetime. She is continually stripped of her agency, status, and possessions, yet she always rises above and reinvents herself.

While I found Margaret fascinating from a purely dramaturgical standpoint, I was also excited by the possibilities it presented to me as a performer. I have always struggled with my “type.” In high school I was cast almost exclusively far beyond my age, and when I asked my collaborators why this might be, I was told it was because I was “mature for my age.” In college I had the pleasure of playing characters much closer to my actual age, but I never escaped the judgements of “typing more mature.” Even when I played some younger characters who I absolutely adored (such as the title role in Sara Ruhl’s *Eurydice*), I felt myself doubting my ability to play these women so close to my own age and life experience. I was excited that with this project I could not be held down by “type.” Margaret does it all, from fourteen-year-old virginal princess to young wife to protective mother to vengeful witch - Margaret not only traverses these feminine archetypes, she embraces, challenges, and ultimately transcends them. This project presented me with a unique opportunity to explore my performance of each of these archetypes, to fall in love with each one, and to ultimately let them go and move on to the next. Beyond this, Margaret presented me with the opportunity to consider playing these archetypes in conversation with one another, and to let them empower rather than limit my performance.

Perhaps more than anything else, I was captured by the negative rhetoric that surrounds Margaret in critical literature on these plays. There exists an endless supply of scholars who devalue and dismiss Margaret as a dramatic character, typically citing her as a ruthless villain or else reject her as simple and unimpactful. I found this shocking. Even before amassing a body of

research in defense of my inclinations, I had a gut feeling that people were wrong about Margaret; simply because I loved her. I had read her plays, I had seen her performed, and I had fallen in love with her. I believed in her struggles. I saw that pain, survival, and brilliance motivated her actions. She reminded me of so many contemporary women who are continuously dismissed and villainized for living and speaking their truths.

But I still had questions. I needed to bridge the gap between the opinions of scholars and my untethered thoughts and feelings. As an actor, it became clear to me that performing her story (bolstered by rigorous dramaturgical prep-work) was the best way for me to fully explore Margaret.

The script matured along with the idea. I compiled every word of Shakespeare's text spoken by or about Margaret into one giant document on my computer and every day for the past two years I have whittled down this script, crafting it to best tell Margaret's story in one short hour. Alongside this demanding endeavor, I spent endless days in the library, amassing an expansive body of research on Shakespeare's Queen Margaret. I wanted to consume everything: literary criticism, close readings, feminist critiques, production histories, first-person acting accounts, adaptations, historical accounts, and so much more. More than ever before, research brought me joy. I realized that this was because so often in my life I would spend my days researching and writing papers and my nights rehearsing theatre. The two always existed in isolation from one another. But in this instance, I was accumulating a body of research to supplement my work in performance. I wanted to become an expert on Shakespeare's Margaret, so that I could portray her as truthfully as I possibly could.

Crafting the script was an ongoing challenge over the past year and a half. As an actor first, adaptation and script-building has never been my focus, but in this instance, it was thrilling,

because every aspect of the script was working towards telling Margaret's story. One early discovery I made in creating the script was that the play could not be all Margaret. My earliest draft only contained scenes where Margaret was active or was heavily discussed and, while I loved this script, it made little sense. I discovered that for the play to be about Margaret's journey, she needed a full, dynamic world in which to live. This meant adding scenes that did not include Margaret, so that the audience could learn what the queen was pushing up against. This was only the first of many huge discoveries in creating this script. The seventeen scenes that ultimately became *Margaret My Name* were an absolute labor of love and crafting them brought me a whole new appreciation for Margaret's expansive narrative.

After a long fall semester of many sleepless nights, I emerged with a 28-page research paper, a rehearsal-ready (and partially memorized) script, a notebook full of paraphrases and preliminary character-work, a full cast and creative team, a detailed 10-page dramaturgy packet, and an eagerness to start "speaking the speech" (as Shakespeare himself would put it). I thought I knew everything I needed to know about playing Shakespeare's Queen Margaret of Anjou.

However, after finally beginning the process of rehearsing and embodying Margaret, I quickly realized there is quite a lot that you cannot learn from book-based research. So many explosive discoveries occurred in the rehearsal room. While my research was integral in my rehearsal and performance, I also learned so much in putting my books back on the shelf and just being present in the exploring and storytelling of Margaret's journey.



### The Rehearsal Process

It is difficult to capture all of the discoveries made over two years of script crafting, concept development, and character work, one year of world building and collaboration, and one semester of rigorous and fruitful rehearsing, but I am going to try. Since much of my dramaturgical research divides Margaret's story up by archetype, I think it would be easiest to reflect on discoveries made within each of these stages. While I cannot account for every breakthrough over the past year, I will do my best to recount the most explosive and exciting ones.

I found my way into Margaret in rehearsal through her earliest iteration in *Henry VI part I*, identifiable as the archetypally "virgin" Margaret. Though I had decided early on in my process to avoid researching the historical Margaret of Anjou – seeing as Shakespeare extrapolates dramatically far beyond the historical narrative – I did find it valuable to read into some aspects of the historical Margaret's early life. This research allowed me to fill in some gaps and answer some personal questions about where Margaret comes from before the first scene. For example, I was able to inform my performance by the knowledge that Margaret was raised by two powerful and independent women: her mother, Isabella, and her paternal grandmother, Yolande. Isabella functioned as an example for the woman Margaret would later become, serving as a fearless political leader and expert negotiator. Yolande supplemented this by imparting Margaret with culture, education, and guidelines of social decorum. (Licence 24-25)

This research allowed me to establish a clear foundation and "moments before" for the opening sequence of this play. I was also inspired by Tina Packer's musings in *Women of Will*: she asks why and how Margaret ends up on the battlefield, and responds to her own question:

“Because she is bored being holed up in a castle? Because she wants to watch men fighting? Because she wants to find some young English earl to fall in love with her?” (Packer 24) I decided that I liked all these answers, and that they were supported by my historical and dramaturgical research. I chose to believe that on that morning when the play begins, Margaret wakes up feeling restless and in want of some adventure. She wanders out onto the battlefield and is suddenly caught somewhere she has no business being. She could be simultaneously terrified and enthralled. And then, as soon as she locks eyes with the Earl of Suffolk, she gets trapped in a situation that throws her life so far off course from where it would have gone if she had just stayed home that morning.

I learned a lot about the Margaret/Suffolk relationship during our extensive rehearsal time devoted to this opening scene. I recognized early on that the relationship established during this initial interaction would lay the foundation for the rest of Margaret’s story, so we took our time to dig in and check out every angle.

Before ever speaking the text of this scene aloud, my perception of the scenario was that Margaret was abducted from France against her will by a man who saw that he could gain personally (both romantically and politically) by acquiring her. I still believe that this is true, on some level. But I also quickly realized, along with my scene partner, Jason Frank, that there exists true romantic connection between Margaret and Suffolk.

