Women and Politics in Shakespeare's First and Second Tetralogy

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Supervisor: Dr. J.F Van Dijkhuizen

Second Reader: Dr. N.N.W. Akkerman

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Nienke Hazenoot

S1286560

n.hazenoot@umail.leidenuniv.nl

Content

Introduction

This thesis will examine the way in which women in William Shakespeare's first tetralogy of history plays can be compared to women featuring in the second tetralogy. In "Women's Roles in the Elizabethan History Plays", Phyllis Rackin states that “in the more celebrated plays of Shakespeare's second 'tetralogy' - Richard II, the two parts of Henry IV, and Henry V -the roles of women are severely limited, both min size and in scope" (73). She compares William Shakespeare's second tetralogy to "the less admired Shakespearean history plays, such as *King John*, *Henry VIII*, and the *Henry VI* plays" (73). As will be mentioned in the scholarly context, she states that women from the second tetralogy

I will argue that, even though the first set of Shakespeare's history plays does "include female characters who intervene in the historical action" (Rackin 76) while the later history plays do not, the women featuring in the second tetralogy are no less important. The women in *Henry IV Part One* and *Henry IV Part Two* - for example, Doll Tearsheet, Mistress Quickly, Lady Mortimer and Lady Percy - have been given a different role in the play compared to Joan la Pucelle, Margareth and the other women from the *Henry VII* plays.

The reason why this first tetralogy features more influential women is that the women presented in *1 Henry VI* and *2 Henry VI* are found in more politically or strategically powerful places. Margaret, for example, is a queen and Joan la Pucelle occupies a high-ranking position in the army of the French Dauphin. The two other women from the same tetralogy – the Countess of Auvergne and Duchess Eleanor – both have a title and one of them, Duchess Eleanor, is the wife of the protector of the realm. Among their counterparts from the second tetralogy are Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet, two women from the lowest layers of society.

Despite their limited political or military agency, these women from Shakespeare's second tetralogy do offer a low-class view on political issues and offer their perspective on other character's views and nuance other character's - often male - statements. Because taking into account all of these plays mentioned by Rackin would require more room than a master thesis can accommodate, I focus on two connected plays from the first tetralogy and two from the second - *Henry VI Part One, Henry VI Part 2, Henry VI Part Three, Henry IV Part One* and *Henry IV Part Two*. For all of these plays, I will analyse the political role of the female characters, for example Doll Tearsheet, Mistress Quickly, Lady Mortimer, Lady Percy, Joan la Pucelle and Margareth.

There will be argued that women from Shakespeare's second tetralogy are just as important as the women from his first tetralogy. These women from the second tetralogy have less political or military influence as women from Shakespeare's first tetralogy, but their viewpoint is important for the overall plot of the play.

Methodology

In order to demonstrate that the role of female characters from Shakespeare's second tetralogy is not, as Rackin states, limited but simply changed into a different role that is reserved for these female characters, I have analysed two plays from Shakespeare's first tetralogy, namely *1 Henry VI* and *2 Henry VI*, and two plays from Shakespeare's second tetralogy, namely *1 Henry IV* and *2 Henry IV*.

Both of these tetralogies are analysed in separate chapters in which I will elaborate on the role of the female characters in the play. Both chapters will contain an analysis of key female characters in the play. The focus will be on their characterisation, the abilities that these women display and the way these women are perceived by other, often male, characters in the play. One chapter will focus on Shakespeare's first tetralogy, in which women are given an active role in the play. One of the female characters, Queen Margaret displays more political skills than her husband while Joan la Pucelle, with all her military skills, occupies a high position in the French army. The Countess of Auvergne and Duchess Eleanor too try to advance their position. Still, all of these women are, by the men in the play, judged for the masculine abilities they display, such as military skills or political skills. Despite the asset that some male characters consider these women to be, Joan and Margaret are demonised for operating in a masculine environment. The countess of Auvergne is spared by the apologies that she makes when she realises that her plan failed, but she is still turned into an object of comedy.

The subsequent chapter will be devoted to Shakespeare's second tetralogy in which Mistress Quickly, Doll Tearsheet, Lady Mortimer and Lady Percy are the primary – and only – female characters. Despite the lack of agency that Rackin rightly describes, there is an

important role reserved for them in this second tetralogy. The tavern world of Mistress Quickly incorporates comedy in the play in a more prominent way than the way in which comedy can be found in the first tetralogy. Through comedy, the play comments on the world of court and politics in which the male characters of the play operate. The tavern world also displays the influence that political decisions have on low-class characters, a point of view which the first tetralogy does not display. Lady Mortimer, on the other hand, is a prominent example of a female character that shows a foreign world that the male characters in the play are drawn to. Lady Percy shows that even domestic women are able to exercise at least some influence, as she shows when she convinces her father-in-law Northumberland not to go to war after je didn't provide aid when Hotspur needed it during the final battle of the play.

Before these tetralogies will be examined, there will be a chapter in which theories about these tetralogies will be discussed as well as theories concerning female characters in Shakespeare's time. Amongst the scholars included in this scholarly context are Rackin, Hattaway, Bullman and Hoenselaars. Through their theories and the analysis of the chapters, I will argue that, even though the agency of the women from the second tetralogy is indeed diminished, their role does add to the second tetralogy a part of the society that the first tetralogy ignores.

Chapter 1: Scholarly Context

In his article "Principle and Recurrent Characters in the English Histories", Michael Hattaway has included a list of what he believes are "the most important figures in the English History plays" (247). It is remarkable that, from the 102 characters named in the list, only 15 of them are women just as Shakespeare's history plays only feature a handful of female characters and the majority of characters are male. Female characters in both Shakespeare's first and second tetralogy, however, are more important than this list of historical characters implies. The female characters in Shakespeare's second tetralogy are attributes with less political or military agency than their counterparts from the first tetralogy. Their contribution to the play is, at least in part, determined by the leniency that Shakespeare allowed himself when he wrote his tetralogies plays.

Shakespeare and History Plays in General

Shakespeare was not the first or only playwright to write history plays. Plays and other productions including historical events were written and performed by Shakespeare's contemporaries even though they were not acknowledged as history plays at the time. In "The Shakespearean History Play", Michael Hattaway claims that "Drama in England before the first decades of the sixteenth century was almost entirely ceremonial and produced under the auspices of religious institutions" (6). These productions vary from the kind of history plays that we know now because, "from a consideration of their titles alone, the genre of the Shakespearean history play was very undetermined. Who else had written 'history plays'?" (Hattaway 6).

In "Shakespeare and the Early Modern History Play", A.J. Hoenselaars explains the plays that were popular during Shakespeare's time but also adds that "Shakespeare's history

plays are at a far remove from the plays of the period like Robert Greene's genre-blending *Scottish History of James the Fourth* (based on Giraldi Cinthio's Heccatommithi), or Anthony Munday's two instalments *of The Downfall and Death of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* (1598)" ("History Play" 28). These folk plays, he claims, "are constructed around the life and death of the eponymous folk hero, better known as Robin Hood" (Hoenselaars 28) while Shakespeare's tetralogies concentrate more "on matters of national interest" (Hoenselaars 28). Hattaway adds that the "earliest [history plays], the plays about the reign of Henry VI (1588–90), are chronicles of civil war" (7).

Although Shakespeare was not the first or only playwright to have written history plays, according to Hoenselaar "only Shakespeare's history plays are still read and performed" (28). The reason Hoenselaars presents for the popularity of Shakespeare's plays is their "joint political and psychological complexity" (28). These complexities, he states, "could account for much of his lasting appeal, although one should not underestimate the impact of the process by which Shakespeare has risen to become the national laureate whose English history plays have tended to be privileged over those of his contemporaries" (Hoenselaar 28).

Women in (William Shakespeare's) History Plays

Shakespeare's first tetralogy features multiple female characters of which Joan la Pucelle and Queen Margaret are two of the most prominent examples. In "Women's Roles in the Elizabethan History Plays, Phyllis Rackin states that these two female characters are "cast as antagonists to the apparent purpose of the plays themselves – the preservation of England's heroic past" (Rackin 73). Joan, especially "is cast as a threat to the heroic Talbot" (Rackin 73) and "in the scripted performance on stage, she is the most memorable and vividly conceived

of all the characters in the play" (71). Joan is interesting because she, as one of the few women in Shakespeare's works, occupies a military position. Margaret, Rackin states, is "a prominent and memorable character for Shakespeare's original audiences. She is the only character who appears in all four plays of the first 'tetralogy', and she plays a major role in to shape the course of the historical action in both Part 2 and Part 3 of *Henry VI*" (71). So both women influence history in another way. Joan helps to shape the course of historical action by her victories over Talbot's army and the other battles. Margaret has no military agency like Joan has but is able to influence the course of history in political ways.

These two women from Shakespeare's first tetralogy are not the only women who, according to Rackin, have a prominent role in a play. Rackin provides *Edward III* as another example of a play featuring powerful and influential women and states that this play "suggests not only that the Elizabethan history play could stage positive images of powerful women but also that these images were already available in the historical world" (77). So Margaret, Joan and other female characters from Shakespeare's first tetralogy are no exception.

Even though female characters from the first tetralogy are attributed with agency, that does not mean this active role does not change in the second tetralogy written by Shakespeare. Rackin argues that "by the end of the sixteenth century, virtuous women no longer led armies: the constriction of women's roles which was to become one of the salient features of modernity was already well under way" (Rackin 84). The women in later plays, even the women from the second tetralogy, seem to have lost the agency that they had in the first tetralogy and other plays from that same period. According to Rackin,

> the more sympathetically depicted female characters, such as the victimised women in Richard III and the Duchess of Gloucester and the Queen in Richard II, never go to war, they play no part

> in the affairs of state, and they seem to spend most of their limited time on stage in tears. Helplessness seems to be an essential component of female virtue in the best-known Shakespearean history plays. History-making seems to be an exclusively masculine project. (Rackin 75-6)

In *Henry IV* Part 1 and 2, Mistress Quickly, Doll Tearsheet and Lady Percy indeed have little influence on the plot of the play. Their political and military agency is limited and shifted to a more domestic role. They are never seen in any scene in which battles are fought, military strategies are planned or politics are discussed. Therefore, as Rackin argues, "in the more celebrates plays of Shakespeare's second 'tetralogy' – *Richard II*, the two parts of *Henry IV*, and *Henry V* – the roles of women are severely limited, both in size and scope." (73) compared to the women featuring his first tetralogy.

