Representations of Elizabeth I in Early Modern Culture

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Although scholars who study Shakespeare are often warned not to assume that any character who is female, royal, or both can be mapped onto the figure of Queen Elizabeth I, it is equally important to remember that awareness of the Queen and what she represented pervaded all texts produced during her reign, even if only implicitly. Several chapters in this volume, particularly those of Yvonne Oram and Laura Tosi, explore the complex intersection between stage representations of female rulers such as Shakespeare's Cleopatra and Webster's Duchess of Malfi and the shadow of Queen Elizabeth I, and it is within that discussion that this chapter belongs. As Louis Montrose makes clear at the beginning of The Subject of Elizabeth, 'the feminine gender of the ruler had a profound impact upon the relations of power and upon their representation. Such representations, however, not merely were consequences of the ruler's gender but were themselves particular constructions of it' (Montrose, 2006, p. 1). This is especially relevant when dealing with the profusion of historical drama in the 1580s and 1590s, when it was growing increasingly clear that the unmarried Elizabeth would be the last member of the Tudor family to wear the English crown.

Shakespeare's first history tetralogy engages with this anxiety, even if, on the surface, his rendering of the late fifteenth century follows Edward Hall's Union of the Two Noble and Illuste Houses of Yorke and Lancaster (1548). This providential narrative presents the civil wars between the houses of York and Lancaster as a punishment for the deposition of Richard II in 1399, brought to an end by divine intervention in the form of Henry of Richmond's defeating Richard III at the battle of Bosworth Field in 1485. Indeed, the final play of the tetralogy, Richard III, is suffused with supernatural elements that foreshadow Richard's doom, leading some critics to claim that it oversimplifies the chaotic world created in the three Henry VI plays in order to produce an overwhelmingly positive – and politically safe – conclusion that parallels Hall's (see, for example, Riggs, 1991, pp. 140–50; Rackin, 1990, pp. 1–29). However, the play itself resists this reading; Shakespeare makes a number of departures from Hall, particularly in his treatment of women, that sustain the ambiguity of cause and effect that runs through the Henry VI plays.

This ambiguity is best illustrated through Shakespeare's fixation on the competing narratives of historical and dynastic legitimacy put forward by the numerous claimants to England's throne. Although it would be disingenuous to propose any direct correlation to Elizabeth I's disputed succession, what is clear is that the civil wars of the fifteenth century, combined with the religious upheavals beginning during the reign of Henry VIII, haunted Elizabethan cultural memory, and that the uncertainty attending upon the Queen's eventual death took on many different forms, including but not limited to staged representations of earlier civil conflicts. What sets Shakespeare's tetralogy apart from other accounts of the Wars of the Roses, whether plays, poetry or more straightforward chronicles, is his placement of queens consort at the centre of these disputes over legitimating narratives. This chapter explores how the character of Lady Grey, later Queen Elizabeth, who appears in the third part of Henry VI and Richard III, becomes a locus for historiographical interrogation and – unlike her predecessor Margaret of Anjou – proves to be an effective voice of resistance against the rewriting of history and lineage spearheaded by Richard III.

The primary foci for Elizabethan representation in this first tetralogy have been the figures of Joan of Arc and Margaret of Anjou, both framed as cautionary tales for women exercising political power. Leah Marcus, for instance, proposes that Joan 'functions in many ways as a distorted image of Queen Elizabeth I' (Marcus, 1988, p. 53), particularly in terms of ambiguously gendered rhetoric and the religious imagery often associated with both figures. More recently, Kathryn Schwarz has argued that Joan and Margaret signify different aspects of Elizabeth I's otherness – Joan 'embodies contradictory iconographic positions by literalizing a series of tropes, Margaret consolidates contradiction through the explicitness of playing, her masculine performance inseparable from the fictional female body she presents onstage' (Schwarz, 1998, p. 160). It is my belief that Margaret is not the only queen whose function within
the play can be seen as a reflection of Elizabeth I; even if Queen Elizabeth lacks the androgy nous implications of Joan and Margaret, her resistance to the tyrannical Richard figures a quieter and more understated political model that in its own way echoes Elizabeth I. She, like Cleopatra in Yvonne Oram’s chapter, calls upon the power of rhetoric and speech acts, a power primarily reserved for men, and turns it against them. Moreover, the slow stripping away of the trappings of wifehood and motherhood as her rhetorical power increases aligns her more and more with Elizabeth I as the plays progress.