Ultimately, my greatest discovery in this scene was that Margaret does fall in love with Suffolk as they banter. The comedic back and forth of their dialogue is exhilarating. It felt reminiscent of Katharina and Petruchio or Beatrice and Benedick (both relationships I have had the pleasure of portraying in past performances); these are two brilliant people who shouldn’t be in the same place finding joy in matching wits with one another, and yet they do. Does Margaret

know that she is being used and abducted? I think she does. Does she love Suffolk anyway? I think she's got to.

Upon her arrival to England, Margaret is passed from Suffolk to Henry and she sheds her virgin status to assume the "wife" archetype. As an actor, this kept me on my toes. I had spent all the rehearsal time on the opening scene exploring how Margaret navigates agency within that first archetype. While Suffolk surely has the most power in that first scene, Margaret relies on her youth, attractiveness, and appearance of naiveté to leverage power in her negotiations with him. While she does continue to use these to some extent as a tool in her relationship with Suffolk throughout *Henry VI part II*, these tactics work far less effectively on Henry. At this point Margaret (and I, playing Margaret,) needed to access a whole new set of tactics to master maintaining female agency within the wife archetype.

I found this in similar but nuanced different tactics to those of scene 1. I realized that Margaret could be her most powerful in court when she doted on and flattered Henry, taking on the role of the "ideal" wife in his company and in public settings. This reminded me of early interactions between Lady Macbeth and Macbeth; though Lady Macbeth may be the smartest and most potentially powerful in the room, sometimes the best way for her get what she wants from her husband is to dote on and praise him. I was continually struck throughout this process how many similarities I could draw between Margaret and Lady Macbeth; I have to think that Margaret was a prototype for the types of women that Shakespeare would continue to write throughout his career.

Another pivotal discovery I made in the rehearsal room was just how significant the Margaret/Henry relationship is to Margaret's overall arc. Before starting the rehearsal process I would have said that Margaret simply hates Henry. And, truthfully, I think she does resent him

for not being the king she (and the country) needs him to be. Later on she certainly does lose most of her respect for him when he disinherits their son. But I realized in rehearsing the wedding scene that Margaret does have some love for Henry. Perhaps she is not “in love” with him, but some part of her must, in fact, love him. His outlook on life is perhaps not compatible with hers; Henry (specifically as he was portrayed by Seth Wulf in my production) values domestic peace and political pacificism above all else. Additionally, Seth’s Henry leaned particularly into what we called the “boy-king energy” (Henry’s youthful, innocent nature). Margaret, on the other hand, has been robbed of her youth. She is pragmatic and fiercely protective of herself and what has been promised to her in order to insure her own survival. I think the two characters are too fundamentally different to ever fall in love in the romantic sense. However, I discovered that Margaret does admire and respect Henry’s kindness and innocence. I discovered a kind of sad kinship in the way they are both thrown into the throes of political turmoil at such a young age. In some ways, I think Margaret wishes she could see the world the way Henry does, but in her position as a woman, a queen, and a transplant from a foreign country and government, she simply never can.

This discovery of my attraction to Margaret and Henry’s relationship wholly altered my framing of this section of the play. I realized that I needed to revisit the script and make some changes to ensure that I was promoting the arc of their marriage and relationship.

This discovery led to one of the largest changes to my script over the course of this project. One of the very first things I created for this project was a song for Margaret. An ongoing struggle of mine with the text of these play is that Shakespeare never writes Margaret a direct address soliloquy and gives her almost no direct address at all (the only instances being in the very first and very last scenes of my script). While I found significance in Margaret’s not

taking time to philosophize on her situations by instead constantly focusing on navigating them from within, I still wanted to give her that moment of personal reflection in companionship with the audience. I thought she deserved that as the protagonist of this play. To accomplish this, I composed a song to replace the scene in which Margaret receives Suffolk's dismembered head (what later became scene 6 in my script). The melody and underscoring were original, while the lyrics of the song were taken from the text of *Henry VI part II* act 4, scene 4, as well as from Shakespeare's Sonnet 66:

Tired With All These  
*Text borrowed from Sonnet 66 and Henry VI pt. II (4.4)*

Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,  
As to behold desert a beggar born,  
And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity,  
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,

*Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,  
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.*

And gilded honour shamefully misplaced,  
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,  
And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,  
And strength by limping sway disabled

*Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,  
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.  
Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,  
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.*

Oft have I heard that grief softens the mind,  
Think therefore on revenge and cease to weep.  
But who can cease to weep and look on this?  
Here may his head lie on my throbbing breast:  
But where's the body that I should embrace?  
Ah, barbarous villains! hath this lovely face  
Ruled, like a wandering planet, over me,  
And could it not enforce them to relent,  
That were unworthy to behold the same?

Ah, were the Duke of Suffolk now alive...

My hope is gone, now Suffolk is deceased.  
 My hope is gone, now Suffolk is deceased.  
 My hope is gone, now Suffolk is deceased.

*Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,  
 Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.  
 Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,  
 Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.  
 Tired with all these, from these would I be gone,  
 Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.*

While this song served as a wonderful exercise in accessing Margaret's inner life, I realized that I was yearning to further explore the development of Margaret and Henry's relationship at this point of the play. The entire time that Margaret has known Henry up until this point she has been conducting her affair with Suffolk. Now that Suffolk was gone, I felt that I needed to investigate how Margaret's marriage to Henry was impacted. In perhaps one of the most difficult decisions of my script-crafting process, I chose to cut the song in favor of some text from *Henry VI part II*, act 4, scene 4 (the scene from which the text of the song's bridge was pulled). This allowed me to process Suffolk's death in relationship with Henry, and to further that relationship, rather than mourning in isolation.

Backing up by a few scenes, it is significant to analyze the degree to which Margaret's relationship with Suffolk is central to her overall arc throughout these plays. Some of my most exhilarating discoveries occurred while exploring this relationship. Though Suffolk's involvement in the story spans only about half of my play, as well as only about half of *Henry VI part II*, the guidance and companionship he provides to Margaret is integral in her development. It is with Suffolk that Margaret first learns to love, strategize, fight, and grieve.

One of my greatest challenges in portraying Margaret caught me by surprise. One rehearsal Jason and I were working on scene 3, in which Margaret has her first big fight with

Suffolk. Here she lashes out regarding her dissatisfaction about the life she has been given in the Lancastrian court. My original instinct was to let myself be comforted by Suffolk and lean into Margaret's utilization of her romantic relationship with him as a tool to solve her problems. However, my director, Zoë Golub-Sass, continually gave me the note to "not let him comfort me." Zoë repeatedly said, "Aren't you mad?" "Yes, I'm mad!" I would answer. She called back, "and you have a right to be mad! Let yourself be as angry as you want, and trust that he will follow you." This made sense to me on an intellectual level, but I struggled to implement the note. I became frustrated almost to the point of tears. And then I figured out what was holding me back: I was terrified of making Margaret "unlikable."