Shakespeare and Historical Accuracy

Though female characters from the second tetralogy have little political or military agency, they do contribute to the plot and theme of the play. In order to pursue this argument, it is necessary to first elaborate on Shakespeare's treatment of history in general. This focus on Shakespeare's treatment of history is necessary because it also influences the female characters from his plays and especially his second tetralogy.

Because history plays are, by definition, based on history and historical events, it is important to emphasise that Shakespeare did not let himself be bound by historical accuracy. According to Hattaway's account in his article "The Shakespearean History Play", Shakespeare's history plays are "neither generically similar one to another nor bound to historical fact" (13.). His plays do feature historical characters such as kings, queens and other historical figures – Henry VI, Henry VI, Henry IV, Talbot, Joan la Pucelle and Queen Margaret, to name a few – but, as Hattaway claims, " They are related to history mainly by

offering representations of historical figures and the creation of theatre out of historical events." (13). Shakespeare's characters are based on the historical characters they represent but not fixed by their real-life counterparts.

Hattaway is not the only scholar to claim that Shakespeare took some liberties in his representation of history when he wrote history plays. In his introduction to *1 Henry VI,* Roger Warren adds that Shakespeare "is not primarily concerned with historical fact, but with a dramatic interpretation of it" (35). He, too, underscores that Shakespeare preferred dramatics to historical accuracy. Hattaway and Warren are joined by Michael Taylor who, in his edited version of *Henry VI,* points out various liberties Shakespeare allowed himself to take when he wrote his first tetralogy. Historical accuracy does not necessarily determine the plot of the play or the portrayal of the characters. Often, Shakespeare, in the scenes he describes in his history plays, altered historical events when the plot asks for it. One example is given by Taylor, who points out that "historically, it was Bedford who stripped Falstoff of his garter; in the play, Bedford dies in act 3" (190) and therefore Shakespeare transfers the action to Talbot instead. As a second example, Taylor also claims that "Shakespeare manipulates space and time to focus on Talbot and Joan as antagonists, with Talbot as the last link to England's heroic past" (92). A third and fourth example of historic leniency taken by Shakespeare is provided by David Scott Kastan, who edited The Arden Shakespeare's version of *Henry VI Part 1*. Kastan discusses the leniencies Shakespeare took with Prince Hal, later Henry V, when he wrote *Henry IV* part one and two. First of all, he points out that "Shakespeare makes Hotspur the contemporary of Hal (in spite of being three years older than the king)" (13). He also describes that "the young prince emerges, against the evidence of the chronicle sources, as the hero of the decisive battle (when it fact it was the vigorous activity

of his father that led to victory)" (13). So Shakespeare takes leniency with historical events when he considers them necessary for the plot of the play.

On the other hand, Hattaway also argues that, even though Shakespeare's plots and characters are subjected to historical leniency, " yet in another sense they are profoundly historical, addressing themselves to historical *process*, ways in which change comes about" (13) He mentioned Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, and his belief that these chronicles were "Shakespeare's principal source". These chronicles

> offer not only stories, but colour the narrative of events with set speeches and reflections upon the course of action. Sometimes Holinshed mingles providential accounts of history with secular materialist ones of the kind associated with Livy or Machiavelli. Sometimes marginal notes offer a sardonic and populist perspective upon a grand narrative: 'an ominous marriage' beside the account of the marriage of the young Henry VI to Margaret of Anjou, or, concerning the death of the Duke of York in *3 Henry VI* which the text likens to the Crucifixion. (Hattaway 13)

Because these already coloured chronicles are the foundation of Shakespeare's history plays it is only logical that these narratives also shine through in Shakespeare's plays and the characters in it. Hattaway explains that" Shakespeare was always alert to a variety of historical processes and his political characters often behave theatrically – at worst being guilty of dissimulation, at best as though they are conscious of taking part in a play" (19). Women, especially, are subjected to this treatment. Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet, for example, are amongst those characters that provide some comic relief in the Tavern scenes in *1 Henry IV* and *2 Henry IV*.

Still, even in *Henry IV*, the play in which, as Rackin rightfully stated, women's roles have shifted from military and political agency to a more domestic and foreign role, these female characters provide more than just comic relief and do have a prominent role to play. In "Henry VI Parts 1 and 2", James C. Bulman relates that Shakespeare," devoted his most creative energy to dramatising the temptations of the tavern world, and Hal, like audiences everywhere, understandably is drawn more to that world than he is to the court" (160). He also describes that history, at least to Shakespeare, "is less about chronicle history than about the more encompassing 'state' of Elizabethan England – the whores, drunks, false captains, country gentlemen, yeomen, and women's tailors who populate the world outside the court and whose histories had never been recorded" (174). This focus on the world outside of court and politics is especially true for Shakespeare's second tetralogy which focuses on "a social history of the other England – its taverns, brothels, and farms – which rivals the official history in importance and surpasses it in the sheer energy and copiousness of its detail" (Bulman 169). Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet are excellent examples and arguably even the embodiment of characters that flourish and thrive in such an environment. Their tavern world serves as a hideout for outlaws. Even, to an extent, Lady Percy can be counted among those characters who show Bulman's other England, although the side of England shown by her is more of a domestic side. In their own world, these women are influential in their own way. Even though Shakespeare "does not offer an unadorned account of act and event, nor does he separate dramatisation from commentary" (Hattaway 16), therefore, the language he adopts "in verse and in prose, tells as it shows, offering not reflections of the past but reflections on the past." (Hattaway 16). And he shows this world via the female characters in the play.

Chapter 2: Henry VI Part 1 and 2

In this chapter, the four most prominent female characters in *Henry VI* will be discussed. These four female characters are Joan la Pucelle, Queen Margaret, Duchess Eleanor and the Countess of Auvergne. The focus will be on the way in which these characters seek political agency, the abilities that they use to try and gain this agency and the demonization that they undergo once the male characters perceive these female character's agency to be dangerous. One of the personality traits all of the four women display is ambition, and they do so in various ways. Through this ambition, they seek political agency and, to an extent, are able to gain it. Two of the women are associated with magical abilities such as witchcraft. But the male characters accept the women, their personality and abilities only as long as they are able to provide a political and military for the men in the play. As soon as that advantage diminishes, the women are either demonized, at the least, reprimanded for their attempt to interfere in territories, such as warfare and politics, that are considered to be solely masculine.

The Female Character's Search for Political Agency

One of the most prominent and influential female characters in *1 Henry VI* is Joan la Pucelle, also known as Joan of Arc. Howard and Rackin point her out as "the most vivid and memorable voice in *Henry VI, Part I*" (24) because of her ambition and prominent presence. Charlene V. Smith adds how "the largest part is John Talbot (391 lines) followed by Joan la Pucelle (255 lines)" (459). During her first meeting with Charles and his fellow Frenchmen, Joan proclaims that she wishes to "free [her] country from calamity" (*1 Henry VI* 1.2.82). She is confident that her ambition to save France will become a reality, as is shown when she adds: "thou shalt be fortunate / If thou receive me for thy warlike mate" (*1 Henry VI* 1.2,.91-2). Not only is Joan patriotic, but she is also confident that she will prevail. That is the case

until the spirits that Joan calls upon abandon her and "France must vail her lofty-plumed crest / And let her head fall into England's lap (5.3.25-6).

Besides Joan, Duchess Eleanor is another prominent female character in the first tetralogy. Her personality is, to a large extent, determined by the fact that she turns out to be more ambitious than her husband. The ambitions of this Duchess are revealed when she narrates her dream to her husband and tells him:

> Methought I sat in seat of majesty
> In cathedral church of Westminster
> And in the chair where kings and queens are crowned
> where Henry and Dame Margaret kneeled to me
> And on my head did sat the diadem (*2 Henry VI* 1.2.36-40)

This dream shows how the Duchess' ambitions go as far as becoming the next queen. Duke Humphrey, however, reprimands his wife and bids her to "banish the cancer of ambitious thought" (*2 Henry VI* 1.2.18) from her mind. Her ambitions scare him and he states: "Then I must chid thee outright. / Presumptuous dame, Ill-nurtured Eleanor, / Art thou not second woman in the realm, / And the protector's wife beloved of him" (*2 Henry VI* 1.2.40-50). According to Duke Humphrey, Eleanor should be satisfied with her position as the second most important woman in the realm and not aim for something even higher. She has, after all, "worldly pleasure at command / Above the reach or compass of thy thought" (1.2.45-6). He does not feel the same need for their status to rise even further. But even despite her husband's rebukes, she stays determined to continue her plans to become the next queen. When her husband exits the scene, she confesses to the audience: "where I a man, a duke, and next of blood, / I would remove these tedious stumbling blocks / And smooth my way upon

their headless necks. / Being a woman, I will not be slack / To play my part in Fortune's pageant" (*2 Henry VI* ll. 1.2.63-67). So neither her husband's rebukes nor the fact that she is a woman restrain her ambitions or keep her from seeking agency.

Later, Duchess Eleanor contrives with Southwell, Bolingbroke and Margery Jourdain to investigate what the fate of certain characters in the play will be. During her negotiations with John Hum, the priest who has arranged a meeting with the two men and the witch, she appears relatively humble. "What says thou? Majesty! I am but grace" (*2 Henry VI* 1.2.71), she corrects John Hum when he addresses her as "your royal majesty" (*2 Henry VI* 1.2.70). Still, she does not protest when Hum claims that "by the grace of God and Hum's advice / Your grace's title shall be multiplied" (*2 Henry VI* 1.2.72-2). Instead, she presses him to answer her questions regarding some errands on which she has sent him:

> Hast thou as yet conferr'd
> With Margery Jourdain, the cunning witch,
> With Roger Bollingbroke, the conjurer?
> And will they undertake to do me good? (*2 Henry VI* 74-7)

Rather than contradicting Hum's prediction that her status will rise, she requests information regarding the plan she devised to become the next queen. So despite her correction that she is just a Duchess and no queen, she still displays a desire for more power and a way to get it.