Both Hall’s *Union* and Holinshed’s *Chronicles* take as their basis the *Anglica Historia* of Polydore Vergil (1534). All these chronicles are fairly consistent in their portrayal of Elizabeth, which fluctuates between ambivalent and negative. The exception is the unfinished text of Thomas More’s *History of King Richard III* (c.1513), which appears juxtaposed with Vergil in both Hall and Holinshed and features a wise, pragmatic, and witty Elizabeth who becomes the centre of resistance to the usurping Richard III. Vergil, in contrast, dismisses her as inconsistent and meddling, crediting that resistance to Margaret Beaufort, the mother of the future Henry VII. In the plays, these moments of contradiction are heightened through the repeated references to past events – the constant presence of *history* – and the changing circumstances and contexts in which these events are deployed. In this way, the plays not only question their own readings of events, but, by extension, those found in their chronicle sources. At the heart of this interrogation is the fraught relationship between women and political agency, in some ways exemplified by the representation of Elizabeth in the plays and its relationship to chronicle sources. Many modern critics have dismissed Elizabeth as weak or overly domesticated, particularly in comparison with Margaret, but I would argue that her ability to understand the importance of storytelling and historical rewriting without necessarily resorting to it herself, as Margaret and most of the male characters do, sets her apart from them, and places her at the centre of Shakespeare’s critique of historical and political rhetoric.1

Elizabeth first appears in Act III, Scene II of *3 Henry VI*, where she has requested an audience with the newly made King Edward IV for restitution of her late husband’s lands. With his two brothers, Richard and George, providing a running commentary, Edward notices her beauty and elects to ‘make a pause’ in the hope of seducing her (3.2.10). Richard has already remarked that Edward ‘love[s] the breeder better than the male’, a passing reference to Edward’s reputation as a womanizer that gets limited attention in the *Henry VI* plays, but is turned against him in *Richard III* (2.1.42).2 If Henry VI’s mildness makes him ‘the hollowness at the centre of the patriarchal edifice’ (Rackin and Howard, 1997, p. 85) for the Lancastrian party, Edward’s own weakness soon proves to be a similar problem for the Yorkists.

The scene that follows is one of Shakespeare’s earlier examples of stichomythia – fast-paced dialogue consisting of single or half-lines between two characters – which emphasizes Elizabeth’s quick wits as she turns Edward’s numerous double entendres back on him with cautious, measured responses. It is unclear whether she is deliberately misunderstanding him, an ambiguity that appears in the source material as well:

> When the kyng behelde and harde her speake […] he not alone pityed her, but also wexed enamored on her […] whose appetite when she perceyued, she vertuously denied hym, but that she dyd so wysely and that with so good manner and woordes so wel set, that she rather kyndeled his desire then quenched it. (Hall, 1548, f.18r)

In Shakespeare’s version, Richard and George assume she is aware of Edward’s intentions and is toying with him. When finally Edward is forced to be blunt – Richard ridicules him as ‘the bluntest woor in Christendom’ – she responds with a line lifted almost verbatim from More: ‘I know I am too mean to be your queen, / And yet too good to be your concubine’ (3 *Henry VI*, 3.2.83, 97–8). His decision to marry her is almost instantaneous, prompted not only by her beauty but also by her ‘words [which] doth show her wit incomparable’ (3.2.85). Throughout this scene, Elizabeth resists Edward’s efforts to exploit her into a known narrative – that of the lusty widow able and willing to become the mistress of a notoriously lusty king – through carefully equivocal language, something Shakespeare does not forget when he places her in opposition to Richard III at the climax of that play.