Margaret enters this scene already in a precarious situation. She is an outsider in the English court, and everyone there (besides Henry and Suffolk) want her gone. The peers say awful things about her. This rhetoric only worsens throughout the plays, exacerbated by Margaret's increasingly radical and violent (and in my eyes, justified) actions. Subconsciously, I think I was trying to make early Margaret too sweet and demure, too lovable, so I could win the audience over before she does something truly rash. Yet this was holding me back from fully embracing and expressing Margaret's entirely justifiable frustration and rage.

At this point I needed to step back and retrace my steps. I fell in love with Margaret when I first read and saw her plays. Something in me understood that she was warranted in her behaviors, and I admired her ruthlessness and passion in protecting herself. And yet, here I was in rehearsal, terrified to be ugly. I was so scared to let Margaret yell, fight, and reject love when it was offered to her. Wouldn't this make the audience hate her? What would stop them from aligning with the myriad of characters and scholars who dismiss Margaret as a scold and a tyrant? Once I noticed this holding me back in one scene, I recognized it all over the play. Is was

subtle, but in so many moments I was holding myself from fully leaning into Margaret's zeal and strength out of fear of making her unlikable.

I knew I had to get past it. After some talk with my director and some soul-searching of my own, I realized that the only way to win over an audience was to play Margaret's circumstances as truthfully as possible. To yell when I wanted to yell and to be rough and unkind when that felt justified. To let myself cry when Margaret wanted to cry and to not worry if that made her appear weak. If I fell in love with Margaret when I read her doing all these things, why wouldn't an audience love her that much more when they saw her performed?

The more I thought about this, it dawned on me that this exact dilemma spoke to why I embarked on this thesis exploration in the first place. Too often, women – both women characters in classical plays as well as real, modern day women - are expected to play a demure, likable role, in order to stay in favor of the men in charge. I know that I have experienced this in my own life, and it has held me back both personally and artistically. If I was going to do Margaret justice, I had to let go of that fear and trust my instincts, my collaborators, and my script.

Once I let myself stop trying to make Margaret likable, I was able to commit to her circumstances far more truthfully. Not only that, but I was able to have more fun. That fight scene with Suffolk twisted from a scene about a woman asking a man to help her into a scene about a woman justifiably frustrated with her disappointing circumstances and looking to problem-solve. Additionally, this development allowed Jason and I to explore a maturity in the Margaret/Suffolk relationship. At this point they are no longer the Margaret and Suffolk from scene 1 of this play; they have established enough love and trust to know that one giant fight cannot break down their relationship. This discovery became increasingly valuable as we began



to view Margaret and Suffolk's relationship as a thing that progresses, grows, and changes throughout our very short play.

A piece of text that troubled me throughout the entirety of my rehearsal process was a monologue from scene 5 of my play, originally from *Henry VI part II*, act 3, scene 2. This incredibly long speech (easily one of the lengthiest in any of these plays) details Margaret's arduous journey from France to England, and in isolation would serve as a poetic plea for Henry's sympathies. Yet when considered in the context of the scene in which it appears, its presence is vexing. At this moment, Henry has just learned that Humphrey Duke of Gloucester, his uncle, political advisor, and closest friend, has been murdered. Margaret launches into this speech, admonishing her husband, implying that he should not grieve for Gloucester but rather "be woe for me, more wretched than he is." While the text of the speech is beautiful, it comes off as incredibly insensitive to Henry, and does not seem to fit with Margaret's typical pragmatism and intuition about how to get what she wants from Henry.

My director, Zoë, suggested cutting this monologue almost entirely from our play. She argued that it did not serve the arc of the scene nor the arc of Margaret's life, and it did no favors in portraying Margaret positively to the audience at this point in the play. While I understood Zoë's reasoning completely, I felt in this instance that I needed to explore why Shakespeare might have written this speech into this play. Whether we kept it or not, I wanted to try and understand the purpose of this lengthy monologue and how it served Margaret and the scene.

So, I kept working with it. I tried many different cuts of the speech over our rehearsal process. I made exciting discoveries about Margaret's past and the baggage she has carried with her since first arriving in England. Working this speech was a useful tool in embracing Margaret's inner life during this part of the play.

I ultimately concluded that I agreed with Zoë's suggestion of a cut, but we compromised and left in only two short portions of the speech. I realized that what Margaret definitely does need to do with this speech is distract Henry; In practice, the outburst is less about Margaret truly expressing her inner feelings to Henry (though she still may be doing that), but rather attempting desperately to play on his sympathies as means to distract him from his fury at York and, more importantly, Suffolk. In this moment Margaret is trying to regain control over the increasingly dangerous situation by employing every tactic in her arsenal to appeal to Henry. Once I made this discovery the speech become less about whining and more about rebuking, appealing, seducing, provoking, and distracting. It was less about Margaret and more about her relationship with Henry. Ultimately, this breakthrough made the scene much more fun to play, and I am glad that I took the time to carefully analyze and work with this speech before cutting it entirely.

I also dedicated a lot of time in my research and rehearsals to the second half of scene 5, which we referred to as the Margaret/Suffolk "goodbye scene." This scene proved to be one of my greatest challenges throughout during the rehearsal process. It was one of the pieces of Margaret's story with which I had fallen in love even before beginning this project, and one that I looked forward to developing from the very first day of rehearsals. This is probably the first scene for which I got off-book and the first scene I paraphrased and analyzed. For all these reasons, I was understandably mortified when we finally ran the scene on its feet for the first time and it felt unexplainably "off."

After that first run, I knew I was somehow holding myself back. I realized I was playing what I thought I knew about the scene rather than responding to what was actually happening in front of me. After so much reading and thinking about this part of the play, I was sure the scene was about crying and feeling sorry for myself. It took until working this scene endlessly with my

wonderful scene partner to discover that it was not about loss at all – after all, Margaret has countless opportunities to explore loss ahead of her. When I really stopped and looked at Jason, I realized that the scene is not about Margaret and what she is feeling, but rather about Suffolk and what he needs from her in that moment. Margaret starts this scene desperate and selfish, but as soon as she sees Suffolk’s pain, she changes. I was reminded of my training from Declan Donnellan’s *The Actor and the Target*; that every moment is not about me but rather about my target (or scene partner) and what he needs from me. Suddenly this became a scene about comforting, about responding, and about planning. After realizing this, I noticed the moment at the end of the scene when Margaret says, “To France sweet Suffolk: let me hear from thee.” (Greene 13) She is not lost in grief over Suffolk’s banishment, but, rather, she is growing up and taking control, making plans to meet up with her love at some point in the future in France.