Margaret, a third female character appearing in both *1 Henry VI* and *2 Henry VI*, enters at the end of the first play of the tetralogy being just as ambitious as Duchess Eleanor. Her part and therefore also her significance as a character increases when her role increases in *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*. All three plays need to be taken into consideration because, as

Roger Warren, in his introduction to *Henry VI Part Two*, states "there is "narrative continuity, with several major continuing from one play to the next" (2). Only because of this narrative continuity can Margaret be perceived as a prominent character. The audience needs the whole of the three plays to come to understand what kind of character she is. Smith adds that Margaret's narrative does require the same actress to play the part in all three of the plays because "With one actress playing Margaret across the tetralogy, viewers see an integrated Margaret who becomes one of the central figures of the narrative and the leading female role" (460). Rackin underscores the political influence that Margaret seeks and, to an extent, gains, when she states that "Margaret's influence at court threatens both her husband's royal authority and the peace of the realm" (73). Margaret introduces herself as "daughter to a king" (*1 Henry VI* 5.4.7-8 or 5.3.51-2) even though her father is, according to a lieutenant, "a worthless king, / Having neither subject, wealth, nor diadem" (*2 Henry VI* 4.1.81-2). Her father is a king, but not as influential a king as Margaret would like other people to believe. When Suffolk proposes Margaret to "make thee Henry's queen/ To put a golden sceptre in thy hand / And set a precious crown upon thy head" (*1 Henry VI* 5.4.73-5), his initial response is that she is "unworthy to be Henry's wife" (*1 Henry VI* 5.4.78), Still, as Warren explains, Margaret "knows exactly what Suffolk is suggesting, and, in agreeing to become Henry's queen, plays along with it" (4). For that reason, Suffolk only has to persuade her that he himself is unworthy "to woo so fair a dame to be his wife" (*2 Henry VI* 5.4.79-80), in order to convince her of her eligibility as Henry's queen. She offers no more protests and, therefore, makes the audience wonder how opposed to the marriage she was in the first place. The fact that she agrees to the marriage so quickly and with so little argumentation suggests that she is more ambitious than she originally suggests.

Once Margaret is Henry's queen, her ambition becomes obvious when she tries to gain some political influence. In *2 Henry VI,* in particular, Margaret "acts as a catalyst for the political tensions between the ambitious politicians who surround Henry VI, and for the destruction of Henry's Lord Protector, Duke Humphrey of Gloucester" (Warren 2). In this play, Salisbury questions Buckingham about "why Summerset should be preferred" (*2 Henry VI* 1.3.115) as regent in France. Yet, despite the fact that the question is directed to Buckingham, it is Margaret who answers. She pressures them that "the king, forsooth, will have it so" (*2 Henry VI* 1.3.116). In order to limit her influence, Duke Humphrey then reprimands Margaret: "Madam, the king is old enough himself / To give his censure. These are no women's matters" (*2 Henry VI* 1.3.117-8). Queen Margaret's reply that "If he be old enough, what needs your grace / To be protector of his excellence?" (*2 Henry VI* 1.3.119-20) sets off a chain of reactions that eventually lead to Humphrey's death, starting with Suffolk's comment that Duke Humphrey should "resign it, then, and leave thine insolence" (*2 Henry VI* 1.3.23). In this scene, Margaret and her ambition function as a catalyst for Humphrey's downfall. Other examples of Margaret exercising political power is when she, as editor Randall Martin emphasises, "overrules Clifford's impulse to kill York immediately after he is captured" (17) or when she tortures and kills York, ending the threat that he, in her eyes, presents. These actions confirm that Margaret has, at least in those moments, political agency. The agency is underscored by Liberty S. Stanavage, who adds; "It is not just her role as a political agent, but her actions as a self-described revenger that destabilise the English land" (163), a description that emphasises the catastrophic consequences of her agency.

There is also a fourth female character who appears in *2 Henry VI*. Although this countess of Auvergne only appears in one single scene, she, like Joan and Margaret, is driven by ambition in order to gain political agency. And, like Joan and Margaret, she is demonised

for this same ambition that drives her to aspire the crown. She devises a plan to invite Talbot to her home and, as such, lure him into a trap. According to the countess' confession to the audience, this plan is set in motion to make her famous: "The plot is laid. If all things fall out right / I shall as famous be by this exploit / As Scythian Tomyris by Cyrus' death" (*1 Henry VI* 2.3.4-6). Fame and the agency that it brings her are the main goals of her plan: Therefore, she is a fourth example of a woman who wishes to raise her status and acquire agency.

All four women appearing in *1 Henry VI* or *2 Henry VI* try, in their own way, to gain political or military agency. Joan displays this ambition via her patriotism and by expressing a desire to save France from England's rule. Both Margaret and Duchess Eleanor are equally ambitious, even though they both claim modesty in the first scene in which they appear. They both want to be queen even though only one of them succeeds. The Countess of Auvergne wants to lure Talbot into a trap to gain fame and agency. Therefore, the driving force behind all of these women is their ambition to acquire agency.

Female Character's Rise to Power

In order to gain the political agency that they seek, these female characters are able to make use of a number of political and military abilities that they possess. Joan's military skills and strategic insight offer the French army an advantage over the English while Margaret has both political and military skills and, of course, her position as queen to aid her. Despite the fact that male characters benefit from the abilities that these female characters display, their abilities are demonised by the men around them, especially by the enemies of a female character or by their former allies who no longer need the abilities that made the women an asset.

Joan's primary skills are military. Because of these military skills, Joan is a threat to Talbot and the other men in the army. As such, these military skills demonize Joan because the men in the play feel threatened by the masculine skills she displays and the fact that she, as a woman, operates in a masculine environment. As Howard and Rackin state, areas such as the battlefield and the court, the areas in which Joan is mostly found, "were typically regarded as the sites of masculine power and authority" (20). Joan, despite being a woman, is an active participant during the play's battles and is often the determining factor in that battle. During those battles, she displays skills that are usually attributed to men. One example of her determining the outcome of the battle is when she faces off against Talbot and decides to let Talbot go. She stops their fight with the words "Talbot, farewell. Thy hour is not yet come" (*1 Henry VI*Z 1.6.13). But she also wins battles by introducing sneak attacks, a kind of attack which valiant men such as Talbot are not familiar with. Talbot is, in *1 Henry VI* act 1.5, not aware that the French army, led by Joan and the French Dauphin, has arrived and the battle has already started. All of a sudden there sounds "*an alarum, and it thunders and lightens" (1 Henry VI* 5.2.75.1). Talbot, like his men, is surprised by the sudden attack and exclaims: "What stir is this? What tumult's in the heavens? / Whence cometh this alarum and the noise?" (*1 Henry VI* 5.1.76-8). The fight was "roused on the sudden from their drowsy beds" (*1 Henry VI* 2.2.23) and, therefore, unexpected by Talbot and his men. Joan's sneak attacks contrast with Talbot's "noble deeds as valour's monuments" (*1 Henry VI* l. 3.2.118). The surprise effect is one of the reasons why the French army wins the battle and proves Joan to be a military asset for them.

Though Joan is a formidable fighter and strategist, the play alludes to other, more spiritual abilities that Joan may or may not have. Some characters, the same characters who call Joan a witch or an enchantress, imply that Joan may have magical powers that she calls

upon to increase the chances of a victory for Charles and the other French characters in the play. These characters demonise the powers that Joan displays, whether they believe the magical abilities to be real or not. Rackin states: “Although Joan and her enemies disagree about the source of her martial powers, they all agree that it sets her apart from other women” (78), proving that Joan’s military skills are, according to various other characters, accompanied by magical abilities. One of the scenes in which the matter of Joan’s almost magical abilities come into question is when Joan persuades Burgundy to stop fighting against his countrymen. In that scene, she is able to convince him in less than 40 lines by pleading:

> O, turn thy edged sword another way
> Strike those that hurt, and hurt not those that help!
> One drop of blood drawn from thy country’s bosom
> Should grieve thee more than streams of foreign gore.
> Return thee therefore with a flood of tears,
> And wash away thy country’s stained spots (*1 Henry VI* 3.3.52-57)

Those few lines alone are enough to convince Burgundy to cease the fighting. Joan has done little more than pointing out the “pining malady of France” (*1 Henry VI* 3.3.49). Still, Burgundy is already changing his mind in a rapid manner. Burgundy himself comments on his own speedy change of heart: “Either she hath bewitched me with her words / Or nature makes me suddenly relent” (*1 Henry VI* 3.3.58-9). His doubt whether Joan’s persuasive abilities are rhetorical or magical amplifies Charles’ encouragement to Joan that she must “speak, Pucelle, and enchant him with thy words” (*1 Henry VI* 3.3.40). These remarks about enchanting and bewitching make the audience wonder if Joan has really been able to persuade Burgundy with words alone or if she, as Charles’ and Burgundy’s comments imply, bewitched Burgundy to make him do what she wants.

The scene described above is not the only one in which Joan is implied to have magical abilities and is demonised because of them. There are multiple other scenes in which characters address Joan's supposedly magical skills. Especially Talbot displays a tendency to indicate Joan as a witch, devil or demon. For example, he directs to Joan during their first meeting: "I'll have a bout with thee. / Devil or devil's dam, I'll conjure thee. / Blood will I draw on thee – thou art a witch - / And straightway give thy soul to him thou serv'st" (*1 Henry VI* 1.6.5-7 or 1.5.5-7). According to him, she only won their first battle because she is "a witch by fear, not force" (*1 Henry VI* 1.6.21). He cannot understand how she could have defeated him without the aid of magical abilities. Just before the next battle, when Joan apparently is nowhere to be seen, he asks: "where is Pucelle now? / I think her old familiar is asleep" (*1 Henry VI* 3.2.119-20), referring to a witch's animal companion. Thirdly, he calls her a "railing Hecate" (*1 Henry VI* 3.2.63), a goddess who is, according to editor Michael Taylor, the "goddess of the moon, night, and he underworld" (178). Even though none of these alleged abilities are, as far as the male characters know, proven to be true, they do add to Joan's reputation as a witch, devil or devil's offspring.

The most prominent example of Joan's magical abilities is when Joan, in the middle of a battle, calls upon her spirits to aid her. "Now you familiar spirits, that are culled / Out of the powerful regions under earth" (*1 Henry VI* 5.3.10-11) she chants, asking them to "help me this once, that France may get the field" (*1 Henry VI* 5.3.12). They do appear, although they do not answer her nor feel obliged to accommodate her request. Joan laments how her "ancient incantations are too weak" (*1 Henry VI* 5.3.27) to persuade the spirits to help her win the battle. Although Joan's call for aid is unsuccessful, the scene reveals that Joan does have a magical ability even though it is not the same bewitching persuasion of which some characters accuse her.

As mentioned above, Duchess Eleanor also resorts to witchcraft. She meets Bollingbroke, Southwell and Margery Jourdayne, who have promised to show het "a spirit raised from depth of underground" (*2 Henry VI* 1.2.79). Even though Hum reveals that he is "Suffolk and the Cardinal's broker" (*2 Henry VI* 1.2.101.) and he has been hired to "undermine the Duchess, / And buzz these conjurations in her brain" (*2 Henry VI* ll. 1.3.98-9), the prophesies that are made during the entrapment all come true. Therefore, Duchess Eleanor and the others are dealing with real witchcraft.