Elizabeth’s wit and rhetorical skill belie the dismissiveness of the three brothers, none of whom refer to her by name throughout the entire scene, and link her with the other powerful female characters in the tetralogy, all of whom are shown to be brilliant orators and whose involvements ‘subvert or destroy more valued alliances between men’ (Kahn, 1981, p. 55). The next scene, where the marriage ruins Edward’s alliance with the powerful Earl of Warwick, echoes the disastrous marriage of Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou in *2 Henry VI*. She is also blamed for the splintering of the York family when Edward begins to favour Elizabeth’s family over Richard and George (4.1.51–60).
The placing of Richard's first, famous soliloquy just after Elizabeth agrees to marry Edward forges an implicit connection between the two that Richard later makes explicit when he tells Edward 'in your bride you bury brotherhood' (4.1.55). However, Richard's very presence anticipates his eventual betrayal of Edward; since he is already embedded in the cultural psyche as a hunchbacked villain, Elizabeth's role in the breakdown of the York family is subsumed. Richard constantly blames women for his own actions—particularly in Richard III, but also in 3 Henry VI—making him part of a tradition 'in which the outcome of aggression between men is proleptically installed in the bodies of women as originary cause' (Charsin, 1993, p. 46). Shakespeare questions this attribution of blame throughout the tetralogy, but the discrepancy is particularly glaring in Elizabeth's case.

As part of the chaotic shuffling of thrones between Edward and Henry that makes up the second half of 3 Henry VI, Shakespeare includes a short scene where the pregnant Elizabeth enters sanctuary. It is dramatically unnecessary—the action could easily have been condensed into a few lines in a messenger's speech, like so many other events in the plays—but appears in both Octavo (1595) and Folio editions, and is significant because it is the first time Elizabeth appears without Richard's commentary. All earlier defences of her marriage have been made to counter an attack by Richard, or with Richard as a hostile witness. Here, Elizabeth reveals a keen awareness of her precarious situation, but also her primary duty as Queen: for the sake of her unborn child, she 'bear[s] with mildness my misfortune's cross' (4.4.19–20). The association of Elizabeth with motherhood—Leah Marcus refers to her at the end of 3 Henry VI as 'an image of devoted female domesticity'—confers some legitimacy upon her cleverness even as Shakespeare undermines the 'lasting joy' (5.7.46) of Edward's victories by anticipating Richard's destructive actions (Marcus, 1988, p. 94).

In Richard III, questions of storytelling and historiography become even more complicated. The introduction of Thomas More's narrative as a counterpoint to Vergil and Hall adds a satiric and deconstructive undertone to Richard's rhetorical manipulations, countered by the growing significance of supernatural elements, particularly surrounding female characters. Elizabeth is, even more so than in 3 Henry VI, at the centre of these interrogations, repeatedly resisting Richard's attempts to rewrite the events of the previous plays to serve his own purposes. Although her agency within the play is constantly undermined, she provides a reminder of the discrepancy between Richard's revisionist history and what is actually presented onstage. For instance, Richard announces in his first soliloquy that he has laid the plots 'to set my brother Clarence and the King / In deadly hate the one against the other', but later insists first to George and then to others that Elizabeth is responsible—'Why this is it, when men are rul'd by women' (Richard III, 1.1.34–5, 62). Though she has been queen for some time, Richard still refers to her as 'Lady Grey' or, even more pejoratively, 'widow', harkening back to his scornful commentary in 3 Henry VI, and making her isolated position at court clear well before her first appearance onstage. Thus, we see Richard espousing the Vergil/Hall version of Elizabeth even as the play itself deconstructs his representation by drawing attention to its flimsy foundations.

When Elizabeth does appear, her words seem to support Richard's dismissal of her as self-centred and haughty: 'If [Edward] were dead, what would betide on me' (1.3.6). The emphasis on her low birth and the previous status of her family lend weight to Richard's boast that he has convinced the other lords—'many simple gulls' to his mind—that 'tis the Queen and her allies / That stir the King against the Duke my brother' (1.3.328, 330–1). This is in spite of Elizabeth's own public denial earlier in the scene; being a woman and not born to royalty, her voice is ignored. In these early scenes, she is often the only woman present onstage, constantly overruled by the men surrounding her. Even her positive associations with motherhood from 3 Henry VI no longer carry the same weight; motherhood, itself, in Richard III becomes a fraught state, exemplified in the relationship between Richard and the Duchess of York.