After this revelation, Jason and I emerged from every new run of this scene with fresh discoveries. In addition to this scene serving as a tragic and poetic end to Margaret and Suffolk’s relationship, it also proved vital in preparing Margaret to take on the rest of the play. During the rehearsal process we realized that this scene is the first instance of cursing within these plays, a theme whose development I continued to track throughout the script. Margaret begins this scene admonishing Henry for his banishment of Suffolk, saying “Mischance and sorrow go along with you / And threefold vengeance tend upon your steps.” (Greene 12) For the very first time, Margaret considers using her language and her pain as a mechanism for leveraging power. It is not a very refined attempt at cursing, but it is nonetheless significant to note it as her instinctual response to such a profound sense of hopelessness. She is upset with Suffolk’s lack of reciprocation of this instinct, and she turns on him: “Fie coward woman and soft hearted wretch / Hast thou not spirit to curse thine enemies?” Suffolk immediately punches back with some crude

curses of his own, swiftly deflating Margaret's outburst; she tells him then to stop his cursing. While this interaction is only the beginning and not even the most fruitful part of this pivotal scene, it was significant for me to note that Margaret seemingly learns a bit about cursing from Suffolk here. She sees and hears him cursing and likely tucks this away in the back of her mind for later use.

I realized that this is a discovery which Margaret remembers, revisits, and refines throughout the rest of the play. It resurfaces in scene 6. This scene, beyond its function of developing Margaret and Henry's relationship, is the first time Margaret recognizes the central philosophy that carries her through the rest of her narrative. She says:

“Oft have I heard that grief softens the mind  
And makes it fearful and degenerate  
Think therefore on revenge and cease to weep  
But who can cease to weep and look on this?”  
(Greene 14)

Here, Margaret muses that she should stop her grieving, as it does nothing but weaken her. She states that she should instead focus on avenging Suffolk's death. However, she immediately contradicts her own logic, and expresses that there is no way she could stop herself from grieving. She continues to lament her loss, detailing how much she loved Suffolk: “Hath this lovely face / Ruled like a wandering planet over me.” She follows this by a statement of contempt for those who have wronged her, saying “Ah barbarous villains... that were unworthy to behold the same.” This is the first time Margaret accesses what she will later explain in very clear terms in her final scene:

“Think that thy babes were fairer than they were  
And he that slew them fouler than he is  
Bettering thy loss make the bad causer worse  
Revolving this shall teach thee how to curse.”  
(Greene 32)

She may not know it yet, but Margaret in this scene learns the lesson that will carry her through the rest of her life: feeling her pain, loss, and hatred, is what gives her power and strength. It does not hold her back, but rather keeps her alive and spurs her to action. This discovery not only fascinated me as a moment of foreshadowing the later cursing “crone” Margaret, but even more served as a significant milestone in connecting Margaret’s through-line across the four plays.

With the loss of her romantic love (though not her legal husband), Margaret departs from the wife archetype. The next time the audience encounters Margaret she has birthed and raised a son who is already of age to fight for the English crown. Margaret here enters the “mother” archetype. She quickly divorces Henry in response to his disinheriting of Prince Edward, and must once again find new avenues through which to maintain her agency.

While working on this section of the play, an answer to an ongoing script-related question fell into my lap. In earlier drafts of script there was another character who accompanied Margaret through this portion of the play: Clifford, a loyal Lancastrian soldier with a personal quest for vengeance against the Duke of York. I originally wanted Clifford in the play to show the audience Margaret’s newfound skill in commanding armies, as well as to provide another character that was neither Margaret nor Prince Edward to deliver the first blow in killing York. However, about halfway through the rehearsal process we found we were hitting a wall in staging scene 11. In this scene Margaret delivers a rousing speech of encouragement to her soldiers, here represented by Clifford and Prince Edward, after a particularly difficult loss in battle. We acknowledged that something was not feeling quite right in our runs of the scene. For the sake of exercise, we decided to attempt the scene without Clifford, cutting his lines and leaving Margaret speaking to Prince Edward alone. This felt better, but not quite right. We then, on a whim, decided to attempt the scene without Edward, with me instead delivering Margaret’s

speech as a monologue to her troops (the audience), alone on a bare stage. This proved to be an unexpectedly magical moment.

Zoë placed a rehearsal block center stage. I ran in to the playing space, imagining I had just escaped from a particularly taxing battle. I stepped on the block and I looked out, picturing throngs of wounded and downtrodden soldiers. I surveyed my army and I took a deep breath. I opened my mouth: “Great lords, wise men ne’er sit and wail their loss...” (Greene 21)

I finished the monologue and the rehearsal room was silent. We recognized that we had unearthed something special with this new moment: with that speech, Margaret claims her space in the world of the play. In this text Margaret addresses her army of men and appeals to them to trust her and her son. She acknowledges her status as a woman in this unexpected place and begs the men’s attention. She encourages them and delivers a pep-talk that could rival that of any Shakespearean man. For so long I had wanted Margaret to have a full monologue of direct address, and I kept trying and failing to find it earlier or later in the play. But here it was, presented to me without my even trying. Of course this was the time for Margaret to have the stage to herself, to appeal to the audience, as well as her soldiers, to trust her, to accept her, and to follow her charge.

The cutting of Clifford became a permanent change. This presented an opportunity to rethink the next scene, scene 12, or “the molehill scene.” Instead of the aggression against York being led by Clifford with the encouragement of Margaret and the viewership of Prince Edward, the violent deed now fell entirely on the mother/son duo. With just Prince Edward (played by Eliana Weiss) onstage with me to face York (played by Alan Omori), I was forced to scrutinize my every action: was this a behavior I wanted me son to see? What message was I sending to him? What did I want him to learn here?

One of the largest lessons I learned about Margaret in the rehearsal room is that her story is about love and not about hate. So much of the critical rhetoric around Margaret is about who she hates and who she harms as a result of her vitriol; but when I analyzed her from the inside, in performance, I realized she is not an inherently hateful person. Rather, she is a person who loves deeply and intensely, and it is this deep love that drives her towards desperate actions. This became incredibly clear for me while working on the molehill scene. For so long, I was caught up in playing Margaret's hatred for York. I felt myself burning out while doing this; how could I play "hate?"

One day we were running the scene and Eliana was holding Alan down as I delivered the molehill speech. For perhaps the first time, a few lines in, I looked away from York and caught sight of Prince Edward. In this moment I realized the scene was not about hating York at all, but rather about loving Edward. Margaret loves her son so fiercely that she would commit gruesome acts to protect him, his life, and his legacy. She hates York because she loves Prince Edward. She hates York because she loves everything she has lost: she loves the life she built with Henry, she loves the love she fostered with Suffolk, she even loves the power and responsibility she had in ruling a kingdom. It is Margaret's tireless fight to protect that which she loves that motivates her to act. Of course, York's tirade about Margaret's femininity ("She-wolf of France...") enrages and encourages Margaret, but this is only compounded by the fact that it happens right in front of her son.

Suddenly every choice was about Prince Edward. The molehill speech was not only about punishing York for his transgressions but simultaneously about teaching Edward how to be a king. Not only does Margaret need to educate Edward to be nothing like York, she also needs to

instruct him to be like her: to stand strong in his beliefs about leadership and responsibility, to protect the crown, and to defend family above all else.