Margaret is not linked to witchcraft but she, like Joan, is linked to military skills. In *3 Henry VI*, Margaret's military influence and position as a commander of the army expands and so does the emphasis that is put on her as a military and political leader. There are various points in the play in which her position as a military leader is emphasised. She is, for example, said to come with a "puissant host" (*3 Henry VI* 2.1.207) of which she is the commander. Another striking example of the military presence of the queen is that the army is called "the army of the Queen" (*3 Henry VI* 1.2.64 and 1.4.1) on more than one occasion even though one expects the army to be under the command of the king and not the queen of the realm. And, as a last example, there are some instances of Margaret being called a "ruthless Queen (*3 Henry VI* 2.1.61) or a "warlike Queen" (*3 Henry VI* 2.1.123). All of these examples emphasise status as a warrior.

As a military leader, she transcends her husband, and this is clearly noticed and commented on by other characters in the play. Clifford, for example, requests the king: "I would your highness would depart the field, / The Queen hath best success when you are absent" (*3 Henry VI* 2.2.73-74). Margaret's addition, "Ay, good my lord, and leave us to our fortune" (*3 Henry VI* 2.2.75), proves that she herself is aware of her superior position as a

strategist and commander of the military army. Another example of a male character pointing out Margaret's presence as a better ruler than her husband is when Edward confronts her and claims to Margaret "I hear / You that are king, though he do wear the crown" (*3 Henry VI* 2.2.89-90). Even though not all male characters in the play agree with her actions, Margaret is a skilful military leader that can lead the army to victory better than her husband, the king, can

Male Character's Acceptance of Female Characters

The way in which the female characters of *Henry VI* are either demonised or domesticated also shines through in the way in which female characters are portrayed by the male characters in the play. Suffolk illustrates the way in which other characters in the play, especially male characters, generally perceive women when he talks about Margaret. He states: "She's beautiful, and therefore to be wooed; / She is woman, therefore to be won" (*1 Henry VI* 5.4.34-5). As mentioned above by means of Duke Humphrey's comment to Margaret, the military field nor the political stage are considered to be a woman's place and, in that area, their esteem of women is low. In this area, women are only accepted as long as they have some value to add. This value can consist of military value on the battlefield such as the strategic asset that Joan la Pucelle proves to be for the French legion, but it can also be political value like Margaret adds to the English via both her marriage and her political influence.

In Joan's case, Charles is the only male character in the play who has a high esteem of her due to the fact that she proves to be a valuable military asset for his army. He calls her "bright star of Venus, fallen down on the earth" (*1 Henry VI* 1.2.144) in the first scene in which they cross paths. In that scene, she is able to point out Charles as the Dauphin even though Charles ordered Reignier to "stand thou as Dauphin in my place; / Question her

proudly; let thy looks be stern" (*1 Henry VI* 1.2.61-2). Charles lets Reigner stand in for him because he believes that "by this means shall we sound what skill she hath" (*1 Henry VI* 1.2.63). Joan, however, passes the test when she walks straight past Reignier and calls out to Charles "Come, come from behind" (*1 Henry VI* 2.1.66). Then, Charles admits: "thou hast astonished me with thy high terms" (*1 Henry VI* 1.2.93). From that moment onwards, she has his respect. He demonstrates his respect for Joan by offering his services: "let me thy servant and not sovereign be / 'Tis the French Dauphin sueth to thee thus" (*1 Henry VI* 1.2.12-3) as well as by listening to her suggestions and carrying out her strategies.

There is only one moment in the play when Charles doubts Joan. This moment is when the watchmen of the tower are surprised by Talbot and his men. Charles blames Joan for failing to notice the ambush in time and asks her "Is this thy cunning, thou deceitful dame? / Didst thou at first, to flatter us withal, / Make us partakers of a little gain / That now our loss might be ten times so?" (*1 Henry VI* 2.1.51-4). However, she does not believe that the blame that is placed upon her is fair and retorts that she cannot be blamed for every single part of the action even when she is not present:

> Wherefore is Charles impatient with his friend?
> At times, will you not have my power alike?
> Sleeping or waking must I still prevail
> Or will you blame and lay the fault on me?
> Improvident soldiers, had your watch been good,
> This sudden mischief never could have fallen (*1 Henry VI* ll. 2.1.55-60)

After this relatively short speech by Joan, Charles transfers the blame from Joan to Alençon: "Duke of Alençon, this was your default, / That, being captain of the watch tonight, / Did look

no better to that weighty charge" (*1 Henry VI* ll. 61-3). His faith in Joan is restored and he continues to follow her military lead.

Even when the battle at Rouen is lost, Charles does not lose his faith in Joan. He assures her that "We have been guided by thee hitherto, / And of thy cunning had no diffidence. / One sudden foil shall never breed distrust" (*1 Henry VI* 3.3.9-11). The other men present during that conversation follow Charles' example. The Bastard says to Joan: "We will make thee famous through the world" (*1 Henry VI* 3.3.13). Alencon adds "we'll set your statue in some holy place / And have thee reverenced like a blessed saint. / Employ thee then, sweet virgin, for our good" (*1 Henry VI* 3.3.14-6). Reignier even begs her: "Woman, do what thou canst to save our honours; / Drive them from New Orléans and be immortalised" (*1 Henry VI* 1.2.147-8). Even after the failed attack, they still trust her and count on her to lead them towards victory because they believe that she is capable of doing so.

The Frenchmen accept Joan as an equal as long as she has military abilities to offer, but their opinion of her changes when Joan starts to lose her value as a warrior. Then, they demonise her just as much as her English enemies already do. Following Joan's capture, they meet with Suffolk, Warwick and Richard Duke of York to agree "that a peaceful truce shall be proclaimed in France" (*2 Henry VI* 5.5 117).. That is the last and only time that we see Charles and the other Frenchmen after Joan's capture and she is not mentioned again.

The countess of Auvergne is, by Talbot and the other men that visit her home, not demonised but turned into a comical figure. When the Countess invites Talbot to her home, she is convinced that he is trapped in her house. She confronts Talbot as soon as he enters her home and claims to be who he is: "If thou be he, then art thou prisoner" (*1 Henry VI* 2.3.32). Talbot, however, is not impressed and mocks: "Prisoner to whom?". (*1 Henry VI* 2.3.33). He

comments: ”I laugh to see thy ladyship fond / To think that you have aught but Talbot’s shadow / Whereon to practice your severity” (*1 Henry VI* 2.3.44-6). Indeed, Talbot had already seen through the countess’ plan before he entered the castle and is saved by the men he has, prior to entering the castle, placed right outside of the countess’ door. He mocks the countess by claiming that “where the whole frame here, / It is of such a spacious lofty pitch / Your roof were not sufficient to contain’t” (*1 Henry VI* 2.3.53-5) shows that Talbot is confident that he will be able to escape whenever he wants and does not perceive the countess as any kind of a threat. Instead, he conceives her threats as nothing more than a joke. As Michael Taylor, in his introduction to *1 Henry VI*, states, “in the scene between the countess and Talbot, so frequently cut in production, there are a number of gratuitously comic moments” (38). These moments, he states, are “are moments of delightful nuance for an Elizabethan audience” (Taylor 41) and the moments that display the countess as a comic character. At the last moment, she realises that she cannot continue her plan and asks Talbot “pardon my abuse” (*1 Henry VI* 2.4.66). Her apology saves her from being demonised for her ambitious plan, but not from being turned into a comic character.

Margaret is, by the male characters in the play, not seen as a person but as a tool to advance the position of, for example, Suffulk. Even though Suffolk does seem to care about Margaret, he presents her as queen to Henry mainly because he believes that he can control her. Suffolk ends 1 *Henry VI* and, as a kind of prologue to *2 Henry VI* and envisions how “Margaret shall now be queen, and rule the king / But I will rule both her, the king, and realm” (*1 Henry VI* 5.6.107-8). He therefore sees Margaret primarily as a means to control the kingdom.

Suffolk is not the only male character who sees Margaret not as a person but as a tool to advance their own political ambitions. Other men, too, want to diminish Margaret's political power because allowing her some semblance of agency is, by them, considered to be too dangerous. After a comment Margaret makes in the discussion following Duke Humphrey's death, she is shut up by Warwick, who plainly tells her: "Madam, be still, - with reverence may I say; / For every word you speak in his behalf / Is slander to your royal dignity" (*2 Henry VI* 3.1.207-209). According to him and the other people at court, Margaret may be a queen and should be respected as such, but she should not meddle with state affairs or political issues. If she does, she loses the respect that she is entitled to as a queen.

Because of the masculine military skills that she displays, she is demonised by the other characters in the play. The more power Margaret gains, the more the men in the play demonise her. The comments that contribute to this argument the most come from York. When Margaret taunts him, he replies to her monologue as follows:

> 'Tis Beauty that doth oft makes women proud,
> But God he knows thy share thereof is small
> 'Tis virtue that doth make them most admired,
> The contrary make thee wondered at.
> 'Tis government that makes them seem divine,
> The want thereof makes thee abdominal
> Thou art as opposite to every good
> As the Antipodes are unto us,
> Or as the south to the Septentrion (*3 Henry VI* 1.4.128-36)

His description illustrates that he believes Margaret to be the opposite of what an ideal woman is supposed to be. Her lack of beauty, virtue and government do not only make Margaret

stand out amongst other noblewomen. York also points out that women are supposed to be "soft, mild, pitiful and flexible" (*3 Henry VI* 1.4.141). Margaret conforms to none of these traits and is instead described as "stern, obdurate, flinty, rough, remorseless" (*3 Henry VI* 1.4.142). This description portrays Margaret as the ruthless woman that she proves to be when she tortures and kills York. The more power Margaret exercises and the more agency she gains, the less accepted is she by the male characters around her.

In Eleanor Humphrey's case, the men at court do consider Eleanor's plans to become the next queen to be dangerous. Hum, the man paid off by the Duchess, comments on her "aspiring humour" (*2 Henry VI* 1.2.97) and believes that the Duchess' "attainture will be Humphrey's fall" (*2 Henry VI* 1.2.106). Smith contributes to Hum's comment that Eleanor is the "instigator of her and her husband's downfall" (110). Still, Eleanor does not succeed because a plan is set in motion to trap her. She is arrested and hears her sentence: "Despoiled of your honours in your life / Shall, after three days' open penance done, / Live in your country here in banishment" (*2 Henry VI* 2.3.10-2). She begs Humphrey "ban thine enemies, both mine and thine" (*2 Henry VI* 2.4.26), but he is deaf to her pleas and simply orders her to "forget this grief" (*2 Henry VI* 2.4.27). The dismissal shows how she has lost any influence she had when she was still a Duchess.