Richard III contains a number of textual inconsistencies concerning Elizabeth's children by her first marriage, as well as her brothers. Despite repeated references to Elizabeth having more than one brother and more than one son in addition to the two princes, only three Woodville men appear onstage. Lord Rivers is consistently listed as Elizabeth's brother, and the Marquess of Dorset as her son by her first marriage. Lord Grey fluctuates between the two (1.3.37, 67, see notes). It is possible that these are textual errors, or may indicate Shakespeare's own confusion and uncertainty about the Woodville family. However, they also augment the dismissiveness displayed by Richard and the other lords for Elizabeth's family and herself—for instance, in his speech to the Mayor of London, Buckingham's reference to 'a care-craz'd mother to a many sons' is unquestionably pejorative not just in itself but in its larger context of retelling her marriage to Edward to render it invalid (3.7.183). The undermining of Elizabeth's political position through the rewriting of her marriage draws attention to the deployment of storytelling within
the plays to serve political ends, and to Elizabeth's inability, at this point, to harness that power for herself. In light of the appearance of Margaret and her curses — now slowly beginning to bear fruit through the arrest of Rivers and Grey and their deaths, along with that of Hastings — it would seem to be Elizabeth's role as mother and wife that stalls her rhetorical progression.

It is only after Edward's death that Elizabeth gains her own voice, echoing and echoed by the other wronged women not just of this play, but of the tetralogy as a whole. Stage directions in both Quarto and Folio specify that she enters 'with her hair about her ears' — a traditional attitude of mourning, and an echo of descriptions in Vergil and Hall of her reaction to her sons' murder. More provides a similar image of Elizabeth as distraught widow and mother, but places it earlier in his narrative, and Shakespeare follows suit, undercutting the high drama of her mourning by interspersed comments from the Duchess of York, and George's two children. By the end of the scene, Elizabeth and her brother Rivers have made an agreement with the Duke of Buckingham to have the Prince of Wales brought to London with 'some little train' (Richard III, 2.2.123). Richard's guiding hand is immediately apparent, despite his silence during this exchange, when, afterward, Buckingham refers to 'the story we late talk'd of, / To part the Queen's proud kindred from the Prince' (2.2.149–50, emphasis mine). Elizabeth is once again rendered powerless by the deceit of the men around her, echoing More's statement that the lords did not bear 'eche to other so much loue, as hatred bothe vnto the Quenes parte' (More, 1967, p. 15). When Elizabeth learns of their treachery, she and her younger son retreat to sanctuary, only to discover that, even there, they are not safely out of reach.

More includes a lengthy sequence surrounding the queen's presence in sanctuary, but only small segments appear in the play. Buckingham remarks upon the 'indirect and peevish course' that Elizabeth has taken, and makes it clear that neither he nor Richard have any qualms about removing her son (3.1.31). More's extended scene between the Archbishop of York and Elizabeth, where she extracts a promise from him to protect her son, is completely absent, undermining her supposed power even further. Richard's accusation of 'devilish plots / Of damned witchcraft' (3.4.60–1) directed at Elizabeth and Edward's mistress, Jane Shore, is preposterous for a number of reasons and draws attention to that preposterousness when contrasted with the numerous references to his deformity at birth. Aside from being the first of Richard's failures to reconceptualize both his deformity and Elizabeth's purported power, it also highlights Elizabeth's lack of supernatural associations compared to the other women in the play.