I found much more joy in this scene after this development. Not only was I thrilled to finally tear down the man who had taken so much from Margaret, a representation of the patriarchy and all the harm it had done her; I was also bonding with Edward. Lines like “where are your mess of sons to back you now?” (Greene 22) were simultaneously a dig at York and his parenting as well as a moment of praise for Edward, who was present and certainly “backing me.” “York cannot speak unless he wears a crown” served as an insult to York’s fragility without power as well as a lesson to Prince Edward that a crown means nothing without speech and conviction. Eliana and I absolutely loved this scene. We would come out of runs with huge smiles on our faces, having found power in developing our characters’ pure, familial relationship.

We then faced the practical question: who stabs York? If they both stab him, who strikes first? After a seemingly endless back-and-forth, I concluded that Margaret must strike first, followed soon by her son. This was a tough choice to make; I was revisited by my early fear of losing the audience’s sympathies for Margaret. Emotionally torturing and then murdering a man seemed like it could be just the behavior that pulled the audience away from her. And to have her do all that in front of her own son? Was it too much?

I ultimately concluded: no, it was not. I personally believe Margaret is absolutely justified in her behaviors, and so should she. When considering all the wrong York has done her, the decision seems almost easy. I was still nagged by the scholars who site this action as the defining moment of Margaret’s villain status in these plays...but what about characters like Hamlet? What about all the men who commit acts of murder throughout their plays and are still



considered some of Shakespeare's greatest heroes? I had to consider Margaret's whole arc, trust my instincts, and commit wholeheartedly to her every action.

With the next scene came the murder of Prince Edward. It hurt every bit as much as I expected it to each time we rehearsed it. At the hands of York's sons, Margaret is ripped from the mother archetype. After spending the last few scenes exploring Margaret's capacity to command and to lead with love and righteous confidence, I once again needed reinvent Margaret. With everything but her mind and her words taken from her, Margaret enters the "crone" archetype.

Of the four archetypal Margaret's, I found the "crone" Margaret (I prefer the term "mystic" as it lacks the negative connotation of crone) of *Richard III* to be the most difficult for me to access. I consider her to be the most different from the Margaret that Shakespeare writes in *Henry VI parts I, II, and III*. Before starting rehearsals, I used to think that *Richard III's* Margaret felt like more of a plot device than a full character. After all, she shows up to speak only twice throughout the play, serving mainly as the catalyst for Richard's downfall and then retreating into the shadows for the rest of the play. But I realized thinking of her this way was not at all useful for me in performing her. And, looking back after having crafted this piece which pulls Margaret into the forefront of her own narrative, I have learned that my original perception was incorrect. Shakespeare must have had a reason for putting her in this play, especially considering that the choice goes against history. Historically, Margaret was sent back to France following her defeat in the battle of Tewksbury, just as she is in the antepenultimate scene of *Henry VI part III* (scene 13 in my play). Shakespeare stays relatively close to the historical truth when writes King Edward IV to say, "Away with her, and waft her hence to France." (Greene 25) Yet the bard seemingly changes his mind, or – more interestingly – writes Margaret to

commit a bold act of defiance against the new king in returning to the now-Yorkist court for *Richard III*.

I realized that Margaret needs to feel an almost irresistible need to return to (or never actually leave) England. I found this in the need to exact revenge on Richard III. Margaret has unfinished business in England, and that is the murder of Richard. So, when she returns to do just that in scene 15, it is all the more infuriating when she sees a court she deems far inferior to her and Henry's. She sees a young queen standing in her spot, an arrogant king who is somehow less effective than Henry, and a disruptive future tyrant biding his time. In rehearsing this scene, I was almost overwhelmed with emotion and a need to speak my piece to these villains, regardless of the consequences.

I cannot recall a scene that has ever taken up more of my time and energy than the final scene of this piece. I had my work cut out for me from the start, as this scene was expected to serve as an end my play while it is only the middle of the work from which it appears. And yet, it is Margaret's final scene after four plays of adversity. I knew my biggest challenge with scene would be discovering why this works as a conclusion to Margaret's entire story. For the sake of clarity as well as convenience in casting, I cut the Duchess of York from this scene, enabling my play to end with a scene of two women sharing their loss and hopefully empowering one another. This also streamlined our analysis of Queen Elizabeth as a foil to Margaret.

It took me awhile to settle on why this scene worked for me as an end to my play. I found my answer in late in my process when revisiting the full text of this scene. There was a line I had cut in an early version of the script, not realizing its significance at the time. Margaret starts this scene with one of her only moments of direct address in these four plays:

“So, now prosperity begins to mellow  
And drop into the rotten mouth of death.

Here in these confines slyly have I lurk'd,  
 To watch the waning of mine adversaries.  
 A dire induction am I witness to,  
 And will to France, hoping the consequence  
 Will prove as bitter, black, and tragical.  
 Withdraw thee, wretched Margaret.”  
 (Greene 31)

Hidden within this text, Margaret describes her plan. She explains to the audience that she has been lying in wait, watching as one by one her curses come true. She shares that all she has seen so far is just a “dire induction” – implying that the crux of her plot is yet to come. Here she refers to the death of Richard. By this point in *Richard III* all her other curses have come true, and she is seemingly saving the best for last. She explains that once this comes to fruition, she “will to France,” meaning that she will finally return to her original home.

Yet at the end of this scene with Elizabeth she says, “Farewell York’s wife, and queen of sad mischance, / These English woes, shall make me smile in France.” (Greene 32) The implication here (at least by my interpretation) is that by the end of this scene Margaret decides she actually *is* ready to depart for France – without waiting to see her curse come true against Richard. The discovery here is that something significant enough must occur in the scene to make Margaret abandon her entire plan, and free herself from this narrative. So, what changes over the course of this scene?

Margaret starts the scene as she left the one before: filled with righteous anger, nourished by her pain and many losses. It is this heartache that propels Margaret and keeps her alive, and this very sorrow that brought her back to the English court to exact her revenge. As Margaret speaks to Elizabeth, she continuously gets distracted thinking about Richard, seemingly incapable of focusing entirely on anything else.

It finally clicked for me in rehearsing the scene. I listened to Elizabeth pleading for Margaret to teach her how to curse. Suddenly, all the pieces fell into place: Elizabeth is living out a very similar story to Margaret. She is a young queen and a transplant to a dysfunctional, unstable English court. She has lost both her children and her husband at the hands of Richard. In fact, the language of Elizabeth's mourning for her family is shockingly reminiscent of Margaret's earlier mourning for Suffolk. Finally, filled with the sorrow of loss, Elizabeth wants to learn to survive just like Margaret. As Margaret, I heard this and realized just how cyclical the entire story is. In this patriarchal world, women will continue to be collateral damage in the stories of men. Margaret played the system as best she could, and she survives longer than she had any business to. But suddenly she sees this other woman taking up the mantle of this narrative of strife, and Margaret realizes she no longer needs to be a part of it.