The success of the Female Characters

None of the women in *Henry VI* are, in the end, successful. Joan and Margaret are, for a short period, successful. Joan is able to lead the army to victories by means of the sneak attacks that she introduces and are unexpected by Talbot and his army. Margaret is presented as a better political and military leader than Henry VI himself. Still, the male characters in the play judge and punish the female characters for their actions. The same goes for Duchess

Eleanor and the Countess of Auvergne, two characters who are not able to gain any political or military agency.

Despite the military skills that Joan has and the battles that she wins for the French army, she is unsuccessful in her attempt to gain military agency. The male characters in the play believe that Joan has to pay with her life for her attempt to gain military agency. The danger that she presents in their masculine world is, according to them, too profound to let her live. Richard Duke of York claims that "she has lived too long, / to fill the world with vicious qualities" (*1 Henry VI* 5.5.34-35), and even Joan's own father exclaims: "O burn her, burn her! Hanging is too good" (*1 Henry VI* 5.5.33). The demonization that has already begun in the first half of the play is once again emphasised in the scene which Joan is captured. Richard Duke of York addresses her "Fell banning hag! Enchantress, hold thy tongue!" (*3 Henry VI* 5.3.42). He also calls out: "bring forth that sorceress condemned to burn" (*1 Henry VI* 5.5.1). The manner in which he calls forth Joan is striking because it indicates that the male characters in the play already have condemned Joan even before the trial starts. The trial, therefore, is merely a mock trail of which the outcome has already been determined in advance. During the trial, Joan resorts to various arguments of which she believes might save her. First, she claims to be "virtuous and holy, chosen from above / By inspiration of celestial grace / To work exceeding miracles on earth" (*1 Henry VI* 5.5.39-41). This is the same claim that she has made earlier in the play and, therefore, does not change the mind of the men present at the trial; their decision to let her burn is already taken. Another claim that she makes is to be "a virgin from her tender infancy / Chaste and immaculate in very thought" (*1 Henry VI* 50-1). When this plea based on her virginity and chastity does not work, she tries to argue the complete opposite. "I am with child, ye bloody homicides" (*1 Henry VI* 5.5.61). She points to various men who, according to her, are the father of her child. None of the names

mentioned by Joan as a father of her child is able to persuade the men to spare her life. Instead, the men judge her even more for her loose morals. They call her "strumpet" (*1 Henry VI*. 5.5.84) and judge the "liberal and free" (*1 Henry VI* 5.5.81) lifestyle as "intolerable" (*1 Henry VI* 5.5.79). No matter which arguments Joan uses, she is not able to change the verdict. In fact, the men demonised her long before the trial and she never stood an honest chance. The admiration and respect that she gained when she won battles for the French army evaporate as soon as she is captured and put on trial. As Richard Duke of York articulates to Joan, they always planned to carry her away with the words: "Break thou in pieces, and consume to ashes. / Thou foul accursèd minister of hell" (*1 Henry VI* 5.5.92.3). Then, the guards take Joan away and no one mentions her again. So regardless of the proficiency of Joan's military skills and witchcraft, she is unable to acquire the political agency that she seeks.

Like Joan, Margaret's military and political abilities fail to provide for her the political and military agency that she seeks. Edward is able to capture Margaret and Prince Edward. When she witnesses Edward, Gloucester and Clarence "spend their fury on a child" (*3 Henry VI* 5.5.76) and stab her son to death, all of her fierceness evaporates and she begs them to "kill me too" (*Henry VI* 5.5.41). Edward then banishes her: "away with her, go bear her hence perforce" (*3 Henry VI* 5.5.68). In the end, the attempt to acquire political and military agency costs her both her son and her position as queen. She becomes, as Martin states, "one of Shakespeare's great tragic heroines" (6).

Duchess Eleanor is the third female character that is not able to gain the political agency that she is searching for. In contrast to Margaret and Joan, Eleanor's ambitions are never realised. Her pride, as Suffolk exclaims, "dies in her youngest days" (*2 Henry VI* 2.3.45), when she is banished for the attempt to usurp the crown for herself and her husband.

Two scenes after the plan is set in motion during her meeting with Margery Jourdayn, Bollingbroke, Southwell and Hum, the Duchess is arrested and put on trial together with her fellow conspirators. She is called forward to "receive the sentence of the law for sins / Such as by God's book are adjudged to death" (*1 Henry VI* 2.3.3-4). In contrast to the lives of her fellow conspirators, Eleanor's life is spared. Still, she has to face the consequences of the actions that are considered trespasses by the male characters. Their verdict is:

> you madam, for you are more nobly born,
> Despoilèd of your honour in your life,
> Shall, after three days' open penance done,
> Live in your country here in banishment
> With Sir John Stanley in the Isle of Men (*2 Henry VI* 2.3.9-13)

Her attempt to rise to power results in the loss of her husband, position as Duchess and freedom. Therefore Duchess Eleanor is, like Joan, a character that is directly punished for her attempt to increase her power and gain more political agency.

The Countess of Auvergne's attempt to gain agency is even less successful than the attempts of Margaret, Joan and Duchess Eleanor. As mentioned above, she is able to lure Talbot into her home, but he has already seen through her scheme. Talbot's men enter the house and, with their help, he shows her how he is "but shadow of himself" (*1 Henry VI* 2.3.61). The Countess then realises that she has no other choice but to admit that her plan failed. Therefore, she chooses to apologize: "victorious Talbot, pardon my abuse" (*1 Henry VI* 2.3.66), she entreats him, "for I am sorry that with reverence / I did not entertain thou as thou art" (*1 Henry VI* 2.3.70-1). Talbot accepts her apology, as indicated by his request to "taste of

your wine and see what crates you have" (*1 Henry VI* 2.3.78), but it does deduct the fact that the Countess is turned into a comic character.

Conslusion

In *Henry VI Part 1 and 2*, all of the female characters seek political agency. The four most prominent female characters in the tetralogy, namely Joan, Duchess Eleanor, Margaret and the Countess of Auvergne, all try to rise to power in their own way. Joan is determined to lead France to victory, Margaret and Duchess Eleanor are both even more ambitious than their respective husbands and Eleanor strives to become Queen even though Humphrey pleads with her to be grateful for what she already has. The abilities they use to achieve these goals are either military or political. Still, three of the four main women in *Henry VI* are associated with witchcraft. Joan calls upon her spirits to guide her, even though these spirits desert her in the end. Duchess Eleanor conjures a spirit to enquire about the fate of some of the main characters of the play. These prophecies happen to come true later on in the play. All of these abilities set them apart from other characters in the play. They operate in a masculine world.

According to the men in the play, female characters have no place in these political or military settings in which these women want to operate. The male characters are inclined to accept female characters in their midst as long as these women provide some kind of advantage over the opponent. Joan proves to be such an asset when her new military strategies offer victory in battles against the English army. She has military influence as long as she proves to have value as a warrior. As soon as that military usefulness fades away, so does the influence she has on the men surrounding her. Then, men like Talbot demonize her because of the powers that she claims to have and, in the final act, displays. Margaret is, at least to Suffolk, a means to advance his own ambitions. He believes that he can rule the king through

her and that is, at least in the beginning, a reason why he presents her as queen to Henry VI. Other men respect her as their Queen, but she loses her influence when she oversteps her boundaries and wants to meddle in politics. Then, they try to rein in her power. The Countess of Auvergne wants to acquire fame by capturing Talbot. When her plan proves to be unsuccessful and Talbot is one step ahead of her, she has little choice but to repent. By doing so, she is spared the demonization that befalls Joan or the judgement that befalls Margaret. Still, she is turned into a comic character because she did not conform to the ideal that men like Suffolk have of women, namely the domestic woman who is only to be wood and won.

Despite their abilities, none of the female characters is successful in their search for agency. As soon as the women give in to their ambition and operate in a world in which they, according to the men in the play, do not belong, they are either demonised or turned into a comic character. Joan has to pay for her military agency with her life. Margaret had agency for a short period and is able to exercise some political and military influence. In the end, she still loses all of that power. In the process, she also loses her son and her position as queen. The Countess of Auvergne is spared, but that is only because she apologizes for her behaviour and acknowledges Talbot's power as superior. So none of the female characters acquires the agency that they desire.

Chapter 3: *Henry IV* Part 1 and 2

None of the women appearing in *Henry IV* are, in any way, important for the development of the plot of the plays. Even though the female characters in *Henry IV part 1 and 2* have less political and military agency and are not able to influence politics in the way than the women in the first tetralogy are able to do, their parts do contribute to the theme and social context of the plays. Despite the lack of agency these women have, their presence in the play is important because they broaden the play's scope and add to the structure of the play. Their contribution to the play is shown by the criticism that Shakespeare incorporated in the play through comedy and through comments made by, for example, Lady Percy. In contrast to being criticised and demonised for their behaviour, as the female characters from *Henry VI* are, these female characters are women that audiences can relate to and which with they can sympathise. They offer their own criticism on the world around them and they invoke more sympathy than their counterparts from the first tetralogy.

Female Characters and Foreign Worlds

The women from *Henry VI* create and represent a foreign world away from the masculine world of battlefields and political discussions with which the men in both plays are mostly concerned. Howard and Rackin state on this subject:

> Aliens in the masculine domain of English historiography, the women in Shakespeare's English history plays are often quite literally alien. Female characters are often inhabitants of foreign worlds, and foreign worlds are typically characterized as feminine.

Craig Payne highlights "the emphasis placed on the underworld throughout both parts of *Henry IV*" (67). The foreign world is a temptation for the men in the play and also offers criticism to the masculine world. The worlds are linked to the female character's inabilities, especially their linguistic inabilities. Their inabilities serve a dual purpose and both these purposes have to do with displaying a world different from the political of court and battlefield. On the one hand, the feminine worlds of Wales and Mistress Quickly's tavern show an exotic – characteristically feminine - world that is foreign to the majority of the noblemen in the play. This foreign world is shown in much the same way as it is also introduced in the first tetralogy via Margaret, Joan and the other French characters from the play. On the other hand, via Mistress Quickly's tavern, Shakespeare displays how political decisions influence the common people. And the tavern world that she creates serves as a comic note to the play more so than is the case in Shakespeare's first tetralogy. Through these comic scenes, the characters comment on the world around them and present a criticism on the political and status quo outlined displayed in the rest in the play.