The constant reminders of the future that permeate Hall's narrative in particular are given new form in Richard III through Shakespeare's anachronistic use of Margaret. Although the historical Margaret of Anjou died in 1482, Shakespeare includes her as a symbolic reminder of the weight of history, as well as a voice of prophecy and supernatural knowledge; her repeated references to past crimes subvert Yorkist attempts to rewrite history, while her curses project the past cyclically upon the future. Although Elizabeth states 'I never did her any wrong, to my knowledge', she is doomed to 'die neither mother, wife, nor England's Queen' for the crime of usurping Margaret's rightful place (1.3.309, 209). Although she is still a mother at the end of Richard III in that Princess Elizabeth and Dorset survive, neither fits into a traditional model of patriarchal succession, and it is Elizabeth's loss of queenly motherhood, namely the production of an heir, to which Margaret's curse refers. It is here that an echo of that other Elizabeth, neither wife nor mother except in the symbolic framework as wife and mother to England, can be found; Queen Elizabeth's rhetorical power increases with her growing resemblance to Shakespeare's own reigning monarch.

Unlike in the Henry VI plays, where Margaret appropriates the male power of historical narration, conferring legitimacy in the present by rewriting the past, her purpose here is to simultaneously dismantle those rewritings and refigure her version of the past into a providential framework that damns the Yorkists for their crimes against the Lancastrians. In Act IV, history becomes a series of choric interchanges between what was and what is, where Margaret's earlier curses serve as a conduit for her systematic unmaking of Elizabeth, line by line, reducing her to 'a queen in jest, only to fill the scene' (Richard III, 4.4.91). However, even after this ritual stripping of titles — wife, mother, Queen — Margaret leaves both Elizabeth and the Duchess of York with a new sense of the power of language and storytelling, particularly the latter whose final repudiation of Richard is inextricably linked to his fall.

Elizabeth remains outside this supernatural circle, despite her plea to Margaret to 'teach me how to curse mine enemies' (4.4.117). Although her words do have power, it is that of deception rather than prophecy: she ultimately double-crosses Richard in the same way that she became queen in 3 Henry VI: by refusing his attempts to re-employ her. Richard, directly after having been cursed by his own mother, demands Elizabeth's aid in courting her daughter for his queen.
Although Elizabeth's words do not carry the same supernatural resonance as those of Margaret, the Duchess, and, to a lesser extent, Anne, her methodical, line-by-line rebuttal of every attempt Richard makes to rewrite his history (a desire made explicit in his request to 'Plead what I will be, not what I have been', 4.4.414) gives her power that nobody else has, not even the divinely sanctioned Richmond. Indeed, as she clearly states, the only way for Richard to win her daughter and, by extension, keep his throne, is to 'put on some other shape, / And not be Richard, that hath done all this' (4.4.286–7).

Richard's response follows a previous pattern as well—the pattern of his courtship of Anne, where he resituates the responsibility for all of his actions in her through the deployment of Petrarchan motifs. When this fails, his ensuing long speech, rather than inviting Elizabeth 'to see herself reflected in him, as immensely powerful' as Anne did, appeals to the material considerations emphasised by Vergil and Hall in their descriptions of Elizabeth's capitulation, complete with homilies on the mutability of all women (Waller, 1986, p. 172). Once again, however, Elizabeth undermines both his attempts at recontextualization and her own historical employment as a foolish and capricious woman. Even when she gives the impression of having surrendered, her words are deliberately ambiguous, while Vergil and Hall's denunciations boil down to a single line of Richard's: 'Relenting fool, and shallow, changing woman' (4.4.431). In the next scene, Stanley makes it clear that Elizabeth's surrender was a ruse: he tells Richmond's spy that 'the Queen hath heartily consented / [Henry] should espouse Elizabeth her daughter' (4.5.7–8). The juxtaposition of political agency—whether Elizabeth's in cementing the alliance between her and Richmond, or Stanley's later deception of Richard—with the ghostly visitations before the battle, rather than privileging the supernatural over the political, presents them alongside one another as part of a multiplicity of reasons for Richmond's victory.

The effect of this direct encounter between Elizabeth and Richard is not just to mirror the earlier stichomythic dialogue between him and Anne, but also to place Elizabeth firmly in the position of his successful adversary. In both Vergil and Hall, this role is played by Margaret Beaufort, but Shakespeare excises her altogether, except for a fleeting reference by Elizabeth, who claims that Margaret 'loves not me' and remarks upon 'her proud arrogance' (1.3.23, 24).