Margaret starts to extract herself from her story about halfway through this scene. In one of her final monologues she starts by recounting for Elizabeth everything the new queen has lost: "Where is thy husband now? Where be thy brothers? / Where be thy children? Wherein dost thou, joy?" (Greene 31) But as Margaret goes on it becomes increasingly clear that she is not talking about Elizabeth, but rather about herself: "Where be the bending peers that flattered thee? / Where be the thronging troops that followed thee?" Elizabeth never had troops to follow her; clearly, Margaret has started to extract herself from this discourse with Elizabeth and begin to reflect, perhaps for the very first time, on the very full life she has led. She finally takes a moment to look back on everything she has been through. After a lifetime of mourning for those she has lost, Margaret takes a minute to acknowledge and mourn for herself.

Margaret realizes her time in England is over. Her curses have been made, her plan enacted. Her staying around to watch the exacting of her revenge is just a way to torture herself

by remembering all her losses. Recounting her pain is what has given her strength for so long, but I think she finally realizes at this point that she can free herself from reliving all this pain. As a great Linklater teacher of mine, Paul D'Agostino, once told me: "Say thank you to your bad habits for getting you here. Now say goodbye to them because you do not need them anymore." Margaret's passionate recalling of her losses is the compulsion that enables her to continue to function in this story. And now that she has gotten the revenge that she so deserved, she can finally let it go.

Already on her way out, almost as afterthought, Margaret does share her methods with Elizabeth:

"Forbear to sleep the nights, and fast the days;  
Compare dead happiness with living woe;  
Think that thy babes were fairer than they were,  
And he that slew them fouler than he is:  
Bettering thy loss makes the bad causer worse:  
Revolving this will teach thee how to curse."  
(Greene 32)

In other words: feel your feelings so intensely that they give you magic. Remember those you have loved with all your heart and hate those who have hurt you as fervently as you can. At the end of the story, it is Margaret's deep love, when all has been stripped from her - her beauty, her power, her status, her soldiers, and so much more - that gives her supernatural power. As I said during one of my very first thesis meetings, "she gets stripped of absolutely anything physical that could bring her power, and then she gets magic."

Finally, Margaret decides to extract herself from this narrative. She says to Elizabeth, "Now thy proud neck, bears half my burthened yoke, / From which, even here I slip my weary head." And with that, she leaves: from England and from this story. She frees herself from the burden she has carried for four plays. This led me to one of my biggest discoveries in this piece:

Margaret's final act of power in these plays is unburdening. She spends a lifetime accumulating pain, experience, and what Zoë once called a "long emotional resume." And after a lifetime of people taking things from her against her will, Margaret now unburdens herself on her own terms. Here she finally takes control, and in an act of power, agency, and love for herself, she hands it off to Elizabeth. With that, Margaret can finally return home.

I spent months trying to figure out what song could end this show and segue into bows. The answer fell into my lap one day while doing character work and listening to music in my dorm room. Kesha's "Raising Hell" started playing, one of the many pop songs on my "Margaret" Spotify playlist (music I use to warm up and inspire my character work). The song started playing and I felt an overwhelming desire to dance. So, I stood up danced. Three minutes and twenty-two seconds later I was in tears. Something about this song stuck a nerve as I thought about Margaret. I had spent so much time searching for a song that somehow perfectly summed up the end of Margaret's story, but I realized this song said everything I wanted to give to Margaret and to the audience:

"Oh, if you couldn't tell  
We can always find the trouble, we don't need no help  
Singing oh, mama raised me well  
But I don't wanna go to Heaven without raisin' hell"

Maybe Margaret is a hero and maybe she is a villain. In her lifetime she does a lot of good and a lot of bad. But she does it all against all odds, constantly reinventing herself to be her own strongest advocate. Good or bad, she shows up as a woman in a world where she has every disadvantage, and she makes a huge, disruptive impact. She raises hell.

I was also overcome by the joy in this song. As soon as I heard it, I knew I could not end Margaret's play with some melancholy, mournful number. At its core, this piece is intended to be a celebration. It is a celebration of a woman, simply because she lived, made a mess, and fought

ruthlessly, ungenerously, and savagely for her agency. This play 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. It felt only right to end by connecting Margaret to the contemporary world, and letting myself, my ensemble, and the audience celebrate and dance.

### Post-Rehearsal Process

While I am incredibly proud of the expansive and fruitful rehearsal period I have had, I would do my process a disservice by neglecting to acknowledge the cutting short of this project due to the global health crisis. There are certainly areas into which I would have liked to continue expanding were I to have had the final few weeks of this process.

Due to the unique nature of this project as both an exploration in performance as well as the compiling of a new script, a significant portion of my character work revolved around understanding the “big-picture” of Margaret. As such, I was constantly working on synthesizing the four Margarets that Shakespeare wrote into one cohesive, performable character. While I am now confident in the full, nuanced character I crafted, I was still in the midst of the latter half of the rehearsal process of going back and deepening my understanding of individual scenes. There were several scenes which, had I had the opportunity, I would have continued to expand and explore. One of these was the Margaret/Suffolk “goodbye scene.” The more time we spent rehearsing this scene, the more I recognized how pivotal this scene is in Margaret’s development; this is the first time she feels true loss, true hate, and true heartbreak. In this scene

she loses her only true friend and mentor in the English court. It is also the first scene in which Margaret begins to learn how to curse. All these big ideas were a lot to wrap my head around, compounded with the immediate, intimate nature of the relationship and text. Margaret grows a lot here: for the first time she stops relying on Suffolk for guidance, as well as for the first time she is not the one needing to be calmed down by her partner. In this scene Suffolk is the one who breaks down, and Margaret needs to be calm, mature, and pragmatic. Had I the time, I would have loved to continue exploring the nuances of Margaret's growth and relationships here.

Another scene I would have loved to develop is scene 6, in which Margaret receives Suffolk's dismembered head and mourns for him. While I focused heavily in rehearsal on how this scene effects the Margaret/Henry relationship, I would have liked to have spent some more time considering what happened in between my last exit (after saying goodbye to Suffolk) and my entrance into this scene. This scene was a later addition to the script, and as such I would have liked to give it some more attention.

In general, I wish I had had more time to deepen my analysis of Margaret in her "crone/mystic" archetype. While I was able to understand intellectually all the choices that Margaret makes which bring her back from France to the English court to curse the Yorkists, I felt that I had not fully internalized who this later Margaret was meant to be. I would have liked to further expand my vocal and physical choices in this section to more fully realize Margaret's increased maturity and experience. I would have also liked to spend more time on scene 15 and further massaged the action of cursing vocally, physically, and textually. Though we rehearsed it many times over the semester, I feel like I could always have spent more time on the final scene of the play. Every time we ran it, I felt that I learned something new and profound.



I also was unfortunately unable to fully realize and implement many of the design elements of this production due to the early cancellation of the project. However, I am thankful that there were several elements that I was able to utilize for some rehearsals if not only the final rehearsal run.