One example of the linguistic inabilities that create a separate world apart from the male-oriented world of war and politics is the inability to speak 'standard' English, a trait that is displayed by both Mistress Quickly and Lady Mortimer. Howard and Rackin state that "even when women do speak in this play, the language they use signals their exclusion from its dominant discourse" (23). In Mistress Quickly's case, her linguistic errors and the slang spoken at her Eastcheap tavern create and represent a world of licentiousness in which the focus is not on nobility but on low-class and middle-class characters. During the play, Mistress Quickly often makes use of incorrect words. These ungrammatical words are either words that are made up by Mistress Quickly herself or words that just do not fit the context of the sentence. For example, she uses "confirmaties" (*2 Henry IV* 2.4.47) when she, according

to Melchiori, means “infirmities” (124) or “extraordinarily” *(2 Henry IV* 2.4.18) when she means “ordinarily” (123). These grammatical mistakes are what Howard and Rackin call “malapropisms” (181) and Melchiori indicates as “Quicklyisms” (124). There are many examples of these malapropisms or Quicklyisms in the play even though all other characters, and male characters in particular, display no such linguistic or grammatical errors. In “Gender and Sexuality in Shakespeare”, Valerie Traub addresses these malapropisms and argues that these “malapropisms imply that women themselves are a disordered or foreign language, metaphorically or literally residing at the borders of the English (or Roman) state” (136). By incorporating malapropisms into Mistress Quickly’s manner of speech, Shakespeare turns mistress Quickly into a representation of her licentious tavern world.

In contrast to Mistress Quickly, Lady Mortimer speaks no English at all. She needs her father Glendower to translate for both her and her husband whenever she wishes to communicate with her own husband. Ton Hoenselaars adds that the Welsh language “dissociates them from England” (140). As someone who does not speak English, she - even to a larger extent than Mistress Quickly - introduces a sense of the foreign to the play, a foreign world that men are drawn to. Mortimer is drawn to his wife despite the fact that he cannot understand what she says. He exclaims that their failure to communicate “is the deadly spite that angers [him]: / [His] wife can speak no English, [he] no Welsh” (1 Henry IV 3.1.188-9). But, even though they do not speak each other’s language, Lady Mortimer and her husband seem to be on better terms than Hotspur and Lady Percy. As a couple, the latter *are* able to communicate with words but, as will later be elaborated upon, they spend what turn out to be their last moments together arguing about trivial matters such as the manner in which Kate chooses to swear. Mortimer does not speak Lady Mortimer’s language, but does claim to know her well: “I understand thy kisses, and thou mine / And that’s a feeling

disputation" (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.200-1). Arguably, he is drawn to "that pretty Welsh, / Which [she] pourest down from these swelling heavens" (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.197-8) more than he is drawn to what she actually says, because her "tongue / Makes Welsh as sweet as ditties highly penned" (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.203-4). The foreign language and the country it represents speak to Mortimer in a way that English words cannot.

The communication that Lady Mortimer and her husband do share – characterised by looks and looks and physical contact – creates their own world. Howard and Rackin describe this Welsh world as follows: "An alien world of witchcraft and magic, of mysterious music, and also of unspeakable atrocity that horrifies the English imagination" (168). Their description underscores Wales as a world distant from the masculine battlefield or courtrooms and a world that Mortimer is drawn to. According to them, "Shakespeare's Wales is inscribed in the same register that defined the dangerous power of women" (168), a phenomenon that will be discussed in more depth later on.

Mistress Quickly and Lady Mortimer are both associated with the foreignising aspect of language, and even Lady Percy, an articulate lady who is not afraid to point out Hotspur's shortcomings as a husband, is, in a way, associated with language that the men in the play consider to be inadequate for a woman of her stature. She is, for instance, accused by Hotspur of swearing "like a comfit-maker's wife" (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.244) instead of the lady that she is. She has to promise him not to conduct herself like that anymore: "swear me, Kate, like a lady as thou art, a good mouth-filling oath, and leave 'in sooth' / and such protest of pepper gingerbread / to velvet-guards and Sunday citizens" (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.249-52). Another example of Hotspur criticizing her linguistic abilities is when he mocks her ability as a singer. "Come Kate, I'll have your song too" (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.241), he requests when Lady Mortimer

initiates her Welsh song. But when Lady Percy declines his request and exclaims "I will not sing" (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.254), Hotspur remarks that her refusal is for the best because singing is, according to him, "the next way to turn tailor or be redbreast / Teacher" (*1 Henry IV* ll. 3.1.255-6). Hotspur's disapproval of his wife's choice of coarse language and the way in which he insults her abilities as a singer indicate that he believes her language to be inaccurate for a woman in her position.

Hotspur makes clear that his wife, because of her choice of language, stands out among other nobility, but his criticism does more than that. The criticism also links Lady Percy, in two ways, to Bulman's theory, as described in the chapter on scholarly context. First of all, the inadequate linguistic choices that Lady Percy makes associate her, at least in Hotspur's eyes, with middle-class or low-class citizens such as comfit-makers and other labourers that populate the world outside the royal court. Therefore, she becomes less of a noblewoman and is linked more to the low-class characters that are, as discussed in the scholarly context, described by Bulman as the part of history that Shakespeare uses to broaden the scope of his second tetralogy.

The second way in which she links to the theory is that she represents a domestic world. She only appears in domestic scenes such as the scene in which she asks Hotspur "what is it carries you away?" (*1 Henry IV* 2.3.73) but fails to receive a satisfying answer from him. In the second scene in which Lady Percy appears, all discussions about military strategy, politics and the upcoming warfare are discontinued as soon as she and Lady Mortimer enter the room. The women are excluded from male subjects such as warfare and the discussion shifts to singing and other forms of entertainment. The scenes featuring upper-class women are, in one word, domesticated. Still, these domestic scenes and the scenes that

show a foreign world at the tavern all contribute to the broader narrative of the play. They show what the world outside of court and battlefields is like. The female characters are, in fact, a representation of this foreign world

Female Views on Masculine Society

As established above, the tavern world from Mistress Quickly, the domestic world from Lady Percy and the Welsh world from Lady Mortimer show a different view compared to the masculine world of battlefields and politics. But the worlds and the female characters that represent them are also essential for offering criticism on a predominantly masculine society. These worlds are the place in which the female characters from *Henry IV* are able to express criticism and even, in some cases, are able to subtly influence the world around them in small ways.

The borderland of Mistress Quickly's tavern has already been discussed as a foreign state in itself, a place isolated from the world of politics, battles and military tactics that most of the male characters in the play are involved in. In addition to this status as a foreign world, the tavern world introduces the genre of comedy that is not covered in the first tetralogy and provides a contrast to the first tetralogy, which does not feature any comic scenes. The comic world offers criticism of the masculine world of politics and warfare. In his introduction to *1 Henry IV* , David Scott Kastan states that "much of the play is dedicated to the non-historical comic scenes; indeed less of the play is dependent upon historical source material than any other of the histories" (14). According to him, "one measure of the play's attenuation of its relation to history is that six of the play's nineteen scenes are completely devoted to the comic action" (Kastan 14). According to Henry Edmondson, "the importance Shakespeare puts on a leader's sense of humor becomes evident" (246) in this play. In contrast to *1 Henry IV*, "*2*

Henry IV has a darker tone and more ambitious aims. It's as much the obverse of *Part 1* as its sequel" (Bulman 167). Yet, in *2 Henry IV*, the focus on comic scenes is arguably even more evident because the majority of the scenes is devoted to comedy. Almost all of these comic scenes from both plays take place in Mistress Quickly's tavern. The Eastcheap tavern is the place where Falstaff, Poins and other comic characters are often found, the place where Hal and Falstaff act out Hal's upcoming audience with the king and where Poins and Hal plan the prank on Falstaff. Mistress Quickly herself contributes to the comedy by the linguistic and grammatical errors that have been discussed above. The comedy in the play shows how, in contrast to *1 Henry VI* and *2 Henry VI*, "*Henry IV* insists that history must be recognised as something more capacious than merely the record of aristocratic motives and actions" (Kastan 3). In these comic scenes, the guests of the tavern mock political characters and decisions, as shown by the aforementioned roleplay between Falstaff and Hal, but also by the way Falstaff talks about Hall behind his back. To Doll Tearsheet, he reveals his belief that Hall's "wit's as thick as / Tewkesbury mustard, there is no more conceit in him than is in a / Mallet" (*2 Henry IV* 2.4.193), showing how he really thinks of Hal when he is not in the Prince's presence. As hostess of the tavern that accommodates most of these comic scenes, Mistress Quickly is the character who, via her tavern in Eastcheap, incorporates comedy in the play and thereby adds a genre that Shakespeare's first historical tetralogy does not include.

The comedy in Mistress Quickly's tavern does, as Jennifer Richard describes, "diagnose […] the ills of the commonwealth of fifteenth-century England, and prescribe its cure" (224). And while the tavern world offers criticism on politics by mocking political characters and decisions, Kate directly offers her opinion on the military decisions her father-in-law has made and still wants to make. Her criticism of Northumberland's actions broaden the scope of the play by showing the domestic view of military decisions and also proves that

she is able to influence Northumberland when she persuades him to stay in Scotland. During the scene in which she confronts her father-in-law, Northumberland wants to assemble his army and join the fight. Lady Percy then reminds him of Hotspur and the way Northumberland failed to come to his son's aid:

> him did you leave,
> Second to none, unseconded by you,
> To look upon the hideous god of war
> In disadvantage, to abide a field
> Where nothing but the sound of Hotspur's name
> Did seem defensible: so you left him (*2 Henry VI* 2.3.33-38)

She even blames him for holding his "honour more precise and nice / With others than with him" (*2 Henry IV* 2.3.40-1) when he left his son to fend for himself. About her own position, she states that "had my sweet Harry had but half their numbers, / Today might I, hanging on Hotspur's neck, / Have talked of Monmouth's grave" (*2 Henry IV* 43-5). By her comment, she shows that Hotspur's loss and the final battle from *1 Henry IV* influenced not only male nobility but also domestic wives and the rest of the common people in England. Her words have a significant effect on Northumberland and she is able to persuade him. He listens to her plea to "fly to Scotland, / Till that the nobles and the armèd commons / Have of their puissance made a little taste" (*2 Henry IV* 2.3.50-3). The unbiased criticism influences Northumberland to such an extent that he indeed decides to accompany Lady Percy and Lady Northumberland to Scotland.