It could well be said that Richard III is haunted by the ghosts of absent women; women who are mentioned in the text, and are significant in the source material, but never appear onstage. I have already mentioned Margaret Beaufort, and briefly touched on Mistress Shore, who is repeatedly invoked to discredit both Edward and Lord Hastings, although Richard fails in his attempt to accuse her and Elizabeth of witchcraft. Even More, from whom the original account of Mistress Shore comes, acknowledges that he has interrupted his 'remembrances of great matters' to include her (More, 1967, p. 56). 8

8 The most notable absence, however, is that of Elizabeth of York. Argued over, and ultimately referenced in Richmond's final speech as one of 'the true successors of each royal House'—himself being the other—whose marriage and heirs will 'enrich the time to come with smooth-fac'd peace' (5.5.30, 33), she never actually appears onstage. This is in contrast to two earlier plays included amongst Shakespeare's sources, Thomas Legge's Richardus Tertius and the anonymous True Tragedy of Richard III (c. 1594), both of which stage the marriage of Elizabeth and Richmond. Legge's play also includes two separate courtship scenes in the second half, the first, where Richard successfully wins over Elizabeth Woodville, and a second, when Elizabeth of York rejects him. Shakespeare is therefore making a deliberate dramatic choice to exclude the younger Elizabeth entirely from his conclusion, in contrast to Elizabeth I's own repeated references to her grandmother as a marker of her legitimacy, particularly in her coronation pageant.

Richmond himself is constantly surrounded by male characters; the only two women mentioned in connection with him are his mother and Elizabeth of York, neither of whom appear onstage. The victory at the end of the play is a decidedly masculine affair, as opposed to Hall's text, which compares the union of Elizabeth and Henry to that of the Godhead and manhood. Shakespeare's choice to ignore the symbolic centrepiece of his chronicle sources reveals a deep-rooted anxiety for the Tudor dynasty, which, in the 1590s, was coming to an end.

The excising of Elizabeth of York is the culmination of a long series of movements within the tetralogy to dismantle and interrogate the providential vision of the chronicles and their readings of events and characters. That so many of these interrogative moments seem to involve Elizabeth Woodville might simply reflect the addition of More's text to an already volatile mix of sources, but I would argue that Shakespeare's depiction of Elizabeth is, in fact, consistent through both 3 Henry VI and Richard III. Although she does not appropriate masculine roles or rhetoric as Margaret does, her rebellion against dismissive employment first by Edward and then by Richard plays a prominent role in the play's denouement. Furthermore, her lack of supernatural associations, rather than cementing a providentialist interpretation of the
tetralogy’s ending, questions it by adding that second, political element that sustains the competing histories and ambiguity of cause and effect that characterise the Henry VI plays.

Elizabeth I attempted strict control of her own representation, whether visual or narrative. Montrose remarks upon sweeping campaigns both early and late in her reign to direct circulation of her image amongst printers and engravers (2006, pp. 215–22). Nonetheless, countless different versions flourished in England and abroad, such that, as I remarked at the beginning of this paper, it is difficult not to imagine a female character, let alone a queen, who was not in some way mapped onto her. It is not Shakespeare, however, who explicitly connects Queen Elizabeth Woodville to her great-granddaughter. The True Tragedy of Richard III, almost certainly one of Shakespeare’s sources, ends with a series of set speeches that detail the triumphs of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York’s descendants. The final monologue, a panegyric to ‘Worthie Elizabeth, a mirrour in her age’, is recited by Elizabeth Woodville, a visual rather than rhetorical association meant to cement that play’s neat conclusion (True Tragedy, 1929, TLN 2192). Samuel Daniel, in Book VIII of the 1609 edition of his unfinished epic poem The Civil Wars, interrupts his recital of the ills brought on by Edward IV’s marriage to Lady Grey – these ‘sad and graver businesses’ – to linger on that lady and ‘thus t’expresse / Elizabeth, for our Elizaes sake; / Who gret the Muses (which her Times became): / For, they who give them comfort, must haue fame’ (Daniel, 1609, VIII.77.3, 5–8). That Daniel was drawing on 3 Henry VI in his depiction of Elizabeth is clear from the scene itself, which emphasizes her verbal dexterity and cleverness, and his digression into a panegyric of the late Elizabeth I forges a direct link between them as two queens bound to resist being trapped by narratives of any making but their own.