One significant storytelling tool was that of 1940's dress. I had originally come to this project planning to utilize classic, Elizabethan costuming, but after much conversation with Zoë and my costume designer, Kat Lawrence, we came to the conclusion that the story we were telling could be better served with some more contemporary elements. While I am no expert in costume design, I was grateful for my fruitful collaboration with Kat and am thankful for her detailed research. I learned that the 40's were an exciting time in women's fashion: the dresses got shorter, and shoulder pads became a staple and added a masculine element. For both men and women, the silhouettes were economical while still gendered.

We discussed many options for Margaret's costume specifically, but ultimately concluded that I would wear one costume throughout the entire show with no changes. Besides this serving the storytelling of the play, as in every other instance a costume change was shorthand for an actor changing character, this served Margaret in a slightly more thematic way. I realized any pieces or changes that could be donned to signify shifts in Margaret's archetypal role would only serve to limit the fullness of these archetypes and reduce them to stereotypes – for example, putting Margaret in a weathered shawl for the *Richard III* scenes would come with a load of baggage, implying that her hunger for revenge and aptitude for cursing makes her old, disheveled, or unfeminine. I felt it imperative to highlight that Margaret is one full human being throughout this play – not four – and need not be compartmentalized by shorthand signifiers of age or status. Wearing this one dress throughout the story was incredibly useful for me to

connect Margaret through all the stages of her life, and to let her experiences, not her clothes, mature her.

I also felt that the specific dress we chose – a bright red, unignorable piece – was valuable in my embodying of Margaret. The piece felt high status and was modest and feminine without hindering my ability to run around and do combat. Beyond this, there is no way to hide in bright red; Margaret starts the play running around in a dress on a battlefield where she has no business being, and she only continues to disrupt, make waves, and defy expectations throughout the rest of the play. Even as Margaret's story changed drastically over and over again, it was comforting to have this costume piece take the journey with me. I was lucky to wear the dress during our final rehearsal run, and upon putting it on I was pleased to note that it just *felt* like Margaret.

On the topic of costuming, I also learned how valuable shoes could be for my acting process. We debated several show options and changes for Margaret, from combat boots to high heels to everything in between, but we ultimately landed on a low, simple black heel that could last the entire show. While I typically hate performing in heels, the first day putting on the shoes made a world of difference. There was something amazing in portraying a woman running around on the battlefield in heels. I especially enjoyed having the heels for the molehill scene, stalking around York in traditionally ladylike footwear while he spat his diatribe about my substandard expression of femininity.

Another world-building tool for this piece came in the sound design. When I began compiling sound for this piece I created a long playlist of aggressive percussion tracks, the likes of which I have heard underneath many a production of Shakespeare's history plays. I quickly realized, however, that this soundscape did little to feed my performance of Margaret. I did not

want the narration of her world to be the sounds of men hitting things. I wanted to frame Margaret in a world that felt explosive, celebratory, and contemporary. My director and I eventually decided that we preferred to use the music of punk-rock/pop girl groups and artists from the 1980's through today. Margaret endures much of her angst silently, so I wanted to fill the world of this play with the contemporaries that she does not have in her lifetime. As such, we chose to underscore transitions with the music of No Doubt, Joan Jett, Billie Eilish, and Kesha, among many others. I found unexpected inspiration in the works of these artists. Especially Kesha, who I lovingly dub a "modern-day Margaret," as her music reflects her life-long struggle and constant reinvention.

I was also unable to share the set of this piece, that would have featured crowns hanging from above the stage. This element was a gesture at making literal the ever-present struggle for power and status in this play. The set also featured several other world-building set and prop elements, such as thrones and red and white carpet runners for the Lancastrian and Yorkist courts, respectively.

It is also worth noting that due to the cutting short of this process there were a few moments of the play that were not yet completed. A main example of this was scene 10, a transitional scene in between Margaret and Henry's divorce and Margaret's speech to her troops on the battlefield. This was intended to be a battle sequence in which several plot points were to be conveyed with little or no text. In this transition I planned to relay to the audience Henry's capture (and implied murder at the hands of the Yorkists) as well as the murder of Rutland by Margaret's soldiers. I had also hoped to use this transition as an opportunity to introduce York's sons (Richard III and Edward IV), so that the audience would be familiar with these characters

when they next appeared in scene 13. Had I had more time to complete my development of this piece, this transition would have been blocked and implemented into our runs.

Though there were many areas in which I would have hoped to expand in the remaining weeks of my process, I am nevertheless proud of the strides I made as an artist in the past year. In addition to the discoveries made in character work and crafting Margaret's narrative, I am also proud of many points of growth in my acting work in a more technical sense. Margaret's spanning of four literary archetypes was relevant in my vocal work; the voice of youthful, fourteen-year-old Margaret rests in a very different place than that of the later Margaret who uses her voice to command armies or curse her enemies. Throughout this play I needed to use my voice to flirt and flatter, command and admonish, wail and curse, and so much more. While the more youthful and higher-pitched sound of early Margaret came more easily to me, I had to work harder to access and maintain the deeper, more commanding vocal quality needed to deliver the molehill speech or Margaret's many curses.

This piece also further challenged me in my work on scansion, rhetoric, and verse-work. Margaret has many long speeches, and I knew that to keep them each unique, powerful, and effective, I needed to do disciplined work on my verse. Some fun scansion discoveries included Margaret's almost complete lack of enjambment; in almost every case, her thoughts follow through to the end of her lines. This informed my performance with the knowledge that Margaret is logical and follows her thoughts through with care and attention. Another textual element that informed my delivery of Margaret's speech was her heavy employment of antitheses (as opposed to ladders) to convey her thoughts.

Another useful text-based discovery was Shakespeare's employment of trochaic feet throughout Margaret's text. This often occurs as a result of Margaret's lines beginning with

verbs or action words. These common trochaic starts were informative to me of Margaret's eagerness to say her piece, and the passion and vigor with which she delivers her arguments. Margaret even has a few exciting lines that I read to have almost all trochaic feet, for example: "thou hast spoke to much already get thee gone." (Greene 18)

I also enjoyed exploring Margaret's use of shared language with her scene partners. This occurs for the first time as she matches wits with Suffolk in scene 1. Not only does the pair bounce similar words and phrases back and forth with one another, they also share several rhyming couplets:

**MARGARET**  
He talks at random: sure, the man is mad.  
**SUFFOLK**  
And yet a dispensation may be had.  
(Greene 1)

This occurs again, several lines later:

**SUFFOLK**  
Lady, wherefore talk you so?  
**MARGARET**  
I cry you mercy, tis but quid for quo.

In general, the language flows very naturally between these characters, and I took these rhyming couplets as an indication of their blooming compatibility.