Like Lady Percy, Lady Mortimer successfully tries to prevent one of the male characters, her husband, from going to war. The reason she does not want Mortimer to go to war is not emphasised in Glendower's translation. Still, she is loathe to see him go to war. His

absence from battle shows that her pleas must have contained some criticism that kept Mortimer with her. Lady Mortimer is able to manipulate her husband through the song that she sings for him and the other people in their company. Ton Hoenselaars adds that the Welsh language in the song "dissociates them from England" (140). But the song that Lady Mortimer sings, and Welsh language in general, do more than just represent a foreign country. The inability to speak English that was discussed above becomes a bewitching ability that enchants Mortimer to such an extent that he asks for her song and listen to her pleas not to go to war. She then bewitches her husband and, to an extent, the other people in the room via the Welsh song that she sings when the men are about to go to battle. Glendower translates to Mortimer that his daughter will "sing the song that pleaseth you, / And on your eyelids crown the god of sleep" (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.211-2). With this song, Glendower elaborates, she claims to be

> charming [Mortimers] blood with pleasing heaviness,
> Making such difference 'twixt day and night
> The hour before the heavily harnessed team
> Begins the golden progress in the east (*1 Henry IV* ll. 3.1.213-216)

After her song, he is in no hurry to leave his wife to go to war. He only rises when Glendower urges him: "come come, Lord Mortimer. You are as slow / As hot Lord Percy is on fire to go" (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.258-9). The song obviously has bewitched Mortimer and deprived him of his desire to join the other men in battle.

The theory of Lady Mortimer's bewitchment of her husband is solidified by Mortimer's absence from the final battle. Even though he is present at various meetings about battle strategy, he is nowhere to be found by the time the army assembles. When Sir Michael,

full of hope, believes that "there is Douglas and Lord Mortimer" (*1 Henry IV* 4.4.21) as a back-up for the rebel forces, the Archbishop vanquishes that hope by stating "no, Mortimer is not there" (*I Henry IV* 4.4.22). According to Valerie Traub, Mortimer "allies himself with that which is foreign and, in the terms of the play, unmanly" ("Gender and Sexuality" 136) and therefore deserts masculine warfare and his fellow soldiers to be with his wife. The reason for Mortimer's absence from the battle that he and the other rebels prepare for over the course of a number of scenes is not made explicit, but Kastan suggests the it "is to remind the audience of his seduction by Glendower's daughter, which politically undercuts his claim to the crown and his place in the historical action" (302). In addition, Howard and Rackin claim that sometimes Shakespeare's female characters "function to define what is not English, what is foreign and dangerous." (30). According to them, "Mortimer's Welsh wife is the prototype of such a figure, never speaking English and luring her husband away from his public duties" (30). The lack of English brings out the Welsh that lures her husband to her own Welsh world, a world that is just as foreign as France is in the first tetralogy.

Mortimer is not the only male character who is affected by Lady Mortimer's Welsh song. Even Hotspur – who initially exclaims that he "had rather hear Lady, my brach, howl in Irish" (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.332) than hear a Welsh song – is affected. "Peace; she sings" (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.244), he silences his wife in the middle of their argument as soon as Lady Mortimer starts singing. Hotspur's belief that "the devil understands Welsh" (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.227) is, by the song, altered to such an extent that Hotspur requests a song from his own wife: "Come, Kate, I'll have your song too" (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.241). In doing so, he proves himself to be the second character affected by the bewitching power of Lady Mortimer's Welsh song.

Importantly, All four female characters are influential and critical in their own way. The criticism of Mistress Quickly's tavern and the criticism Lady Percy and Lady Mortimer express about the war their husbands are planning all contribute to the play's criticism on politics. These women are, therefore, essential for the play's critique of the masculine environment.

The Fate of the Female Characters

Because of the criticism that they provide and, in case of Lady Percy and Lady Mortimer, the manipulative power that these characters have, the female characters are considered to be dangerous in the eyes of the male characters of the play. The way in which female characters are viewed by male characters is foregrounded by the scene in which Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet are arrested, but also via the way Lady Mortimer vanishes after the first and only scene in which she appears. The arrest of Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet shows that women who represent a world of licentiousness are perceived as a kind of threat by the male characters in the play. Lady Mortimer represents the domestic environment that lures her husband away from the action.

In order to pursue this argument, a return to Mistress Quickly's tavern world is in order. This tavern world represents the influence that political decisions have on the rest of the nation. Kastan explains that "the tavern world comments on [aristocratic motives and actions], with an often withering insight into their compromises and self-deception, but, at least as importantly, assumes its own place within the drama of the nation (3). The way in which the tavern world assumes its own place in the plays is best shown by Hal and his transformation. Without Mistress Quickly's world, Hal would not have been able to adopt the manner of speech spoken at the tavern. Hal's primary language is the language at court, the language in which he addresses his father when he is called to court for a meeting:

> so please you majesty, I would I could
> Quit all offences with as clear excuse
> As well as I am doubtless I can purge
> Myself of many I am charged withal (*1 Henry IV* ll. 3.2.18-21)

Having once associated himself with the people in Mistress Quickley's tavern, Hal expresses that he is proud to have learned words such as "dying scarlet" (*1 Henry IV* 2.4.14-5) and of his ability to "drink with any tinker in his own language" (*1 Henry IV* 2.4.18-9), an ability that stems from the fact that he picked up slang at Mistress Quickly's tavern. The language he adopts at the tavern differs greatly from the formal language he uses at court and this shows that he is able to communicate with common people as well as with royalty and that he is able to differentiate between the two. This ability would not have been acquired without Mistress Quickly's world. She and her language are needed for Hal to make this transformation from "shadow of succession" (*1 Henry IV* 3.2.99) to king.

In effect, this language helps Hal with the plan he has set in motion for his redemption. The plan entails that he will "imitate the sun, / Who doth permit the base contagious clouds / To smother up his beauty from the world, / That, when he please again to be himself, / Being wanted, he may more be wondered at" (*1 Henry IV* 1.2.187-91). The Eastcheap Tavern and its inhabitants are, to Hal, a means to carry out this plan and as long as he needs Mistress Quickly's tavern for his "reformation" (*1 Henry IV* 1.3.203) he surrounds himself with tavern people such as Mistress Quickly. But as soon as Hal's reformation is complete and he has ascended the throne as King Henry V, the tavern world is a place with which he can no longer associate himself. Therefore, men are sent to arrest the two women who run the place that represent Hal's "truant youth" (*1 Henry IV* 5.2.5.2.62).

When Hal ascends the throne, Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet become the characters that are most affected by the decisions Hal makes when he becomes king. Both Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet belong to the group of characters that Kastan describes as "people not directly involved in shaping the serious military and political action of the play but whose daily lives are inevitably changed by the events that swirl out of control" (3-4). The moment in which these changes become most evident is when Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet are arrested in the final act of *2 Henry IV*. Until their arrest, Mistress Quickly is a relatively independent woman who runs her own tavern. At the end of the play, she and her friend Doll Tearsheet are deprived of their freedom and will be "soundly winged" (*2 Henry IV* ll. 5.4.17) during a "whipping-cheer" (*2 Henry IV* 5.4.4) and brought "to a justice"(*2 Henry IV* ll. 5.4.22). This is because they are part of the "foul and ugly mists" (*1 Henry IV* l. 1.2.193) that "strangle him" (*1 Henry IV* 2.1.194) and, as such, have to be removed. They are referred to as two of the "misleaders" (*2 Henry IV* l. 5.5.60) as well as the "the tutor[s} and feeder[s] of [Hal's] riots" (*2 Henry IV* l. 5.5.58). As such, these two women "define the limits of what can acceptably be included within the new king's charmed band of brothers" (Howard and Rackin 4). Eventually, these women are "delivered [...] over" (*2 Henry IV* 5.4.3) to Beadle and have no choice but to comply with their arrest. Therefore, one of the important roles these women have in the play is to show that women who are too independent, like Doll Tearsheet and Mistress Quickly, are considered to be too dangerous to remain free.

Even though Hal and most of the male characters in the play consider Doll Tearsheet and Mistress Quickly dangerous and want them to be removed from society, the scene in which the two women are arrested invokes sympathy rather than the feeling that their arrest is nothing but just and righteous. At the start of the scene, Mistress Quickly accuses Beadle: "Thou hast drawn my shoulder out of joint" (*2 Henry VI* 5.4.2). Her accusation lays bare the

rough way in which Beadle has treated the two women. The unprovoked action makes the audience feel for Mistress Quickly and it, therefore, invokes their sympathy. In the 2010 Globe production, as another example of a sympathetic Hostess, Barbara Marten's Mistress Quickly helplessly witnesses the falling apart of her tavern world when she and Doll Tearsheet are arrested. Nonetheless, Mistress Quickly tries to put on a brave face and stays strong for Jade Williams' Doll when she takes her friend's hand and comforts her by stating that: "of suffering comes ease" (*2 Henry IV* 5.4.20). The two women are, in this scene, helpless and vulnerable rather than headstrong as they watch their tavern world fall apart. They are characters that audiences can relate to and with which they can sympathise. Because of the sympathy that these characters invoke, their arrest is not a satisfying conclusion of two antagonists who finally get what they deserve. Instead, it is an ambivalent scene that is not indisputably right or wrong. On the one hand, the conclusion is necessary for Hal's transformation from prodigal son to King. On the other hand, the manner in which the arrest is done leans towards sympathy with Doll Tearsheet and Mistress Quickly.

One of the arguments that Doll Tearsheet uses in order to avoid being arrested links to *Henry VI*. Doll claims that if she is arrested, "The child I go with do miscarry" (*2 Henry VI* 5.4.7). The scene echoes the scene in which Joan pleads for her life by claiming to be pregnant by a variety of men. Like Joan, Doll pretends to be pregnant in order to avoid prosecution. The difference between the scenes is that the treatment of the guards who arrest Doll Tearsheet and Mistress Quickly invokes sympathy from the audience.

In addition to the sympathetic way in which Doll Tearsheet and Mistress Quickly are presented in the scene, the entire scene itself also carries a sense of loss. As Beadle removes Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet from the stage and from society, the tavern world disappears with them. There is, of course, a reason why these characters have to be removed.

Howard and Rackin describe that "Quickly is excluded because of her gender, the others for their undisciplined behaviour" (4) and, for that reason, these characters and the licentious world that they represent are no longer tolerated. But the play does not specify whether the removal of this tavern world is a positive development. It is necessary for Hal's development, but that does not mean it is also just. Mistress Quickly herself laments "O God, that right should thus overcome might" (*2 Henry IV* 5.4.20). Melchiori emphasises that, as one of her Quiklyisms, "the Hostess means the opposite" (206). The Hostess's Quickylism highlights the question that the audience is left with at the end of the scene; whether it was really might or right that has prevailed by the removal of the tavern world and the people belonging to it.