Notes

1. Dash calls her ‘less heroic’ than Margaret (Dash, 1981, p. 187; Rackin and Howard refer to her as ‘a ventriloquist’s dummy’ whose motives are ‘irrelevant to the outcome of the plot’ (Rackin and Howard, 1997, pp. 108–9); Liebler and Shea repeatedly claim she is ‘passive’ and ‘weak’ (Liebler and Shea, 2001, pp. 91, 93).

2. Heywood is more detailed, relegating most of the political concerns to the background and concentrating on Edward’s affair with Jane Shore.

3. For a discussion of how Elizabeth’s name is represented in speech prefixes, see Cox and Rasmussen’s introduction in 3 Henry VI, pp. 173–5.

4. The language in this scene reflects Holinshed more than Hall, who only mentions Elizabeth’s situation in passing. Holinshed, drawing on earlier Yorkist sources, attributes to her ‘greate patience’ (Holinshed, 1577, p. 1332).


6. Supernatural elements are constantly being undercut in the first two Henry VI plays; for instance, Joan’s unsuccessful conjuring in 1 Henry VI, Eleanor Cobham’s prophecies, and the false miracle in 2 Henry VI. 3 Henry VI is more ambiguous, presenting curses and prophecies alongside human elements as part of its complicated presentation of cause and effect, and Richard III makes them even more prominent.

7. It is here that Shakespeare’s excision of More’s scene between Edward and the Duchess of York where she imagines a pre-contract between him and another woman becomes significant; in the universe of the plays, the validity of Edward’s marriage, much like the legitimacy of Margaret of Anjou’s son in 3 Henry VI, is never meant to be in question.

8. Shore, a popular figure after the publication of the 1563 Mirror for Magistrates where she is the subject of a tragedy by Thomas Churchyard, is one of the two protagonists of Heywood’s Edward IV, where the titular king is displaced by the middle-class concerns of Shore and her husband.

Bibliography

Printed sources


Studies


Mirrors for Female Rulers: Elizabeth I and the Duchess of Malfi

Laura Tosi

What does a female ruler see or want to see when she looks at herself in the mirror? Perhaps a mighty monarch, a beautiful woman, or a glimpse of her future self through the investigation of her first wrinkles and white hairs. In Kapur's film Elizabeth (1998) the Queen is seen to practise the public speech where she will ask her Parliament to pass the Act of Uniformity, to ensure that it is effective and persuasive. The camera becomes a sort of mirror as we contemplate her attempts and frustration: one wonders whether the real Elizabeth would have used mirrors in a similar way to monitor her public speaking and oratorical strategies.

Mirrors have a peculiar way of validating identity; we use them to find reassurance about what we look like and often wonder whether inner changes or emotions can manifest themselves in outward appearance, as happens when we check the mirror after a display of intense emotion, such as crying or a fit of rage. Of course the medieval and Renaissance experience of mirrors was radically different from ours; for example, for many centuries it was not a common experience to look at oneself between two large mirrors (and have a three-dimensional view of one's body) and traditional metal mirrors were not always good quality. However, as works on both the use of real mirrors and mirror metaphors in England can testify (Grabes, 1982), in the Elizabethan age there was an unprecedented availability of glass mirrors (although metal mirrors were still in use). Plane mirrors, which offered a partial, albeit clearer, view, gradually started to replace convex mirrors (like the one visible in Van Eyck’s Arnolfini portrait of 1434), which might have provided a more global view of the world, but nevertheless produced a distorted image (Melchior-Bonnet, 2002, p. 128).