Another scene in which shared rhetoric and language became significant was scene 9. I was surprised by this; even as Margaret and Henry battle with one another in an altercation that ultimately ends in their divorce, their language remains quick and connected. Almost every one of Margaret's lines begins by picking up language from Henry's previous statement:

**KING HENRY VI**  
Be patient, gentle queen, and I will stay.  
**QUEEN MARGARET**  
Who can be patient in such extremes?  
(Greene 18)

Margaret here picks up on Henry's use of "patient" and throws it back at him. She does this again with the word "enforced" several lines later:

**KING HENRY VI**

Pardon me, Margaret; pardon me, sweet son:  
The duke enforced me."

**QUEEN MARGARET**

Enforced thee? Art thou king, and wilt be forced?

Once more, with the action of "speak":

**KING HENRY VI**

Stay, gentle Margaret and hear me speak.

**QUEEN MARGARET**

Thou hast spoke too much already: get thee gone.

This instant picking up of Henry's language and twisting it to accuse him indicates Margaret's confident mastery of language and debate. Additionally, this shows a comfort in Margaret and Henry's relationship; she seems able to predict his language as he is speaking it and can boldly turn it back on him.

Margaret's mastery of argument continues to mature throughout the play. One of my favorite pieces of dialogue appears in scene 15, as Margaret curses Richard:

**QUEEN MARGARET**

Thou rag of honour, thou detested –

**RICHARD III**

Margaret.

**QUEEN MARGARET**

Richard.

**RICHARD III**

Ha!

**QUEEN MARGARET**

I call thee not.

**RICHARD III**

I cry thee mercy then, for I had thought  
That thou hadst called me all these bitter names.  
(Greene 28)

Margaret and Richard here create a shared line as well as a rhyming couplet. While working on this scene I took this discovery as an indicator that the former queen and the tyrant are perfect matches for one another. Margaret truly finds a worthy adversary in Richard III, both in terms of his actions as well as his rhetoric.

Another area in which I constantly pushed myself was in my highlighting of operative words. Because Margaret's speech is so active and because she is so often commanding someone to do something, there are a plethora of exciting active words to highlight in her text. I found that the more I was able to lift these out, the clearer my (and Margaret's) intentions could be.

While script-crafting and world-building were a significant part of my work on this project, I was constantly working to improve my dexterity in analyzing and performing Shakespeare's text. Detailed text work and attention to scansion and rhetoric were essential in my success in my study and portrayal of the ungentle queen.

### Conclusions

I feel confident that this piece has served as a culmination of my four years of undergraduate acting training. I entered college unsure of who I was or wanted to be as an actress. Sophomore year I had the pleasure in performing in a piece that awoke me to a love of Shakespeare's plays as well as an eye for feminist scholarship and a woman-forward philosophy towards artistic work. I further fostered this as I had the pleasure of taking on several more roles of powerful women in classical and early modern plays. I truly feel that the creation and process of *Margaret My Name* functioned as natural next step in my growth as an actor, theater-maker,

and human being. As such, regardless of the cutting-short of the process by a few short weeks, I think that this experience served as an absolutely successful thesis project.

Seeing as the show was not mounted as it was originally intended, I consider what the future is for this piece of theatre. While I may not have professional production photos, I have a carefully crafted script, an expansive body of dramaturgical work, and a deep understanding of a character and a story. I hope to one day mount this show, either in its current form or perhaps with a slightly expanded script, which would enable me to add back some previously cut scenes and characters. Regardless of future performance opportunities, I have also created a website page which includes my program note, a performance highlight reel (with footage from our final rehearsal run), photos, and other excerpts from my research and dramaturgical work (my research paper, dramaturgy packet, materials originally intended for a lobby display, a music playlist that informed our soundscape and my character building, and more). While nothing can replace seeing the show as it was intended, I hope this page can serve as a monument of my work as well as a way to share my work with others.

If I ever have the opportunity to revisit the crafting of this script for future iterations of this project, I would consider exploring scenes that I could not include in this play for logistical reasons (primarily the small cast size and one-hour maximum run-time). Some scenes that I would love to look at would include any of the several instances of the queen scheming and clashing with the English peers in *Henry VI part I*, as well as act 3, scene 3 of *Henry VI part III*, in which Margaret travels to France to appeal for the aid of King Lewis XI.

Regarding myself as a performer, this piece has served as an effective culmination of my four years of theatre education and aided me in further solidifying my identity as an artist. 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. I have now deeply explored in practice my passion for performing the powerful women of Early Modern plays and am all the surer that this an area in which I yearn to continue to expand and explore throughout my professional career. I have also discovered a newfound love for script-crafting and adaptation, which has allowed me to expand my performance ambitions in new ways. Additionally, this process has taught me how valuable research is for myself as an actor. I pushed myself to do as much research as I could, and I feel that it payed off in my rehearsal and performance. I also learned that research cannot be everything, and that sometimes the most difficult but essential thing to do as a performer is to let the research go and just focus on my scene partners and the story I am telling. Above all else, this process has left me with an immensely greater sense of confidence in myself as a performer as I embark on my post-undergraduate acting career.

I do not know how, when, or if I will ever take the stage again as Margaret of Anjou, but I am endlessly grateful for my time with her. Margaret has taught me so much about being a woman who fights for herself and fights for those she loves. Margaret has taught me that life is not fair, but that we can always rise above. Margaret has taught me that feeling too much and loving too deeply gives us strength. Margaret has taught me that it is okay to act ugly when the world treats us badly. Margaret has taught me that people will still love us if we scream and fight and cry. Margaret has taught me to apologize less. Margaret has taught me to never give up on myself. Margaret has taught me that it is all about love and not about hate. Beyond all this, Margaret has reminded me how and why women deserve to fight for themselves constantly and without apology.

This project would have been impossible without the support of so many fantastically talented artists. I owe every accomplishment of this piece to the people who fed it with their guidance, contributions, and inspiration. I would be remiss if I did not extend my greatest thanks to them: to my advisors, Marya Lowry and Tom King, for their constant support of my artistic endeavors, not only on this project but over the past four years; to Isaiah Wooden, Alicia Hyland, Alex Jacobs, Sara Kenney, and Kendall Simpson, for each of their contributions and guidance, whether official and unofficial.

I must also express my deepest gratitude towards the team that made this show happen: to my director, Zoë, for her 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 Cornwell, for being a part of this project from the very beginning and providing a constant source of support; to my costume designer, Kat, for her 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 consistently bringing their hearts, minds, and humor to the work.

My very favorite quote of Margaret's appears in the first scene of *Margaret My Name*. She says to Suffolk, "To be a queen in bondage is more vile / Than is a prince in base servility / For princes should be free." (Greene 2) Even before she embarks on her incredible, trying, educational journey, Margaret knows so clearly who she is and what she deserves. Margaret took hold of my heart two years ago and since then has taught me so much about myself as a woman, a performer, and a human being. As cliché as it is, I know she is a part of me now that I can never truly let go. But at least for now, I am satisfied to set her free, as she deserves. I look forward to the inevitable future day when I can don the dress and heels once more and have the honor to "fill the world with words" with her again.

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