Just like Mistress Quickly, Lady Mortimer has a strong will that is not accepted into society and removes her from the male field of battles and politics. But her influence too comes with a sense of loss. Despite the fact that, of the group of people, only her father understands what she says, Lady Mortimer does display a mind of her own. Indeed, the translation Glendower provides for Mortimer when Lady Mortimer and Lady Percy arrive suggests as much: "My daughter weeps; She'll not part with you. / She'll be a soldier too; she'll to the wars" (*1 Henry IV* 3.1.190/1).

Following from his disapproval, Glendower warns Mortimer "If you melt, then she will run mad" (*1 Henry VI* 3.1.207). When Mortimer does decide to give way to his feelings, his wife does not run mad, but there are some other consequences that accompany his decision to choose his wife rather than follow his fellow rebels in battle. In order to give way to his affection, he has to distance both Lady Mortimer and himself from the male-oriented society of battlefields and politics. He chooses his wife, but following her to her foreign Welsh world requires stepping away from the masculine-based society. He becomes a loss for the male characters, like Sir Michael and the archbishop, who depend on him.

Male character's views on Kate Percy tend to differ. According to her husband, she is nothing more than a woman with little agency or influence. To an extent, he even considers her, and any influence she may have if he would allow it, to be just as dangerous as Lady Mortimer and Mistress Quickly. Her husband admits to her: "I know you wise" (*1 Henry IV* 2.3.103), but immediately adds: "but yet no farther wise / Than Henry Percy's wife. Constant you are / But yet a woman" (*! Henry IV* 2.3.103-105). No matter how constant Kate is, Hotspur still sees her as little more than a woman, a woman who should be careful "not utter what [she] does not know" (*1 Henry IV* 2.3.107). His low opinion of her is the reason why he refuses to answer her when she asks him "what is it that carries you away?" (*1 Henry VI* 2.3.73). His world "is no world / To play with mammets and to tilt with lips" (*1 Henry IV* 2.3.87-8). He wants to focus on "bloody noses and cracked crowns" (*1 Henry IV* 2.3.89) instead of Kate's questions that are only a distraction to him.

In *2 Henry IV*, a different view of Kate is brought to the surface. Northumberland does not share his son's sentiments, for he does value Kate's opinion where Hotspur does not. He sees her in a more positive light and lets her persuade him to leave for a foreign world. The only example of the influence Kate does have on her father-in-law is included in the scene in which Kate argues against meddling in the upcoming war. Kate pleads to Northumberland: "O, yet for God's sake go not to these wars" (*2 Henry IV* 2.3.9), because the war has already caused her husband's death. After an elaborate speech by Lady Percy, Northumberland indeed admits: "many thousand reasons hold me back, / I will resolve to Scotland: there am I till time and vantage crave my company" (*2 Henry IV* 2.3.66-8). Eventually, then, Northumberland shows that he does values the opinion of his daughter-in-law and she is even able to persuade him to stop from going to war.

Conclusion

The female characters in *Henry IV* have limited political and military agency in the world of men and no agency at all outside of the female environment in which they are able to exercise some influence on the world around them. Because of the women that represent these foreign worlds, the audience is made aware of the consequences of political decisions on all layers of society. Compared to the first tetralogy, *Henry IV* limits itself to a lesser extent to the view of the higher-class society including kings, princes, dukes and other people at court. Instead, the play grants equal importance to political viewpoints from all layers of society, and it does so via the female characters in the play.

These female characters represent a layer of society that is less strongly represented in the first tetralogy. The women in *Henry IV* are the representation of the layers of society that are not explored as predominantly in the first tetralogy. Mistress Quickly may not have much agency outside of her own tavern, but she does contribute to the structure and scope of the play by providing a tavern world in which comic scenes take preference over battles and scenes at court. This tavern world offers, through comedy, criticism on the world of masculine battles and politics. In this foreign world away from court, nobility and battles, the comic scenes are fuelled by “Quicklyisms” or “malapropisms”, the grammatical errors that Mistress Quickly often makes. These grammatical errors emphasise that Mistress Quickly belongs to a separate world, the world of the tavern that she represents. Hal needs this tavern world for his reformation. Without the tavern world, he would not have acquired the ability to communicate with both commoners and nobility. So the tavern world also contributes to the structure of the play by providing Hal with a place in which he can reform himself.

Just as Mistress Quickly's foreignness is emphasised by the grammatical mistakes that she makes, so does Lady Mortimer's inability to speak English emphasise her own link to the Welsh world that she lures her husband to. Through her Welsh song, she is able to prevent Mortimer from going to war. He follows her to Wales. Both Lady Mortimer and Mistress Quickly connect to Bulman's description of history plays in which there is a broader focus on history. These female characters, but also Lady Percy and her interactions with Hotspur and Northumberland, show the domestic life that represents the state of Elizabethan England that Bulman explains. They add to the structure of the play by not only accommodating a new genre but also by providing a foreign world away from the discussions about strategies and political alliances.

When the female characters eventually disappear from the stage, there is a sense of loss that the audience is left with as well as the question of whether justice has really been done. Female characters, therefore, are essential as they introduce an alternative view on and solid criticism on the status quo of the society, even though their agency is limited.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the role of female characters in William Shakespeare's historical tetralogies in order to determine if the female characters in the first tetralogy are, as Phyllis Rackin claims, limited in importance and scope. I investigated this research question by examining female characters from both Shakespeare's first tetralogy and second tetralogy.

The female characters from *Henry VI* all seek political agency and, to an extent, are able to achieve it temporarily. Joan is able to lead the French army to various victories by means of a new strategy of sneak attacks that take Talbot and his army off guard. With her military skills as well as her connection to her spirits, she provides victories for the French army and even has the upper hand in her first fight with Talbot. Margaret is both a military strategist and a political leader who rules the county in her husband's name. She is, as multiple male characters admit, a better strategist and leader than her husband, the king. Duchess Eleanor strives to become the queen and plots against Henry VI and Margaret to get her husband on the throne. And the countess of Auvergne wants to make a name for herself by luring Talbot into a trap. She is able to capture Talbot before he signals his men to rescue him.

Despite their best efforts, the female characters from *Henry VI* are not successful in their attempt to gain political agency. The agency that they attempt to gain and, to an extent, are able to achieve, is a threat to the male characters that surround them. Because of the advantage that Joan proves to be as a strategist and fighter, the male characters feel threatened. For example, Talbot is threatened by Joan when she is able to beat him in battle. When her strength diminishes because her spirits desert her, the male characters seize the opportunity to judge and execute her for the use of witchcraft. Joan is demonised for the

military agency that she is able to gain, no matter how temporary. Margaret is viewed as a threat from the beginning. Eventually, she loses her husband, her son and her position as queen because of her attempt to gain both military and political agency. The victory of the Duchess of Auvergne proves to be hollow when Talbot reveals that he and his men have foreseen the trap and already had an escape plan in place before Talbot entered the Duchess's house. None of these four female characters is, therefore, able to gain and keep the political or military agency that they seek throughout the play.

Compared to these politically strong women introduced in the first tetralogy, the roles of Mistress Quickly, Doll Tearsheet and Ladies Percy and Mortimer from the second tetralogy seem relatively small. The reason that these roles seem small is that *Henry VI*'s female characters are not able to meddle in politics as Margaret can or bring victory to an army as Joan does for the French army on various occasions. Instead, these female characters are limited to their own world from which they continue to pose as a threat to the male characters in the play. Instead, these female characters are limited to their own world. Rackin is correct when she states that the political and military agency of *Henry VI*'s female characters is limited compared to the more active women from Shakespeare's first tetralogy.

However, the observation that their political and military agency is limited compared to the women from the first tetralogy does not, entail that these less influential female characters are also less important to the play as a whole. All four women from *Henry VI* contribute to the play by showing a way in which the political game that is played at court affect the lower parts of society, like the people from Mistress Quickly's tavern. These lower parts of society include domestic lives represented by Lady Mortimer and Lady Percy. But it also includes the life of the common people in general, such as Mistress Quickly, her

licentious tavern world and the people in it or. In that way, the female characters broaden the scope of the play

Mistress Quickly broadens the scope of the play by the tavern world that she represents. Through this tavern world, comedy is introduced into the play. The comedy, in turn, offers criticism of the world of politics and battles that is the primary topic at court. The criticism that is displayed by the characters mainly found in the tavern is represented by Mistress Quickly. Her status as a tavern hostess and accommodator of comedy and criticism is amplified by the Quicklyisms and Malapropism that characterise her way of speaking. This way of speaking sets Mistress Quickly apart from other characters in the play and indicate that her tavern is a world apart. In her tavern world, there is opportunity to criticise the world of courts and warfare. Characters such as Hal, Poins, Falstaff and Pistol make use of that opportunity and Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet add her own comments and remarks. Hal does not only use but also needs this world in his attempt to redeem himself, a plan he has set in motion since before the beginning of the play. Since Mistress Quickly is the hostess of this tavern world, she facilitates Hal's reformation. She and Lady Mortimer both represent a foreign world. In Lady Mortimer's case, it's the world that she lures her husband to. Through the song that she sings, she enchants Mortimer and persuades him to abandon the army that he previously committed himself to and follow her to her own Welsh country. And Lady Percy presents a domestic temptation that Hotspur does his best to ignore.

Because of the authority that these female characters have in the respective world that they represent, male characters in *Henry IV* consider these female characters to be dangerous. These men feel so threatened by the licentious or mysterious world that these women represent that they consider themselves to have no choice but to remove these women from

both stage and society. Still, the removal from the stage of these female characters does not seem fully justified and feels more like a loss. The reason why their removal carries more of a loss than the removal of female characters from *Henry VI* is that the audience is encouraged to sympathise with these female characters. For example, the scene in which Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet are removed from both the stage and *Henry IV* as a play does not only signify the arrest of these female characters, but also the end of the tavern world that was, for two entire plays, the licentious hideout for Hal, Falstaff, Pistol and other male characters who wanted to escape court, law and rules. The question that remains is whether justice has truly prevailed or might that was able to suppress the licentious tavern hostess and the world she represents. Margaret loses her husband as well as her son and her position as queen. The comparison between these two plays has demonstrated that the female characters from Shakespeare's second tetralogy are, like the female characters from the first tetralogy, unable to gain political agency, but they do contribute to the play by broadening the play's scope and adding a layer to the play's plot.

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